

OUT OF ORDER?

THE FIRST THING you notice about Giannis Antetokounmpo, besides the five-syllable surname that arcs over the back of the 19-year-old forward's Bucks jersey and has flummoxed every P.A. announcer in the NBA, is his impossibly lean 6' 10", 205-pound frame, with arms that branch like limbs from a sycamore and spidery hands that can envelope a basketball. Antetokounmpo (pronounced anh-teh-toe-KUHN-po) has shot up another inch since last June's draft, and medical exams have revealed he has the growth plates of a 16-year-old, meaning he could stretch to seven feet.

The next thing you notice is his incandescent grin, the portal to an innocent, infectious personality. At one of the team's first workouts, the coaches told Antetokounmpo to defend guard O.J. Mayo. "O.K.," he said. "Which one is he?" When Nike delivered a dozen new pairs of sneakers to Antetokounmpo before the season, he packed them all up. Puzzled, teammates asked what he was doing. "I want to stack them in my closet," Antetokounmpo told them, "and make it look like one from *MTV Cribs*."

In December, Antetokounmpo took a taxi from

BY
CHRIS
MANNIX

AN UNKNOWN MID-FIRST-ROUNDER DEVELOPS A CULT AS THE STEAL OF THE 2013 DRAFT, WHILE THE TOP SELECTION STRUGGLES TO SHED COMPARISONS WITH THE NBA'S BIGGEST BUSTS

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GIANNIS
ANTETOKOUNMPO
No. 15

The Greek Freak has a name that's a mouthful for P.A. announcers and a game that's a handful for opposing defenders—despite the fact that he spent last season in the second division in his home country.

ANTHONY
BENNETT
No. 1

The former Runnin' Reb spent his summer recuperating from shoulder surgery (and taking it easy), leaving him rusty and out of shape—and lumping him in with names like Kwame and Olowokandi.



BY
ANDREW
LAWRENCE

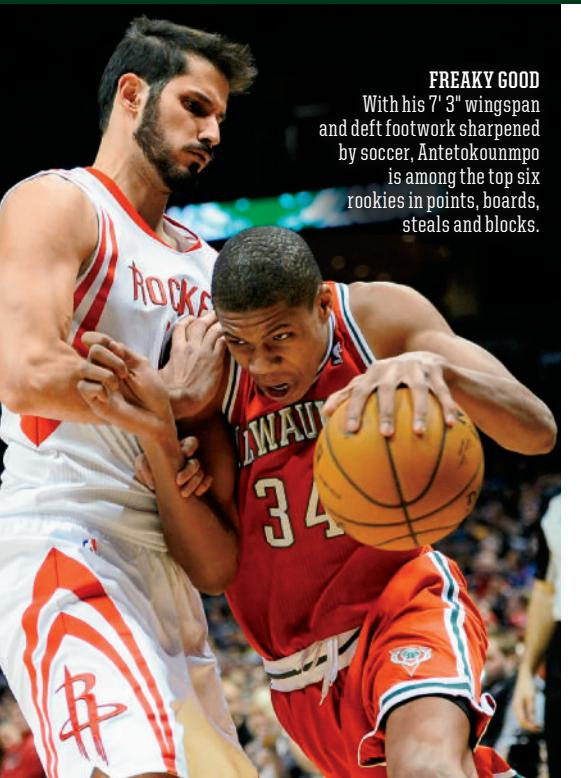
HE WAS no sure thing. The scouting reports were pretty emphatic on that point. They called him undersized for a power forward (he's 6' 8"),

dinged him for preferring to face the basket rather than play with his back to it. And if he made any difference on defense, they said, it would be in the spelling; in his native Canada, the word takes a c instead of an s.

What's more, they couldn't help but wonder if Anthony Bennett was a touch soft for the NBA. Never mind that he had played the last month of his only season at UNLV with a torn labrum in his left shoulder that would require surgery or that he has asthma and suffers from seasonal allergies. If he appeared choked up on the Barclays Center stage when the Cavaliers picked him No. 1 in the draft last June, it's because the pollen-rich Brooklyn air had been assaulting his sinuses.

