

Washington Mystics Media Conference

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Kiki Iriafen

Media Conference



Q. What has this first week, these first couple days been like for you as you try to learn new teammates, learn new coaches, trying to do what you do on the floor, learn new schemes? What has it been like for you in this early going?

KIKI IRIAFEN: Exciting, truly. I think I was just waiting for a new opportunity to kind of have to prove yourself, make your mark in a new league, in a new space, and the WNBA is the best league in the world and a place that I've been dreaming about being in, and the fact that I'm here is something I'm super excited about.

Practice has been fun. It's been competitive going against the bigs that have been in the league for a long time and kind of having to earn my keep. But it's been great learning -- we're learning a lot, but our coaches do a great job of making sure we understand everything. But just a lot of excitement and learning.

Q. Has there been anything that you wanted to show off?

KIKI IRIAFEN: My three. My coaches are super big on that, as well, and they encourage me to shoot my three. I've been shooting it a lot in practice, staying extra to make my shots because I know that's going to be something that's key in this league if I'm playing the 4, maybe the 3. So just really working on my three-point shot.

Q. Just wanted to follow up on all that about learning. What are some of the things, whether it's on the court, game play stuff, or if it's personal stuff as far as being a pro now, what are some of the things that you feel like you've learned the most or that have been your favorite things to learn?

KIKI IRIAFEN: Yeah, definitely a lot of stuff on the court, different terminology. Maybe I called it something different in college but they call it something different in the W. So a lot of terminology. Our vets have been giving us a lot of tips and tricks even though we're competing against them.

But I think the biggest thing is learning what it takes to be a pro. I'm not in school anymore, so it's just basketball and you're cool. But no, it's like you do pre-lift, you do post-lift, you do treatment, you do treatment before practice, after practice, you watch film. There's just a lot that goes into it. What are you eating. So I've really just been kind of observing everybody and kind of seeing what they do to come up with what I see myself doing as a pro.

But I just learned that it takes a lot to be a pro. The way they show up and practice, they don't take any plays off. Almost every shot they shoot goes in, so just that level of detail is something that I've been taking away from them.

Q. You talk about the vets and all this learning. Who's someone that you feel like you've particularly been able to pick their brain or gotten some good advice from, and what was that advice that you've gotten from them?

KIKI IRIAFEN: I'd say Slim and Stef, truly Stef, meaning with like my post work and just me watching her and her watching me and sometimes it's not even a call that Coach makes but Stef will be like, oh, Keeks, if you do this and this, it'll be easier or you don't have to work as hard. So kind of just giving me little tips and tricks. Slim, I think that's someone who I was talking about, just the way that she approaches the game is someone that I've been looking at and observing. We worked out a little bit when I was in high school, so we kind of go back a little bit, so to be teammates is super exciting.

But I think those two, they've been great. Honestly, even Aaliyah, Shakira, Emily, they've all been great at just giving me a lot of advice, but I would say Stef and Slim have really taken me under their wing.

Q. With playing at Stanford with Tara VanDerveer and then at USC with Lindsay Gottlieb, what kind of advice have they given you to extend your career now on the professional level?

KIKI IRIAFEN: Definitely. Coach Gottlieb sent me a text before training camp and was just like, you have everything inside of you to go out there and make your mark. It's just



about me believing it and not being afraid to make mistakes. With Tara, it's just like, you don't ever want to be comfortable. So I think even though I accomplished a lot in college, but everybody here has accomplished a lot in college. I'm kind of playing with people who are my peers but also people who are better than me. So for me it's just not being complacent, not feeling that I've arrived just because I've been drafted but kind of really working hard.

I think that's the part that I'm most excited for. Last year I was a senior and you kind of feel like, oh, I've made it, I know what I'm doing, but to be at the bottom again, to be a rookie, I feel like it's so exciting. There will be a lot of challenges that come my way, but I feel like that's how you grow the most is by going through adversity and going through challenges.

I'm really excited for this first year in the W.

Q. You mentioned how excited you were for Coach Johnson and this offense that he's trying to instill in you guys. Now that you've had a couple practices under your belt and you're seeing it come together, what are your thoughts on it and how it fits your game?

