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Sydney Johnson

Media Conference



SYDNEY JOHNSON: Please fire away. No opening statements that I'm aware of. I'm not prepared for any. So have at it.

Q. We touched on this yesterday, but I wanted to ask you now that you've had a night's rest, with all of the new faces, you instilling what you want to, setting the culture, in these early parts of a short camp, what are some of the things that you really want to make sure you get instilled in this early part?

SYDNEY JOHNSON: I think for us, our daily habits. I think just making sure that we're playing really, really hard. I think that's absolutely critical. It is early. We're going to get tested with that, 44 games.

But we have to compete. This league is just tremendous. So we really, really have to compete, be ready for it.

We want to get better. We want to embrace that. Small victories, big victories all along the way. Never kind of resting on what went down the day before, good or bad.

I like to preach the communication between players and coaches, most importantly players to players. Just communicate very well.

This is a team game. So the humility part of working together. Those are four habits that we want to hold to. We realize we're going to get tested. But for me it's important to hold onto those, to build those now as our foundation moving forward.

Q. We've talked a lot about you want to play fast. Some of the players have mentioned also getting the shot up in the first eight seconds of the shot clock. Can you detail that a little bit, what you're looking for. When you say 'play fast', what does that mean to you?

SYDNEY JOHNSON: I mean, that's a goal. That's a goal, is just to play fast. How we mark. I do favor the analytics a bit. How we mark it is how we mark it. But we do want to

play fast. They understand this.

But to share with you all, is to do it efficiently, right? Not just throwing the ball up there, being loose with it, take any kind of shot, being reckless, gambling, nothing like that.

Understanding that that first eight, 10, 12 seconds, however you want to quantify it, it's a lot of time. It's a lot of time. Getting our players comfortable in terms of passing, dribbling, shooting and making good decisions in that amount of time and seeing where it gets us.

Q. You have a good roster of post players right now between Stef, Aaliyah, Kiki... A lot of people in the post. We've talked a lot about playing fast, shooting threes. How do you envision that meshing?

SYDNEY JOHNSON: Yeah, meshes very well. You do have to have a deep roster to play at the pace we want to play. You already mentioned a pretty health depth chart there in terms of fours and fives.

We also, as I say fours and fives, we want a bit more position-less basketball, versatility, inside-out. You have players that already have those skills or who will be developing those skills with our coaching staff.

It's actually a pretty good blend. I'm excited to see where it gets us.

Q. I know it's early, but what things have you seen from the team that you're looking to build upon day to day? What skills have stood out team wide for you?

SYDNEY JOHNSON: I would start honestly with Stef and Slim's leadership. They're just flat out pros. They're about their business. They work really hard. They're also, like, helpers, givers. That's really stuck out. It's set the tone for how we've practiced, how we communicate with each other.

They are competing, they are professional in terms of their approach, but they're not cold. They're very warm in terms of bringing people in. That's contagious. That's given our younger players like a safe space, to be honest. You know

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what I mean? As we're trying to figure this out, getting people accustomed to some newness, including head coach and coaching staff, they've really set the tone.

Right now I feel good about the energy that we have. What I've shared earlier already is we have to hold that day in and day out. We can't have great energy because we've won a couple games. We can't have poor energy because we've come up short. That's just got to be who we are. So far so good in that regard.

Q. With the rookies, you don't want them to put their toe in the water but you want them to be thermostats. How have you seen that approach in the rookies?

SYDNEY JOHNSON: Right now we have a healthy balance of confidence in their own individual skills, honestly before they even got here. Frankly, why we wanted them in this space. But then also an openness to be coached not only by our staff but, again, Slim and Stef and some of our other younger players that have some games under their belt. Kira and Emily, in particular. Sug to some extent. Jade as well. The rookies are first-rounders in Lucy and Zaay, also kind of confident in what they can do, but also willing to be coached.

Q. With Lucy, what have you seen? How has that skill set of hers and the strengths of her seamlessly translate to the WNBA level?

SYDNEY JOHNSON: I think Courtney Williams has shown the world that the midrange game is alive and well. She's had a wonderful career, continues to. Her ability to knock-down that shot, everybody in the league knows how valuable that can be.

We're certainly not pulling that away from Lucy in any shape or form. It's just got to be a shot that she makes at a high level, which is what Courtney does.

What I would say directly in terms of Lucy is her work ethic is really on the high end. She really puts her time in, which is impressive, which is what's needed at this level. Then she has shown an ability to learn fast. Those two skills bode well for a long career.

Obviously you got to have health in there, as well. But those two things stick out right now.

Q. Going back to playing fast, you kind of touched on this. Specifically how are you thinking as you're teaching this young group about how you want to play, how are you thinking about playing fast but not playing out of control, not playing too fast?