But without a can't-miss prospect in the class of 2013, Cleveland general manager Chris Grant got creative. The 240-pound Bennett had a smooth righty stroke and soft hands around the basket, and he had been the hub of a veteran team,

GIANNIS ANTETOKOUNMPO



FREAKY GOOD
With his 7'3" wingspan and deft footwork sharpened by soccer, Antetokounmpo is among the top six rookies in points, boards, steals and blocks.

his suburban Milwaukee home to a nearby Western Union. It was a game day, and Antetokounmpo wanted to wire some money to his family in Athens before heading to the arena. He went to the ATM, withdrew some cash and sent it. When he went back to take out more for cab fare, he discovered he had reached his limit. Panicked, Antetokounmpo decided to run the two or so miles to the Bradley. A young married couple pulled up alongside him.

"Are you the Bucks rookie?" they asked.

"Yes," Antetokounmpo said.

"Do you need a ride?"

"Yes, please," Antetokounmpo replied. He hopped into the back-seat of the SUV and was dropped off at the arena's front door.

Finally, you notice his talent, which, for the Bucks, who last won a championship in 1971, is the most important thing. With the length of a center, the playmaking skills of a guard and the poise of a five-year veteran, Antetokounmpo, say many league executives, would be a top three pick instead of No. 15 if the rookie class were redrafted now. Though he was averaging a modest 7.2 points and 4.6 rebounds at week's end, he has shown potential worthy of his nickname: the Greek Freak. There was the 16-point, 10-rebound game against the Nets in December, and the 13-point, 11-rebound performance against the Thunder in January. "He has a skill set like Kevin Durant," says Oklahoma City coach Scott Brooks. "I hate to put that pressure on him, but you can see it. He doesn't back down. There's a toughness in him."

JOHN HAMMOND can't remember when he first heard of Antetokounmpo. "Maybe it was [director of player personnel] Dave Babcock, maybe it was a scouting service, maybe it was [former assistant general manager] Jeff Weltman," says Hammond. But sitting in his office in mid-February, the Bucks' GM instantly recalls the first time he saw him play. It was February 2013, and Hammond had flown to Athens to get a look at the 18-year-old. "What we saw was a young player who had, more than anything, a great feel for the game," says Hammond. "He knew how to play. He

had great ball skills, great vision. You could see how comfortable he was on the floor."

Antetokounmpo's parents emigrated from Nigeria to Greece in 1991 in search of a better life. They settled in Sepolia, a small neighborhood in Athens. Charles, who briefly played professional soccer in Nigeria, worked as a handyman; Veronica, a former high jumper, earned money babysitting. As undocumented immigrants in a country of mostly white faces, the family lived in constant fear of deportation. "Whenever we would get stopped, my mother would say she left her papers at home," says Antetokounmpo in conversational English. "If the cops wanted, they could have arrested her and sent her back. But they told her to go home. God was with us."

Money was tight. For years the family moved from apartment to apartment, eviction to eviction, often cramming into small rooms, some without heat, some with overwhelmingly foul smells. To help out, Giannis and his older brother, Thanasis, would go into the crime-riddled markets in downtown Athens, buy watches, hats, radios and sunglasses for \$1 or \$2, and then sell them in the suburbs for \$3 or \$4 after school. On a good day, they made enough to feed their whole family.

Charles pushed his kids into sports, mostly to steer them clear of drugs, which were rampant in their neighborhood. The first time he played basketball, Giannis recalls, he fired bank shots with a soccer ball at a broken rim.

At 13, Giannis was discovered by Spiros Velliniatis, a coach from Filathlitikos, an Athens club team. In Greece, undocumented immigrants—despite the fact that Antetokounmpo and his three

