

Golden State Valkyries

Media Conference

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Natalie Nakase

Media Conference



Q. Can you maybe confirm when you guys found out about the unprotected list? And can you also confirm if every player selected has a genuine offer to play on this team or if you guys are still thinking about future moves?

NATALIE NAKASE: Yeah, so we found out the list on November 25. That's when we found out the list. Then everyone we selected, I'm not sure if you -- oh, you didn't hear on ESPN, like I am genuinely excited about every player that I picked, and I can go down the line with the competitiveness, the way that these players will do anything it takes to win, and they're high character. So yes, these players are, from my heart, very well selected to an intent that I really want them on our team.

Q. This is a very international team; was that intentional? Can you talk about the importance of having such an international roster? The second question is are you excited to go back to coaching Kate Martin?

NATALIE NAKASE: Thanks for the question. Honestly, I was looking -- my non-negotiables are competitiveness, ultra competitiveness, and again, you can see it the way they played. Every single player, they're competitive.

Number two, they have high character. I watch from their body language, how they are when they come off the bench, how they are when they go to the bench. I watch all the little things, and I see high character with every single player.

The next thing is a never-satisfied mindset, meaning they want to play as if their life depends on it. They want to play as if they have something to prove, and to me, those were the characteristics that I love.

The international part, actually when I started to write down, I was like, oh, these players, half of them are not from the States, but that wasn't my mindset. It was building the best team that I wanted to build.

The Kate Martin question, of course. I'm excited with Kate. I grew a very close relationship when I was there with the Aces. She's a very genuine person, but she's also a culture changer. She really pours herself into her work and into her passion the way she plays.

Q. The team picked seven international players. What went through the process with that, obviously?

NATALIE NAKASE: Yeah, so kind of what I just said, it was the non-negotiables that I looked for in terms of my characteristics of what I want as a player. The international just kind of happened. It just was a coincidence. Again, I'm excited. Like I said, competitiveness, high character, and then a never-satisfied mindset. That's exactly what I was looking for.

Q. What kind of culture would you like to establish in the Bay Area, and what gives you confidence looking at the roster that you can have a successful season?

NATALIE NAKASE: Great question. Yeah, so my culture is going to be competitive. You're going to hear me say that a lot. They're going to be connected. I think the best way teams can work well -- sorry, have a lot of success early is if they can connect and have really great chemistry. So that's how I see my culture.

Your second question?

Q. What gives you confidence looking at the roster that you will have a successful season?

NATALIE NAKASE: I think, like I've kind of just been mentioning about the characteristics, when you have players that compete every night at a high level, and like I said, if you just watch these players, all 11 players, they compete. They compete like their life depends on it. I think I have a lot of confidence with that, because to me that means that they have a great work ethic. If they're playing that hard, that means that they have at least had to have practiced that hard.

Q. I wanted to ask about Temi Fagbenle. Were you surprised she was available, and what stands out to



you about her?

NATALIE NAKASE: I wouldn't say surprised. Everyone has their reasons. I don't know what their reasons were, but when I saw her name, I was obviously very excited. She played very well against us, myself last year with the Aces, and I even made a special defense for her specifically. So I'm just really excited to have her.

As you can see, she has a really great personality, and I think that's really going to be infectious.

Q. Obviously with this just being the start of your roster building process and having \$1.2 million worth of cap space available, you guys are going to be pretty active in free agency. How exciting is that to have that type of flexibility and know that you have a little bit of a foundation to build off of?

NATALIE NAKASE: Yeah, that's a great question. No, we are very excited just with, again -- I'm elated with the fact that I was able to get those 11 players. Like I said, these are players that are hungry, that possibly they're players that could have started on other teams, so I'm just really excited to give them the opportunity.

Again, you don't ever question a competitor in my mind.

Q. Kayla Thornton, to have her a part of this team, obviously kind of a WNBA journeywoman of sorts. What does she bring?

NATALIE NAKASE: Championship experience. I mean, right away, she played in really, really crucial minutes in the Finals, and that to me is priceless, having that type of -- I guess you could say pressure. But she steps up. When her name is called, she steps up. She's a defensive specialist. She can space the floor. But like you guys have all seen, she's a competitor.