SYDNEY JOHNSON: Yeah, it's not easy. Every player gets excited, Oh, we get to run. Yet there's some accountability there.

I mean, I named it before, just shot quality, not being loose with the ball. Those are things. Our short (indiscernible) last year was on the high end. Our turnover rate was probably not where we wanted it to be. These are some of the things.

You start to name it. You start to define it. It's just not eight seconds or less, that's all you're thinking. It's more about, Well, how are we attacking the rim? How are we attacking teams from the three-point line? What types of shots do we want?

If we don't have those shots, we're fine to flow into middle and back end of the shot clock. The world doesn't end after the first eight seconds, you know?

Certainly that's been well-defined. You can almost put that on a T-shirt of 'eight seconds or less', but there's a lot more in there. There's a lot more teaching in there. I don't want to give all of it away.

We are working towards that appropriate balance of being a threat in transition, and if you don't have it, let's settle in and trust what we can do five-on-five in the halfcourt.

Q. You've coached at different places, different styles. How has your philosophy evolved over the years to get to this point?

SYDNEY JOHNSON: Yeah, that's a good question.

I think I feel good about the range of experiences that I've had, whether it's collegiately or Team USA, 3 on 3 obviously last year in the W.

I guess what I would say is just, like, what I appreciate so much about our athletes, even our younger ones, is their willingness to want to get better and their ability to pick up things fast.

There's a talent that you have to have. There's a competitiveness that you have to have. Then, frankly, you got to be able to process things quickly. Overall I see a high level of that in this league.

I'm excited to have a good amount of that in our building, in our gym, because ultimately those are the things you got to have to even have a chance in this league.

Q. With so many of your players having played Unrivaled this off-season, how do you think this will



help this group as a whole? What do you expect them to carry over from 3 on 3? What do you see the impact of that being?

SYDNEY JOHNSON: I loved every minute of it. Unrivaled for what it meant for those athletes, for our league, for women's pro basketball globally, and obviously with the W being the big entity there, but Unrivaled, tapping into that a fair amount.

Then I love the fact that all of those players were being put in positions where they had to pass, dribble, shoot in different areas of the floor, play a certain pace, defend different areas of the floor. All that stuff was wonderful.

Mystic specific, all of that bodes well for what we're asking them to do five-on-five day in, day out in our gym, where we want them to be a threat in different areas of the floor, we want them to be able to be comfortable defending in different areas of the floor. We certainly want to accelerate their decision making such that they can make decisions with and without the ball.

I think Unrivaled gave them a taste of that. You can see the experience that Aaliyah had and the growth. We could literally see the growth happening before our eyes. So all those things we want to build on.

But they lend themselves very well to how we want to play the game.

Q. Most of the guards on the roster are 22 years old. What are the pros and cons of incorporating them into that style?

SYDNEY JOHNSON: The cons are you're not sure what you're going to get, you're not sure what's coming.

The pros of that is you can really impact how they go about their daily habits, how they approach things. You feel like you can have some impact there and influence in terms of how you hope it will look and how they develop and grow their careers.

I do think that, yeah, we are lesser experienced and less of an established depth chart, if you will, at one, two and three. I really to hold onto Slim as our guiding light there. I'm hopeful we can get 44 games from her. She sets a really good standard for all of us that I can put her with other players and really feel like we have our identity.

Yeah, there's a bit more coaching there in those areas and with those players. But when I have Slim, I just feel like we can try to get to where we want to get to. So there's a bit of comfort, as well.

Q. Having so many young players at your camp, we know how important it is for you to have a connection with your veterans, the leadership, but what did you tell the group of veterans that are coming in what you wanted them to display in this camp for you and also for the younger players?

SYDNEY JOHNSON: I think I shared it earlier. Again, our daily habits, which I won't bore you and repeat those again. I think as much as anything, prior to coming in, the accountability that we need to have, accountability, reliability, with the pair of them. Then to want this to be a joyful endeavor.

This is pro sports. I get it. The attention is at its highest. Everything has been lifted up. But it's a game. Athletes, ball players, only have a certain amount of years they get to do this. I want it to be joyful for them. I want them to have that appropriate balance of the right approach to it, to be able to be a model for everybody else, but also ball out, have fun with it, get loose. You know what I mean?

What are we doing? It's basketball. I mean, we're so blessed, it's crazy. Like have that balance, be ability to model that for the rest of us. That was probably most tenor of the pre-camp conversations, if any. Once they've gotten here, they've kind of hit the ground running.

I've watched this game a decent amount. I knew what I was getting with Slim and Stef. Frankly, a lot of other teams know what we're getting out of Slim and Stef. We're just glad we have them in a Mystics uniform.

Thank you. Enjoy your day.

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