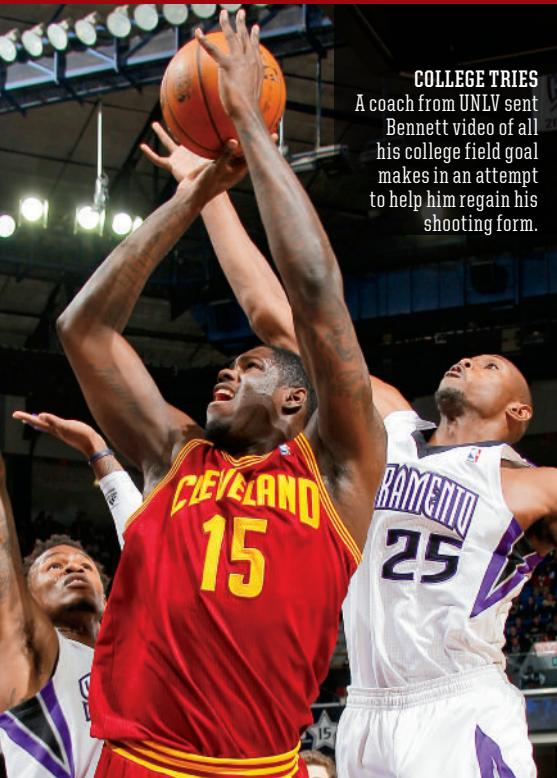
brothers were born in Greece, they were still considered undocumented—were prevented from playing club sports unless they joined a team before turning 15. Velliniatis, who often scoured the neighborhoods looking for young talent, spotted a gangly 5'10" Giannis. "He was just roughhousing with his brother," recalls Velliniatis, "but he had those long limbs. And you could see the way he walked, the way he ran, how agile he was."

PER GAME
+
24.4
MINUTES

7.2
POINTS
4.6
REBOUNDS

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ANTHONY BENNETT



COLLEGE TRIES
A coach from UNLV sent Bennett video of all his college field goal makes in an attempt to help him regain his shooting form.

leading the Runnin' Rebels in scoring (16.1 points per game), rebounding (8.1) and three-point shooting (37.5%). "As we went back and reviewed the film and went on campus and visited everybody, we came away saying he's a great kid," said Grant last June. "He's willing to work and do the right things, and he's got a bunch of talent."

Sure, Bennett expected some growing pains. Name a new job that doesn't have them (even if it pays \$16.7 million over three years). But transition was his game: He left his family in Brampton, Ont., at 16 to play in the U.S. Coming off the bench, he could handle. He just never thought he could feel so lost on a basketball court. He never dreamed he could miss 20 of his first 21 shots, lay an egg in the scoring column in 13 of the Cavs' first 36 games and be reduced to a courtside spectator in 12 more. Bennett's return to Barclays Center on Jan. 4 should have been triumphant. Instead it ended in another shutout after a little more than eight minutes that saw him flub a putback attempt, fumble a post entry pass and blow a handful of defensive assignments in an 89–82 loss to the Nets. This, after coach Mike Brown told reporters before the game, "Every day [Bennett] gets a little bit better." Talk about a cavalier statement.

A month later Grant was fired after nearly four years on the job. And if anything burns Bennett about the first three months of his pro career, it's that he dragged his chief supporter down with him. Now his fan base can be neatly divided into two groups: a handful of lifers like UNLV assistant Todd Simon, who four months ago sent Bennett a 50-minute supercut of all 202 of his college field goal makes to remind Bennett of the beast within himself; and everyone else, who seem to be tuning in for the irony and to pronounce him the biggest bust in history. Things got so bad that there were whispers that the Cavs were on the verge of demoting him to the NBDL's Canton Charge. (Quick reminder: *Anthony Bennett was the first pick in the 2013 NBA draft.*) But through it all he kept fighting. If he didn't, how would he have explained that to his mother?

PER GAME
+
12.8
MINUTES

4.0
POINTS
3.1
REBOUNDS

CONTINUED ON P. 45

LIKE HER son, Edith Bennett left her homeland as a teenager—and she was also no lock to succeed. She arrived in Toronto from Jamaica in 1980 determined to make a go of it. She babysat, among other odd jobs, to put herself through nursing school. By the time Edith finished, in 2002, she had three kids.

Three years later, Anthony, her youngest, was 12 and in the middle of a self-imposed timeout from basketball. Edith had also been an athlete once, a standout on the track, a ringer on the semi-pro netball circuit. She gave up too, without thinking it through. A part of her would come to regret it. "Back in the day, you really don't know you could be a big deal in sports," she says.

Her son had potential. But his height (he shot to 6 feet by time he was a teen) came much faster than his coordination, which often sapped the fun out of playing. Shooting, though he liked—so much so that during a decade of growing up in a neighborhood called Jane and Finch, the Watts of the True North, Anthony stayed out on the court behind their apartment complex until the streetlights came on or gunfire began. (Luckily the lights usually came first.) But after Edith relocated to the quiet suburb of Brampton and Anthony settled into his body, the game of basketball took on a new charm.