Q. You kind of touched on it a little bit on ESPN, but I was hoping you could expand upon it. If you could describe the group you assembled tonight, the group of 11 women, in one word, what would it be?

NATALIE NAKASE: Competitive.

Q. Why that word of all things?

NATALIE NAKASE: So more than one word?

Q. Why competitive?

NATALIE NAKASE: Look, the ultimate goal here for the Golden State Valkyries and from my owner, straight from

his mouth, is we would like to win a championship in five years. He said maybe even sooner. With that in mind, you have to have competitive players in order to win a championship. I've had experience with the Aces on how we won, and I would go down the line to say all those players were really competitive.

Q. So expand on the Kayla question, what do you remember most about your crucial match-ups with her having faced her in the postseason the past two years? What do you remember the most about her?

NATALIE NAKASE: Her physical on-ball defense. It was just really, really hard to be able to get by her and try to get to the paint. Obviously the way she crashes and boards, I think that's priceless.

Q. What does success look like for the Valkyries in year one? And you have four players on this team with championship experience. What was the approach behind building a competitive team for the inaugural season?

NATALIE NAKASE: Yeah, really great question. I mean, success means just winning as many games as possible, to me. I want to win every game. That's just kind of how I'm built. That's my -- undefeated I guess would be a great mark of success.

Can you ask the second question again?

Q. You have four players with championship experience on this roster, and I wanted to know what was the approach behind building this competitive roster for the inaugural season?

NATALIE NAKASE: Yeah, that's a great question. Like I said, having championship experience is vital. You're in those big moments. You're in those big locker room meetings and those practices that go down to the little details with the Playoffs. So yeah, that was a big piece into bringing this team together, because like I said, we have a goal, and we want to get there with the right players but also with the right minds at the same time.

Q. You guys selected a pretty veteran-heavy roster, and I'm wondering how you balance having players who are hungry and ready to go with also younger ones who might be around for the for the longer haul in Golden State?

NATALIE NAKASE: What do you consider veterans?

Q. Well, I'm thinking like the average age of the WNBA is like 27, 28, so older than that.



NATALIE NAKASE: Yeah, kind of. Well, we had AC who was 37. I think it depends on a lot of it as a veteran: How many years have they been a professional, how many years or how many games have they played. I think everyone is different.

Again, I look at the most recent in terms of their success, and then I kind of work my way backwards with them. Like I said, everyone has filled such a positive impact in my eyes in terms of competitiveness -- I keep saying the same words. But yeah, it really wasn't an obvious thing with the veteranship. It was how they compete every single day.

What was your second question?

Q. I wonder how you balance with that having younger players who can be around in Golden State because of their contracts for a longer time.

NATALIE NAKASE: Yeah, everyone is going to have to compete for their minutes. You have to earn it. You have to work for it. There's nothing guaranteed this or that. We're going to have to work for everything that we want.

Q. I heard your interview on ESPN and I imagine it was one of the first questions you got asked when you were hired, what you learned from Becky. But what have you learned from the players that you've coached and what have they taught you in return?

NATALIE NAKASE: Great question. I can go on and on. Gosh, genuine love, I would say, from every player that I have worked with with the Aces. I'll just pick a few since it's going to be lengthy. But starting with A'ja Wilson, unapologetically herself at all times. Whenever she speaks, she speaks the truth. She speaks from her heart, and she genuinely wants to help people and impact the next generation. Watching her and listening to all of her interviews has been very helpful with just being your authentic self and never hiding anything, just always be willing to help.

Sydney Colson, two times unapologetically herself. She's able to make fun of herself in a way where she enjoys to make other people laugh and make other people feel comfortable, and not a lot of people can do that. That's something I'm definitely going to take with me, probably because I'm not going to see her every single -- it's going to be hard not to see her every day, and I want to be able to laugh, so maybe I can make a couple impressions of Sydney Colson at practice.

