

Golden State Valkyries

Media Conference

Friday, December 6, 2024
San Francisco, California, USA

Ohemaa Nyanin

Media Conference



Q. Curious about your selection of Maria and whether -- well, first of all what you liked about her, and also whether or not you know for certain that she's going to be coming over in the 2025 season?

OHEMAA NYANIN: Yeah, we don't know if she's going to be coming over in the 2025 season. We just love her tenacity. She's playing really great basketball right now. She's kind of continued to elevate her game, and I think EUROBASKET is in June, and so there's a question mark for all international athletes that we've selected.

And we also just wanted the opportunity just to talk to her and give her the opportunity to come over if she wanted to.

Q. Yeah, just quick follow up to that. So when you are talking about a player who you're uncertain whether or not they will come over and play, what's your process for kind of trying to convince them of that, or you know, encourage here to come participate in 2025?

OHEMAA NYANIN: Yeah, it's an experience in just being empanel he tick, right. I just want to make sure that they understand who I am, what we're trying to build, who coach Natalie Nakase is, what she's trying to build on court, and then explain to them the Bay. I mean, I didn't know anything about the Bay before I moved out here, having lived in five different countries, most of the times not being given the opportunity to make that choice; I always made the best of it.

So we're looking at making sure that each of the athletes feel good about it, an we can't wait to have those conversations to make sure that it will all work out.

Q. So you know, your former team, the New York Liberty, they had a lot of assets that you could potentially choose from, including a lot of international talent as well. I'm just curious, what it was that made you choose Kayla Thornton over the others available, and what does it mean to reunite and build something new with her?

OHEMAA NYANIN: Yeah, it was, for me personally, it was the hardest pick. Because I just came from there and I know the athletes and I know kind of the connections.

When Coach Natalie explained to me the type of athlete that she's looking for both on and off the court, K.T. is who came to min, right. Like she is a defensive specialist. She has grown her game to be able to shoot the three. She's a ball of energy. She's a vet. She knows how to bring people together, and I'm really excited.

I can be honest and say that I'm also super nervous. I'm excited just to continue to have conversations with her now and kind of see how we move forward.

Q. If you could describe the group you've assembled tonight in one word, what would it be?

OHEMAA NYANIN: Competitive.

Q. Any particular reason for that word?

OHEMAA NYANIN: Yeah. There's a lot of unknown. I think in building a team in a blank canvas, you just don't know, and so the competitive spirit that each of these individuals have individually and now hopefully collectively is what we focused on, and then we also focused on them as humans.

I'm expounding on your question but I think you know me. I care about humans. I care about these athletes. I care about what type of coffee they like. Where, you know, like what brings them joy, and I think what will win basketball games is their just unapologetic nature of wanting to always compete.

Q. This is obviously a roster that as of this point only has three players with contracts for the 2025 season. I think at this point, I was seeing that you guys have the most cap space still available of anyone in the league. Would a lot of these moves kind of reading the tea leaves of them, does this mean that you feel as if you guys are going to be shopping at the top of the free agency pool as much as possible?



OHEMAA NYANIN: Yeah, I mean, I wouldn't call it shopping. I think I would call it kind of like we're open for business. I think we're ready to talk to any and everybody that wants to have a conversations with us about being a part of this journey.

I think we are just really excited about the opportunity to welcome these free agents and these college athletes, as well, and just wanted to give ourselves as much flexibility to be able to go and get athletes in the near future.

Q. And then just as a quick follow-up, how difficult is the current kind of landscape in the WNBA? I think only two players that are non-rookie players have a contract for 2026. Did that cause any extra complications in this specific moment of having an expansion draft?

OHEMAA NYANIN: Can you ask the question one more time?

Q. Yeah. With the CBA set to expire and nobody signing a contract really after 2025, how much did that add complications and knowing everybody that you could pick that's a veteran is going to effectively be a free agent from next year on?

OHEMAA NYANIN: Yeah, this entire process is complex. I think there's a lot of unknowns, and I will say that ad nauseam, unfortunately. But we we're super excited about talking to each and every one of these athletes.

So as you know, I can't comment on the CBA or the negotiations, and I'm looking at it from the human perspective, you know, like what can we continue to express to these athletes that make them want to come and play in this Valkyries violet and black and white, and our shield and all of that.

Q. I just wanted to ask you, once you describe the excitement creating this roster, especially Thornton and Kate Martin come together on a new team.

