

# Washington Mystics Media Conference

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**Jamila Wideman**

Media Conference



**Q. ... what's that been like for you?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: It's exciting, isn't it?

**Q. Uh-huh.**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: It's exactly that. It's a thrill to see some of what has just been in our mind's eye in terms of what and how we've wanted to build from a staff perspective, and as we thought about the players that we wanted to add to our returning corps, players that we brought in for training camp.

And there is just nothing that can stand next to the kind of energy that happens when you have living, breathing human beings walk in the spaces and it immediately changes, and it changes in ways maybe you anticipate, and changes in ways you can't anticipate. Precisely because of the way that that energy lives and connects and people start to connect, that's been the magic.

So it has been energizing on multiple levels.

**Q. As you stood and watched practice yesterday, kind of what were some of the things that stood out to you, observations that are going through your head as you're looking and evaluating everybody for the first time?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, look, I think Coach Johnson has set the culture and invited players to show up and be competitive, to be great teammates, to bring a lot of energy, and to be open to learning from each other and also from the coaching staff that we assembled.

I think the energy has been exactly that. I think it has met his ask for people to come ready to play, his ask for people to come and show up as professionals. Our players have been incredibly responsive and excited. There is hunger that's on the court.

And I think the other characteristic I would name, I think

there has been a grace about our players in terms of their support of one another. Watching our vets interact with our rookies has been amazing.

There is an emerging leadership happening that we're seeing, so that's been really fun as well.

**Q. Timeline for Sika to get back?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, she's finishing her overseas play, and because it is overseas play we're just not sure. Of course she's put a lot into her work with her team and so we're just hoping for the best and hoping to get her as soon as possible.

**Q. Georgia Amoore said her greatest asset is her brain. With that being said, how have you seen that on the floor so far here?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, Georgia has a lot of great assets. I would name her brain I guess as well. I would name it as just one of them.

I think what we've seen her show up and do is to be incredibly prepared to participate and really listen intently. She is really, really communicative with her teammates.

And she's also come in with a sense of humility. She's come in and been willing to listen to our vets, learned from their experience, tried to get a sense of the other players on the floor with her and find her spots to be present and helpful, and also just find her spots also to be present and to learn.

I think as far as she and all the rookies have done a great job in that way.

**Q. With that, do you ever -- I know with the draft you vet and you speak to the coaches and you get to know the people that know them best. What have you done in terms of maybe trying to unlock a little bit more of their basketball IQ speaking to their collegiate coaches?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, I think I you said, we do our



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best to learn from others, to learn from the tape, to be a person and see them actually show up. But of course you never know until you get them in the gym. I just give a ton of credit to Coach Johnson and his coaching staff for creating an environment that I think allows us to get to know each player and their skills in different ways.

I think they're doing that by setting a platform, everything from creating individual drills so we're able to see with more specificity what they come in being great at, what are the spaces they have an opportunity for growth. And then giving them an opportunity to play with others, get up and down the court and see their ability to retain the things they're learning and how deeply they're paying attention to what their teammates do.

With that diversity I think, the coaches have done a great job allowing people to show up in a lot of different ways.

**Q. What will kind of the decision making process look like for you during camp? What are a couple of things specifically that you're looking for as you narrow down this roster?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, I think we start with a couple qualities that are just sort of foundational that I think we want no matter what. That's a group of players who are hungry, competitive, who not only want to win, but want to do it in a way that means if there is a moment to celebrate, whether that's a win or whether that's an improvement, that they want to do that together.

And so I think we're looking at players holistically in the same way that we looked at players holistically as we did in the draft. So for both Coach Johnson and I, the entire experience is part of what we're looking at. How do you show up at breakfast every morning? Are you on time? Are you someone that's engaging your teammates?

And also evaluating how they show up on the court and how they're able to play.

So that collection of characteristics, you know, as we step back, how they gel together, that factor will be important as well.

**Q. And picking up on Georgia, noticed yesterday you were rebounding for her after practice. Can't say I've seen a lot of GMs doing that. What did you get out of that conversation?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Embarrassed. Calling it rebounding was actually very generous. I was vaguely getting it back to her in ridiculous shooting positions. So what I learned is Georgia can make a basket after a bad pass.