Raw talent carried him from AAU ball to the Canadian junior national team, which he helped lead to consecutive bronze medals at the FIBA world championships, the first in 2009. Soon after, prep school coaches south of the border hit Bennett with the full-court recruiting press. He played his sophomore season at Mountain State Academy in Beckley, W.Va., then went to Findlay Prep in the Las Vegas exurb of Henderson.

There, his fondness for goal-setting (his biggest: land a D-I scholarship) dovetailed with a demanding coaching staff. "We were really particular about having him play at a particular body-fat percentage, about practicing in order to play at a particular skill level," says Simon, an associate head coach at Findlay before becoming a UNLV assistant. "He ate all that stuff up. He went from a guy that was a good shooter to a great shooter just on reps and confidence alone."

GIANNIS ANTETOKOUNMPO

Initially Giannis was resistant to playing. "He was helping feed his family," says Velliniatis. "He needed to work." So Velliniatis made him an offer: If he could find work for Giannis's mother or father, would he join the club? Antetokounmpo agreed. When Velliniatis couldn't come up with a job, he arranged for a club member to give the family 500 euros a month. When it wasn't enough, he gave them money out of his own pocket.

Antetokounmpo took to basketball quickly. Years of playing soccer had refined his footwork, and what he didn't learn from coaches he borrowed from teammates. "If he saw someone shoot a floater, he would copy him," says Velliniatis. By his second year, Antetokounmpo was one of Filathlitikos's best players in his age group. When he was 16, his Greek agents, Giorgos Dimitropoulos and Giorgos Panou, sent tapes of Antetokounmpo to Alex Saratsis, an American agent. Saratsis sent the tapes to a few college coaches. None showed serious interest.

The NBA began to take notice last year, when Antetokounmpo scored 9.5 points per game for Filathlitikos's men's team. But because he was competing in the second division it was hard to get a read on him. "It was like a rec league," says a Western Conference executive. "Guys didn't hustle, they didn't get back on defense. You get better games at the Y."

Last June, Antetokounmpo joined Greece's under-20 team in Italy for the European championships. With scouts from almost every NBA team in attendance, he dazzled with his poise and playmaking. "I would check [mock drafts] on my phone," says Antetokounmpo. "I was going from being picked from 40 to 60 to 20 to 40 to the teens fast."

Antetokounmpo believed he was going to the Hawks, who had the 17th and 18th picks. An hour before the draft, Hammond called and expressed the Bucks' interest. Antetokounmpo opened his laptop and Googled "Milwaukee." "I saw lots of snow," says Antetokounmpo. When David Stern called his name, Antetokounmpo popped out of the stands to shake his hand.

Later, he went back to the hotel and celebrated by jumping on the beds with his brother.

SURPRISE SHOWING

Antetokounmpo, who was shocked at how fast his name had moved up the draft boards, popped out of the stands to pose with Stern after the Bucks selected him last June.



"HE HAS A SKILL SET LIKE KEVIN DURANT," SAYS THE THUNDER'S BROOKS. "I HATE TO PUT PRESSURE ON HIM, BUT YOU CAN SEE IT."

DIGITAL EXTRA

Who are the greatest mid-first-round gems in NBA history? Find out by downloading SI for your tablet, free to subscribers at SI.com/activate

of Greece's anti-immigrant Golden Dawn party, has said that Antetokounmpo should have been deported. "I can't click a button on them so they change their opinion," says Antetokounmpo, his voice rising. "Some guys say, 'He's black, Greeks are not black.' You try to explain to them that it's not about the color. If I'm not Greek, what am I? My parents grew up in Nigeria, but I have never been there. If I am not Greek, I don't know what I am. But I don't care. This is about me."

And it will be for a while. When training camp opened, coach Larry Drew wondered if he would be able to get Antetokounmpo more than a couple of minutes a game. Today he is the Bucks' top reserve, averaging 24.4 minutes, and he has 21 starts. His teammates still get a laugh out of him—after picking up a technical foul against Toronto in January, Antetokounmpo, realizing the tech comes with a \$2,000 fine, ran to the referee and begged him to take it back—but they believe they are seeing the beginning of something special.