KIKI IRIAFEN: I love it. It's fast. I feel like I'm a fast player. We want to score the ball fast, and he's also really big on defense. I've been trying to mix it up. I'm guarding post players sometimes and then I'm also like, let me guard a guard, just showing that I can be versatile on defense. But it's been great. There's a lot of freedom in the offense but also there's certain key things we want to get to.

It's only been like week one, but I'm really excited to see where all this goes.

Q. People don't really understand how stark of a transition it is from LA to D.C.; how have you been adjusting?

KIKI IRIAFEN: Honestly, I love it. I didn't ever imagine I'd be an East Coast girl, but I'm loving D.C. so far. I've only been here for a week. The people have been great. Since I landed in the airport, people already knew who I was and they were like, congrats on the Mystics. So just to feel the love, and I've gone to a lot of rookie events this past week and we've gotten so much love and support. It honestly is feeling like a second home for me, so I'm super excited to learn more about what D.C. is all about.

The biggest thing I've been doing here is just going on TikTok and just finding food places to eat, so I'm excited to see more DMV eats.

Q. I know you've touched on it a couple of times, but how much do you also lean on -- as much as you leaned on your previous coaches, but your family and your culture for putting you in this position and the grounding that you have to be able to take all of this in and appreciate it, and to your point, be excited about being back at the bottom?

KIKI IRIAFEN: I definitely give it to my parents. I think my parents have been my rock in everything, ups and downs. They've truly kept me grounded, kept me humble, and I think in my culture, I always say this, so I don't know if I've said it to you guys, but there's a saying, naija no dey carry last, and that's just the idea that in everything you want to do you want to strive for excellence, you want to strive to be the best. So yes, I might be at the bottom but I'm going to work my tail off because I want to be the best. I want an opportunity on that floor. I want to make an impact any single time my coach puts me on the court, so there's really no nerves, surprisingly. I thought I would be very nervous, but there's no nerves. There's just a lot of excitement. I feel like a freshman again. Like you're so excited for what this journey could be, to play against some of the players that you look up to, play with some of the players that you look up to.

I'm just super excited, and I would say my parents have raised me to be like this.

Q. You've already spoken about your adaptability and how you grow as a player. Can you speak to Coach Johnson and his staff, how they've embraced you as a player that you are, and speak to what it feels to know that they're so invested in your success.

KIKI IRIAFEN: I would say Coach Johnson and the whole staff, they truly care about all of us as people before players. Everybody from drafted to undrafted. We've all had coaching meetings, and I thought I was going to talk about basketball, and all we talked about was who is Kiki, what does Kiki like to do.

I told them that I love matcha. Now they're like, oh, we have a matcha spot here, we have a matcha spot there. I think coming in it can be very intimidating at times, but to know your coaches want to get to know who you are as a person is something that's very important, and I feel like that's the biggest thing is he wants that open and honest conversation, he wants that back and forth dialogue of what are we seeing on the court, what is he seeing, but then even off the court, he wants to know, how is your day, what's family like, what are your favorite things to do. Kind of having that personal relationship is something that I've noticed in just my short time here and something that I really appreciate.

Q. Wanted to let you know I recently talked to Cam Brink, and she was super excited not only to see you get drafted but she said she thought you were going to be the best dressed during WNBA Draft night, and in my you were.

KIKI IRIAFEN: Thank you.

Q. Are there plans to do these tunnel outfits -- I know the girls are going to be talking about it, so I wanted to ask you any thoughts on those future WNBA tunnel fits?

KIKI IRIAFEN: First of all, shout-out Cam. I love her down. She texted me after draft, so definitely a lot of love, and I'm excited to see her in the W. We're going to be competitors, not teammates anymore, but she's great.

In terms of my fashion, I've always been a fashion girlie, so I love fashion. I will definitely be partaking in tunnel fits. I think it's going to be a little bit later because I'm like, let me get -- basketball is the main thing right now, so obviously preseason I'm kind of just focused on that, and then as we get into a rhythm, I'll definitely be stepping out with my outfits.

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