Q. One person that's always stood out with her pregame routine and I think you took it as serious as

she has, was KP. Can you touch upon the relationship you have with her and what you'll bring to Golden State from her?

NATALIE NAKASE: Yeah, KP is very, very special. She's probably one of the hardest working athletes I've ever been around, from the time I started coaching professionally. Yeah, her warm-up was about 30 minutes hard. She actually got me in better shape physically because in order for me to last 30 minutes, I had to be in top shape. So we would actually do hot yoga, pilates. We would do that stuff in the off-season because I knew I had to be in great shape with KP. So she pushed me. She's a pusher. I will be forever grateful for KP and all those moments that she pushed me.

Q. When we spoke to Ohemaa before, she told us that you described a type of athlete that you wanted, and she said that Kayla Thornton matched that pretty exactly. Can you describe to us the type of physical athlete that you were looking for and how KT fits that?

NATALIE NAKASE: Yeah, I don't think I've described anyone physically. I think a lot of it comes from, number one, your head, and number one, your heart. For me, I could see that within Kayla, the way she defends with authority, her passion behind how she plays on every rebound that she goes after, her high IQ in order to space the floor but make quick decisions. I can go on and on about her.

But the physical part, hey, you can only move as fast as your heart is desired. That's how I see it more. Rather than it coming from the physical part, it's the heart and the head for me.

Q. Wondering about how your NBA experience and also there was a couple others in the league who have NBA experience like Nate Tibbetts with the Mercury and how that will apply with the Valkyries going forward?

NATALIE NAKASE: Yeah, that's a great question. You know, I still have my great relationships with obviously my mentor Tyronn Lue, so I'm constantly picking his brain with the ideas that he brings. Sometimes it's about bringing some new trends to the game, so as I watch the NBA, and the same with college and international basketball, I'm watching everything right now, you can find anything from just watching.

You guys know I'm an affidavit watcher of basketball, so I'm going to definitely utilize him and pick his brain, but at the end of the day, the players that we have picked right now, I'm definitely utilizing their skills, and I want to make

them feel that they can be their best version of themselves while they're here with Golden State Valkyries.

Q. Just looking at the roster, it seems to be a pretty lengthy one, a pretty versatile one. Was that a product of the players that were available? Is that something you want to establish long-term, the type of players that you want?

NATALIE NAKASE: Versatility is key. That's one word defensively that I kept saying. We're going to hang our hat on the defensive end. So to be able to guard multiple positions is going to be really key.

At the same time, too, we want to be a great rebounding team, but like I said, it's not really physically what I'm looking at. It's coming from their heart and their competitive spirit.

Q. Iliana, I'm curious what went into choosing her, and if you could talk about your experience with her in 2022.

NATALIE NAKASE: Ily was a blessing, to be honest. She's such a positive light. I don't know if you've ever met her, but she's super positive. She loves basketball. She's super passionate about it. We had her a couple of years ago. She was, I think, 19 maybe at the time, 19 or 20, and she was just wide-eyed, just ready to go.

To me, I just remember Ily as an avid learner. She just wanted to learn anything and everything. And just to fit. She's like, whatever you need, Coach, I'll do it. So that's what we did. We were like, okay, can you space the floor and lock up defensively, and she's like, yep, I can do that.

Yeah, excited to reunite with her. I actually did think when I did say goodbye to her, I was like, I guarantee we're going to work together some day. Yeah, full circle. It came back. It came true.

Q. I'm just gleaning from you guys' selections today just picking some pretty established players who have been in the league and talking about wanting to win as many games as possible, it seems like strategically you guys don't seem that interested in building through the draft and the lottery and trying to rebuild that way. I'm curious if that's the case, and what went into that?

NATALIE NAKASE: I mean, that kind of question is more for Ohemaa, but in terms of the expansion draft itself, we went for the players that, again, I feel that can compete, that we can bring in as soon as possible. Like I can't say it enough, I want these players here tonight. I want them

shipped, ready to go. But I understand that they have a season that they have to do overseas, so I'll definitely be connecting with them.

But no, the roster is built for us to be as successful as possible but be the most competitive team in the league.

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