The regrowth of Guerra

The straightahead strongman is keen to take a backward step at Hawthorn, his third AFL club, writes **Michael Gleeson**

BRENT Guerra has reinvented himself as a person and a footballer. First, and most obvious, there is the hair. Where once there was none, now he has some.

"I will say I do look my age now, I am sure you would have asked it," Guerra said of the hair treatment that has delivered the 23-year-old a luxurious mane.

"I was going to cop it for not having hair for the rest of my life, so I thought I might as well cop it for having hair for a couple of months."

More significantly, in footballing terms, there was the shift to a third AFL club in four years after he was a surprising end-of-season casualty at St Kilda. Forced to turn over at least four players a year, the Saints made the call on Guerra.

In two years at the club after moving home to Melbourne from Port Adelaide, the tough forward pocket was essentially battling with Stephen Milne for the same position. Milne is now in the leadership group at the Saints; Guerra is now at Hawthorn.

"With Port I just wanted to come back home. I went to "Choco" (Mark Williams) and said I wanted to get back to Melbourne and I thought there would be more op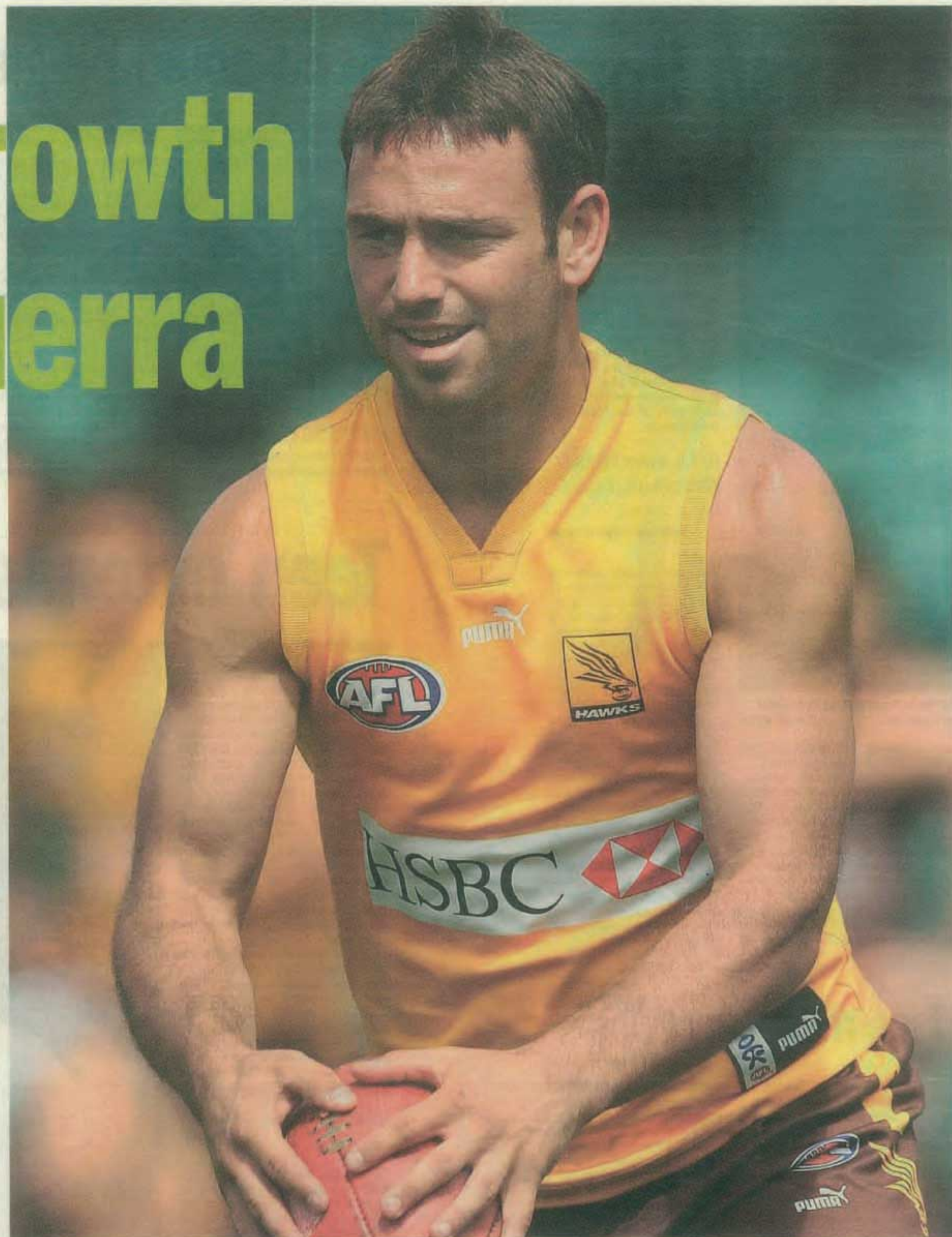portunities over here for me," Guerra said. "With St Kilda, me and Milney were playing for that one spot and it was hard week-in week-out to try and get a game with him there," Guerra said.

"Then I got delisted and hopefully now I get an opportunity here at Hawthorn. It was a shock to be delisted, I didn't see it coming at all. But when it happened I said to mum and dad that I would like to play under Clarko (Alastair Clarkson) because I played under him at Central District in Adelaide and at Port, so I am lucky enough he has now given me a chance and I will bring my best footy for him.

"I come to Hawthorn hopefully bringing the best out of myself. I think I have got plenty more to offer and only hope I can do it at the club."

The move to Hawthorn also brings Guerra to the final and most important stage in his reinvention as a footballer. And that is a change in his on-field role. While he made a name for himself with 83 goals in 96 games as an opportunist small forward, this year the hunted will turn hunter as he shifts to defence.

"I have played virtually all my career in the forward line and the only time I played back was at Central District with Clarko, and I had a meeting with him earlier in the year and said I would like to play down there.

"I have been training down there and played in practice games down there so hopefully I get an oppor-

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> **BRENT GUERRA**

tunity down there and it adds a different dimension for the side also.

"Forward can be tough if the big forwards are up there marking the ball and when there aren't too many opportunities it's pretty hard to do well.

"I would play up forward (if

asked), but I would love to get down back. I found I played my better footy down back; it is just that at Port and St Kilda they put me up forward and at St Kilda I started well up forward and I think that's why they kept me there. And with St Kilda's back line being pretty settled it is hard to crack into."

Guerra's fondness for barrelling through opponents and his ability to use the ball so well by foot would suggest it could be a wise shift of focus by player and club.

"Brett is a beautiful kick of the football, he has good speed and he is a mature body so I think he could be a valuable asset in defence," Clarkson said.

"He played for me there at Central District and played well so we will certainly look at him. He can add a bit of versatility and going to defence would add another string to his bow."

BRENT GUERRA

AGE 23

RECRUITED FROM
Barham-Koondrook/Bendigo Pioneers

GAMES
96, goals 83

PORT ADELAIDE
2000-03; 65 games, 39 goals

ST KILDA
2004-05; 31 games, 44 goals

HAWTHORN
2006 -

- AFL Rising Star nominee 2001
- Port Adelaide pre-season premiership side 2001, 2002
- St Kilda pre-season premiership side 2004