

## Warriors' selfless Turiaf has reasons to smile

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OAKLAND — Ronny Turiaf is smiling.

Bouncing on an aerobics ball after Tuesday's practice, Turiaf, the Warriors backup center, gazed at the rafters while searching through his memories. His trademark smile wide and bright — highlighted by a gap, surrounded by a bushy beard — suggested he found one he liked.

"I can't remember when," he said, "but one time (Warriors coach Don Nelson) stopped me in the hall. He said, 'Ronny, I knew you were good, but I didn't know you were this good.' That made me happy."

Turiaf said he likes being counted on. He likes for people to rely on him, to have expectations of him. Even more than that, he likes meeting them. So you will have to excuse him for a brief moment as he reflects on his accomplishment.

Because, certainly, when it was announced in July that Turiaf was signing a four-year, \$17 million deal with Golden State, not many thought he would turn out to be widely considered a bargain.

Turiaf's averages are unastounding: 5.9 points, 4.6 rebounds, 2.2 blocks and 2.1 assists in 21.5 minutes. They hardly convey his contribution to the Warriors. It certainly isn't how members of the organization gauge his worth.

"He's the full package," said Larry Riley, the Warriors' assistant general manager. "He's the right guy in the locker room, and then his play on the court. He's improved all year. The other thing is his unselfishness. We're thrilled as can be to have him with us and know that we have him going forward for the next three years."

To be sure, Turiaf has established himself on the court. The front office now feels set at center because Turiaf is there to back up Andris Biedrins.

Turiaf is the defensive catalyst on an offensive squad. He protects the basket like few others in the league — his 4.8 blocks per minute are second in the NBA among qualified players — and he defends the best opposing big man. He also leads the team in deflections.

"People don't understand how smart he is," said forward Rob Kurz, who calls Turiaf his best friend on the team. "He's always in the right place. You know he's always got your back."

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His understudy, rookie forward Anthony Randolph, had 20 points and 15 rebounds against New Orleans' All-Star forward David West on April 3. But what people will remember most about the performance was Randolph's missed break-away dunk in the final moments.

It was an opportunity for Turiaf to step in and offer some words of encouragement, an opportunity he was all too happy to seize.

"He's part of the reason I've developed so much in such a short time," Randolph said. "He's unselfish. He's a great leader, on and off the court. He's one of the best teammates you can have."

Though he's never lost like this before, having played for the Los Angeles Lakers and Gonzaga, Turiaf is credited with keeping the locker room cohesive despite the lack of success. He's often the one lifting spirits, giving pep talks, keeping alive the hope.

Want to know how much Turiaf means to the Warriors? Talk to their rookies.

Randolph will tell you about the time Turiaf got a technical foul for him. At Sacramento on April 5, Randolph didn't get a foul called. But Randolph already had one technical not two minutes earlier, so Turiaf went and argued his case for him, picking up a technical foul.

Guard Anthony Morrow will tell you about the time he was famished and Turiaf picked him up at 2 a.m. and took him to hamburger joint. Morrow at the time was living at the downtown Oakland Marriott and didn't have a car.

"I couldn't believe it," Morrow said. "If he can help you, he will."

Ronny Turiaf is smiling.

He's standing shoulder to shoulder with Warriors ambassador Al Attles before Monday's game. Together, they cup a glass plaque that represents the Angela & Chris Cohan Community Service Award. This is something Turiaf can brag about.

He shies away from praise for his shot-blocking ability. He plays down fans' comments about him deserving more minutes. But this, being recognized for giving back, that's commendation he happily embraces.

He purchased 25 season tickets for kids. He visited patients at Kaiser Hospital. He personally gave out food on Thanksgiving. He's done a bunch of meet-and-greets with fans.

"I am from a place where there wasn't much given to me," Turiaf said. "I saw my mom giving back when she had nothing. From a young age, she instilled in me and my little sisters to take care of others before you take care of self."

Included with the blocked shots and contagious energy and leadership, the Warriors got a community ambassador in Turiaf. They got a guy who makes touching others a priority.

For that, the organization is smiling.