

NBA NOTEBOOK: Lakers let Turiaf go to Golden State

By Elliott Teaford, Staff Writer
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Restricted free-agent forward-center Ronny Turiaf officially became a Golden State Warrior Friday night, his four-season, \$17 million contract simply too rich for the Lakers to match by the 9 p.m. deadline.

The Lakers now will turn their attention to re-signing another restricted free agent, guard Sasha Vujacic, General Manager Mitch Kupchak said. Kupchak had hoped to retain Turiaf and Vujacic, members of the Lakers' so-called "Bench Mob."

But matching the Warriors' offer sheet to Turiaf would have caused further salary-cap troubles for the Lakers, who are already \$4 million over the luxury tax threshold of \$71.150 million. The Lakers have about \$75 million tied up in only 10 players so far.

Despite their obvious financial concerns, letting the 6-foot-10 Turiaf leave for Golden State was not an easy decision for the Lakers.

Kupchak said he met with Turiaf for more than an hour Thursday, describing their meeting as "emotional."

"We will miss Ronny," Kupchak said. "The emotion and the energy he brought, whether he was playing or not, we're going to miss that. ... There are emotional ties that go beyond basketball. I think that makes it difficult (to let Turiaf leave)."

Turiaf averaged career highs of 6.6 points and 3.9 rebounds in 18.7 minutes over 78 games, including 21 starts, during his third season with the Lakers. He averaged only 2.0 points and 1.4 rebounds in 9.8 minutes during the playoffs, however.

In addition to making more money, Turiaf figures to get a good deal more playing time with the rebuilding Warriors next season than he would have with the Lakers. The Warriors roster must be remade after losing free agent Baron Davis to the Clippers.