



Holland Blast has its share of fan favorites

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Basketball fans love players who possess fundamental skills.

They also like players with unique, amazing and even unusual attributes.

The list of examples is endless, from the amazingly tall Manute Bol at 7-foot-7 and the uber-short Muggsy Bogues at 5-3.

The International Basketball League has its own attractions, with 7-foot-9 Chinese player Sun Ming Ming returning for his second season with the Grand Rapids Flight. Then there's Holland Blast point guard Dennis Springs, who is a two-time league all-star generously listed on the IBL's official Web site of prospects at 5-8.

While the game's most recognizable names fall somewhere in the middle of the 2-foot range those players represent, basketball clearly has room for those who don't fit the standard mold. We remember the likes of Bol and Bogues not for their statistics, but for their unusual combination of physical stature and athletic ability.

The NBA also has a long list of players who jumped directly from being high school teenagers to multimillion-dollar professional stars. LeBron James and Kobe Bryant lead the way in that category.

Springs has become the face of the Blast entering its third season in the IBL. He is lightning quick, fearless going to the basket and doggedly determined to do whatever he can to help his team win.

Holland has another player who long has been a local favorite in center Duane Bosma. A star during his days at Hope College, Bosma is another example of a non-traditional IBL player.

Married, with a family, Bosma was an All-American for Hope in the mid-1990s and now is a teacher. He also is in his third season with the Blast, continuing his role as a fan favorite.

Each season, the roster changes for Holland and continues to be tweaked throughout. That creates new opportunities for players such as Bosma and Springs to grab the attention of local fans.

A few new possible fan favorites stick out already with the season opener scheduled Friday night against the Windy City Soldiers at the Holland Civic Center.

First is Holland High graduate Ronald Ferguson. At 6-2 and 180 pounds, Ferguson did not play in college after ending his high school career with the Dutch nearly five years ago.

Co-owner Tyler Whitcomb called him a long shot to make the team, but noted his jumping ability.

Ferguson did get a brief glimpse with the Blast before. He has proved persistent in free agent camps, said coach Mike Ahrens, including a measured 37-inch vertical jump.

"He's a high-flyer and he's very quick. You can see he's behind on some fundamentals, but he brings a lot of energy to the floor," Ahrens said. "A lot of guys come to these camps and they don't send a message of urgency. He's the opposite. He's the first one in the gym."

Sounds like a fan favorite in the making.

Second is 5-8 point guard Carlos English of Cleveland State University. He could be the equal to Springs, Whitcomb raved.

Finally, Hope College standout Wade Gugino is working out with the Blast. The second team All-American for the Flying Dutchmen in 1992 preceded Bosma during a stretch of standout centers at the school.

Imagine Springs, Bosma, Ferguson, English and Gugino on the floor at the same time. The Blast may struggle a bit with that lineup, but it would be fun to watch.