

Phoenix Suns Marcin Gortat knows he's on the trade block, has to help young centers grow

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"We all know what's going to happen," Gortat said to the crowd of reporters with his usual refreshing display of candor. "It's a business. I totally understand that. I totally understand the situation.

"There's no hard feelings. I will try to do everything that's necessary to win basketball games, and whatever happens happens. I'm grateful for everything I had in this team."

[Phoenix Suns](#) center [Marcin Gortat](#) was in his usual great mood for the media, cracking jokes and laughing when we asked questions he just didn't want to answer or knew he couldn't to answer with total candor or run the risk of getting inundated with questions from his followers afterward. He learned that from last year, when he quickly started talking about his role in the offense, which started rumors about trades.

"There's always going to be rumors," he said, mentioning how hard it is to take messages from friends and family every day about the latest gossip.

A week after returning from Slovenia for Eurobasket 2013, after Poland was eliminated in the first round, Gortat sees the future very clearly. He watched veterans [Jared Dudley](#) , [Luis Scola](#) and Caron "we hardly knew ye" Butler get traded for youth and assets, and he knows that the upcoming season of the Phoenix Suns is about development of that youth.

Behind him on the depth chart are a pair of 25 years olds, Viacheslav Kravstov and [Miles Plumlee](#) , and a young 20-year old "pure center" in [Alex Len](#) who just needs seasoning before he takes over the starting job.

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"You would be dumb as a GM to not pick a guy like that," Gortat said of 20-year old Alex Len. "He's a 7'1" center who can move, who can run, who can shoot the ball. He's got a great touch around the rim. And quite honestly he's got a super-bright future in this league. That's the best pick.

"Even if you have a decent center on the team, I would still go for him. At the end of the day, you can always get something good for a center."

Gortat knows his time in Phoenix is limited to 9 months or less, but he also knows this is his free agent year and that minutes are paramount to proving his value to the NBA.

"Being a backup for so many years," he said. "It was a pleasure to come in and try to beat up Dwight Howard. Now the situation is turned around. Now I got three young stars coming to practice to beat me up.

"We all fighting for bread, we all fighting for milk. I'm not letting anybody take my job. I'm gonna come here, and I'm gonna fight these guys just like I'm fighting everybody else. I'm gonna do whatever I can to stay in this league, and on this team, as long as possible."

The fight for minutes at the center position will be most interesting for two athletic shot blockers who don't quite have the upside of Len or the talent of Gortat.

And that doesn't even factor in the presence of [Channing Frye](#) , who will play both power forward and center for the Suns once he gets back into game shape. Frye has no restrictions other than getting cardio up and his shot consistent.

Gortat, for one, is excited about what Frye brings back to the lineup.

"I was super excited about Channing coming back," Gortat said. "He can spread the floor for us. He's a big 4-man who can also block some shots and get some rebounds. With his range, my

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game is going to expand. I'm going to have so much space under the basket I can go one-on-one."

Gortat spent much of his time last year playing next to Luis Scola, who spends as much time in the paint as Gortat, leaving little space for driving the lane by either a big or a guard, and certainly not room for all of them.

"[Channing] is the guy I always had the best chemistry with on the team," Gortat said. "If he wants me to come back at 7 o'clock in the morning to shoot some shots, I'm gonna do it."

Expect the Suns to play Gortat regular minutes for at least the first month or two of the season, but after that the minutes will depend on a combination of the Suns' record and the development of any of Len, Kravstov or Plumlee.

This team is all about player development now, and even the resident 29-year old center knows it's not about him anymore. It's about the next wave of young players.