**Q. We talked on draft night, how Elena was calling in some of the picks. How much have you interacted with her beyond that, and how do you envision her helping the franchise this season?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, Elena has been a great supporter. You just could not have a better example of somebody that I think embodies what it means to be a Mystic. We're thrilled she was able to join us on draft night.

Couldn't think of a better person to be speaking our next and literally into the phone and into the league as we made our picks.

And I'm honestly really looking forward to learning from Elena, the ways in which she wants to have an impact and influence. I think we're very open to learning and hearing that from her, and I think it's something that will hopefully grow over time. Really grateful for her generosity in that way.

**Q. Kind of on the first question, how do you as a GM balance talent but not get too attached to specific players? There are only 12 spots at the end of the day.**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, I think one of the things that's really important about what we're trying to build is that anybody who comes in to the gym, into the Mystics organization, whether that's staff or players, and for however long you might be present or a part of the organization. If you are somebody who comes in to training camp and doesn't ultimately make the roster. If you are a player that comes in and makes the roster. If you're someone that comes every single day to practice working the scoreboard. If you're every somebody that comes every single day to practice to help the players work out.

I think it's less important how long you're present to contribute. What's important is that the minute you walk into this space you're part of us. You are among the team while you're there. Ideally when you walk away, whatever the experiences you have is the experience that you have, and so we want to make sure in the minutes you're here and the days and months you're here or years that you're here, that everybody feels like they're getting the same thing, which is being respected, that we have an investment in you, we see you as you somebody capable of developing and learning.

Whatever it is that you're contributing is an inextricable part of our success.

**Q. This being your first training camp, what would a**

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**successful camp be for you? How do you envision that?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, I think camp has a lot of layers to it. The first time that you get your returners in the building, first time you get to introduce any rookies or new players into the franchise.

For us this year it's of course the first time that we're gathering in some ways as a new staff in terms of our office, coaching staff. We made some additions to our athlete care and performance team. So in some ways it is by virtue it being the first collective, I think we have to be open to learning.

I think a successful training camp would be not necessarily that we're perfect but that we have clear standards for ourselves and can recognize when we don't meet them and have a chance to improve ourselves in that space of time.

I think for our coaches, success looks like creating enough of an opportunity for us to do real evaluation of players. But a lot of it is culture setting. We're literally in the process of creating an environment having everyone together.

**Q. You mentioned the process. Relatedly, how important is this camp for you implementing your vision from what you eventually want this organization to be?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: I mean, yeah, it's huge. Every minute is huge I think when you're trying to build something. It means that the time you get to the gym. Your ability to touch and speak to everybody who is in it. Your awareness of where you see somebody that's in their groove and getting what they need, and your awareness when you maybe see somebody who's not, right?

That kind of openness and listening is a huge part of recognizing that you're not going to start out perfect. If you're trying to build something that's reflective of everybody in the organization, it's that paying attention that allows that to happen.

So I think success would be that we are a work in progress, but that we're improving every single day. That's what we ask of the players when we're out there, and I think that's what we ask of ourselves as well.

**Q. I just want to ask you mentioned a little bit earlier about some of the veterans working with rookies. Just sort of being around them the last couple weeks, what are some examples that stand out to you of more**

**seasoned players, players who have been here a while being welcoming to some of the younger players?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, I mean, I think what we're seeing a different types of leadership. Different folks on the team. So I think what we try to shoutout when we see it is the sort of obvious leadership that lines up with different folks on our team.

Folks that are gathering the full team around them to give pointers, to provide a pick-me-up in difficult moments, incredibly vocal to the larger group.

I think we've had examples of players who have really gone out of their way to make connectivity to a particular player in a moment, after a play, after a practice, to provide maybe less vocal or less visible commentary or just literal support, and so I think we're trying to be really careful to name that all of those things are leadership.

You can really lead right where you stand. I think we see the amount of effort we're getting in particular from some of our rookies. That effort, work ethic is a version of leadership as well.

**Q. You touched on it a little bit with regards to the good problem you have in having to figure out how to cut down your roster to 12. But how much joy does it give you that you are in that position, that you have vets that still want to show you they want to stay? And even the ones under contract, but then you have rookies who are trying to push the limits of giving you reason to keep them. How much joy does that give you?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, I mean, you said it. It's been really energizing and gratifying to see what you -- you can't know what happens until it actually happens. Watching our vets come in and be as open as they are and energized I think by some of the new players and their push has been wonderful.