And soon, everyone will notice. □

THE ONE negative to Antetokounmpo's season is that he hasn't been able to share it all with his family. Originally Antetokounmpo's parents and younger brothers, Kostas and Alex, were going to live with him. Visa issues prevented them from coming to the U.S. When he felt lonely, Giannis would fly Thanasis, 21, a first-year forward with the NBDL's Delaware 87ers, up for a night, and return him to Newark early the next morning. (The 6'7" Thanasis, who was averaging 10.3 points and 3.9 rebounds through Sunday, will be eligible for this June's draft.)

The visa issues resolved, Antetokounmpo's family moved in with him earlier this month. Kostas and Alex plan to enroll at schools in the Milwaukee area. And Giannis is happy to have their support. It's been a whirlwind year.

Last May, Greece, sensing a significant talent in the making, expedited Antetokounmpo's citizenship. Antetokounmpo understood the hypocrisy: The country that once refused to acknowledge him is now propping him up as its own. "Now that I am in the NBA, they can use me for the national team," says Antetokounmpo. "Now they want to accept me."

He still faces resistance in his home country. Niko-las Michaloliakos, a leader

And on the rare occasions when Bennett's effort did sag, Findlay coaches knew that rebooting him was as simple as letting fly with basketball's oldest and most devastating zinger: *Yo momma*. They would just remind Bennett how hard Edith had worked: 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. at a rehab hospital then 3:30 p.m. to midnight at a mental hospital. "If you ever needed to push Anthony's button," says Simon, an associate head coach at Findlay before becoming an UNLV assistant, "that was the easy one."

"She sacrificed a whole lot just to see us live well," says Bennett. "Any time I think about that, I try to go hard."

After being named the Mountain West freshman of the year at UNLV, Bennett decided it was time to give back to Edith. "This is a great opportunity for me to be

able to support my family," he said in an April news conference announcing his decision to declare for the draft. "I'm ready to learn and work hard."

A scalpel changed all that.

THE SURGERY was last May, and the recovery left Bennett with his left arm strapped to his stomach and a plastic bag over his shoulder to keep the moisture away from the stitches. To protect

them from perspiration, he only had one defense: Remain as still as possible. So Bennett parked himself in front of the TV and saved his energy for trips to the fridge. For four months he followed doctors' orders—through predraft workouts, through summer league—until he was finally cleared for action last September. By then, he wasn't even close to the same player.

For one, he had 21 pounds of post-op fat throwing off his balance and timing. The bigger issue was a left arm that had gone rogue. Bennett had thought that since the operation was on his weak side, it wouldn't affect his game too much. "There are things that I was able to do in the past that I still can't do now," he said before his nightmarish appearance against the Nets. "I don't have full rotation yet, so finger rolls . . . I can't do that. I can't really do any of that fancy stuff with my left shoulder."

So, out of shape and out of sorts, Bennett returned to the court content to launch jumpers: Of those first 20 misses, 14 came from outside of 15 feet. The only thing that saved

ANTHONY BENNETT

TOP GUNNER

The first player called on draft night by the commissioner (to the surprise of many), Bennett was all too content to shoot jumpers at first, but lately he has found his way to the hole—and the foul line.



"THERE ARE THINGS THAT I WAS ABLE TO DO IN THE PAST THAT I STILL CAN'T," BENNETT SAID IN JANUARY OF HIS SHOULDER INJURY.

DIGITAL EXTRA

Does Anthony Bennett rank among the biggest top-pick busts? Check out SI's tablet edition, free to subscribers at SI.com/activate

coach Michael Malone said after the game. "I'm sure Chris Grant is smiling at home—and deservedly so."

More impressive than the stat line was how Bennett achieved it: He played a lot of pick-and-roll with point guard Kyrie Irving, which left him in position to get the ball on the perimeter—and instead of hoisting jumpers, he attacked the basket, getting to the line nine times. It was the sort of aggression that's becoming a hallmark for Bennett. In his first 32 games he averaged 2.8 free throw attempts per 36 minutes. In his last 11, through Sunday, the number is 5.6. (By comparison, Irving leads Cleveland with 4.9.) During that stretch, Bennett was also averaging 8.5 points and 5.7 rebounds.

But perhaps the most telling moment in his breakout performance against Sacramento came after he buried a fourth-quarter elbow three to salt the game away. As he swaggered over to the sideline to slap five with Mike Brown, he had the look of a kid who could make a smooth transition after all. □