OHEMAA NYANIN: Yeah, Kayla Thornton and Kate Martin and all of the other athletes; I'm going to name all of them because I'm super excited about them. The excitement behind it is filled with emotion.

I think we are -- we haven't had the opportunity to do deep dives and ask them all the questions, and so I'm just really excited to give them the opportunity to want to be part of our Valkyries team.

Q. Just wanted to ask, now that you're finally done with the process, after all the hours that went in to

getting to this point, how do you feel about how tonight went, and then also, you know, looking ahead, knowing that you have the cap space and everything, how this is just like the beginning of the road, kind of?

OHEMAA NYANIN: The entire kind of journey up to May 16, it is the journey, right. Like this is the start of the journey, and I'm just really excited. I'm trying to find a different word.

So "excited" is not the word. It's emotional. I'm very emotional, right. Like I want to be able to make sure, sort of repeating myself, but this is like truly how I feel. I just want to make sure that these athletes understand their worth. This fan base is so hungry for these players to don the uniforms that we just announced and to win basketball games.

Q. When constructing this team from the ground up, what are some core cultural qualities that you looked for in these players that you just drafted?

OHEMAA NYANIN: Yeah, great question. I think the three things that we have said out loud because there's a lot more is competitive spirit, like the edge, the want to always to win, right. Like you kind of feel sick when you lose, and that then kind of like pushes you to want to think and problem-solve around how to get better on a daily basis.

The attention to detail on offense, as well, I think is something that we wanted to talk about and think about, and how do these athletes make it make sense for us in this first part of our journey. And then I'm going to say it again, humans. Like who are these individuals, what can we say about them. We weren't necessarily able to have conversations with them prior.

So you know, what can we glean from all of these different conversations that we've either had in the past or could glean from others. We're just -- we know that these athletes embody the type of culture that will become Valkyries Basketball.

Q. Just wondering about the pick from the Mercury, Monique Billings, what did you see from her to pick among your four forwards that will help impact the team?

OHEMAA NYANIN: Yeah, Monique is a relentless rebounder on both ends. She's a ball of energy. She's a bright light. I actually had the opportunity to work with her when I was at USA Basketball. We went to Japan together. So I know her really well, and I haven't had the opportunity to talk to her just yet to see if she's excited or not.



But she's your professional vet. She comes in regardless of what uniform that she's wearing and she's going to give you all of her energy, and I think that if there's something that is to be said about what we're trying to build, it's, you know, giving people the platform to want to be in the WNBA for first and foremost but also to win.

Q. Getting to this point, what was the most difficult part of landing on the 11 names that you landed on?

OHEMAA NYANIN: I would say the most difficult part was kind of like narrowing down our thoughts. I think what we did was first prepare.

So you know, what athletes did we think were going to be unprotected, and that was too long of a game that we played with each other, per team, and then, okay, if we pick these 12 athletes, thinking that they would all be protected, does that make up a team? Okay. Great.

Day two, everybody go watch film. Say why you liked, you know, Player a, B, C, D, E, F, G from each team for team one of the Valkyries, and then the passion just behind, hey, we need to go get Player A or Player B, and, oh, okay, now, Player A and B are protected. So what do we do now, and what does that look like?

So I mean, in summary, I think it was just -- it was complex in trying to figure out collectively we could not be too guard heavy or too post heavy or too X heavy, but how could we be a complete team and how could people just really kind of get a sense of what we are trying to look for as we are going through free agency.

Q. Looking at your pick from the Mystics, July Vanloo, curious what you liked about her, and with her being a little bit older, how do you think her experience in the WNBA and elsewhere can help your team?

OHEMAA NYANIN: Yeah, Julie is a ball of fire. She has that spunk. She has that aura of, again, trying to win. Her competitive edge, she's, you know, a EURO BASKET Gold Medalist. She competed in the Olympics this year. Her age isn't something that we looked at.

We looked at what she's doing right now, what she's done in the past, what's her growth, what's her trajectory. We're super excited about her experiences that she's had. She's now, you know, had one year in the W under her belt with an Olympic season in the middle.

And so now she gets to come and we get to figure out if, you know, we need to find out if Belgium, you know, qualifies in February for the June EURO BASKET, and

what does that look like for us. There's still a lot to figure out.

But what we can see from our seats is that she just seems like she's a happy person. She seems like this is her goal is to play basketball and to win games and she seems like she doesn't take herself too seriously, and so that's exactly what we need in terms of like an entrepreneurial spirit in wanting to come and be a Valkyries.

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