I think it takes two, right? So if we had a group of rookies that wasn't the sponges that they are or didn't have the respect for our returners that I think we saw them expresses to an individual in their introductory press conference, then there wouldn't be that much room for that exchange.

And so it's both a combination of some of our vets stepping in as leaders and our rookies being open to that. You know, you can try to plan for that kind of dynamic and that organic chemistry. At the end of the day, it's not something that you can force.



So to watch it grow organically, our job is now to figure out how do we capture that, put it in a bottle, and sustain that over time.

**Q. Do you feel that with your experience with the Players Association and seeing different kinds of mixes come together in your first season and Syd's first season, do you feel that gives you a bit of hope, knowing that you already have that one thing checked off? That you don't have to force the chemistry; it's happening on its own?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, I think with chemistry it is as I guess the word implies, it's tricky. It's incredibly delicate, and when you do see it or when you do have it, one, I think you have to name it as something that you value and make sure that folks know they are seen and that they are valued for the contributions they're making that make that possible.

But I also think we are in this moment we're only looking forward, right? We haven't had a loss. We haven't had to face any adversity as a group yet. That's going to happen. I think when that happens will be one of the tests of how strong that chemistry is.

But I think the goal is probably to translate chemistry to culture so that it becomes something that you can name and rely on, as opposed to just something that organically appears or, poof, could be gone.

As we see it, again, it's our job to help cultivate it and remind folks of it in more difficult moments.

**Q. This may be a better question for Coach, but I want your perspective as well. The intentionality with the roster, but how intentional did you also feel of building the coaching staff out with Coach Syd and making sure you were putting the right pieces around him to be able to thrive?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, I think Coach Johnson is really -- just want to give him a ton of credit for how he imagines a coaching staff can work. It's a priority for him to build a staff that is really smart, that has autonomy, that can lead independently of him, and to create an environment that allows for that group to be incredibly collaborative.

And so his ability to recognize I think strength in people and to give them room to show up in that strength without sort of his needing to own that or to sort of be overbearing in that sense, I think his leadership is in the space that he gives for other people.

So our staff as assembled are folks that share this quality

and desire to be a part of something, but without a need to necessarily own something. So I think the group that we've got are fully bought in to those qualities, and I give all the credit to Coach Johnson as naming that as one of the important pieces for him and creating an environment that has invited folks in to do that.

**Q. I was wondering, what do you looking for this roster to show this season? Obviously losing a lot of veterans. What are you looking to build on this year?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: I want to build in all ways. I think on the court we want to see the folks out there adapt to the style that I think Coach Johnson wants to put out there, which is to play fast, play hard, to really I think exhibit the skillsets that allow us to have five creators on the floor, folks that read the game.

I don't think you're going to see a ton of rigidity in terms of players driving everything. I think you need to get out and let the creators learn to create, and when that doesn't work, to be able to have a fallback that in some ways is led by the talents of the folks we have.

I think on court we hope to build and watch our players thrive in that kind of system, which will undoubtedly take time. I think off the court we want to continue to build and emphasize some of the cultural pieces I think I've named.

We think we have also assembled a fantastic staff to support players, both in terms of their physical health and in terms of their mental health. Those are priorities for us.

So we want to continue to build out this framework and make sure that players feel like when they walk in the building they're met with an equally elite talent for their support as they are athletes.

**Q. (Indiscernible) What's your idea now?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, I hope that we -- when you come to watch us that you see a real dynamism and competitiveness on the court. I think we're going to be fun to watch in that way. I think you'll see us improve and be hungry to improve every day.

So this sense of development is at our core. My hope is that that will be there forever and all time. There is not an apex to that where we'll be satisfied and stop. It's the continued ability to sort of perpetually contend and bring that energy all the time that's important.

The other quality is that we have in our players, not just great athletes, but great people. They have expressed an awareness of wanting to have an impact on the team, on



this community, on the game. And wider than that, I think they have a consciousness that they're caring and a part of a really amazing moment for women's sports in general, but also for women's basketball.

We want to caretake that. We want to be a part of building that next for our team, but also for the sport. So we have high ambitions, and I think that we want our footprint, handprint, impact to be wide and to stretch as far as the personalities and the communities that our players already represent, which quite frankly already touches the globe.

**Q. Question about Zaay Green. I imagine a lot of your scouting of her dealt with Alabama last year, but I wanted to know what if any you saw from her time at Arkansas, Pine Bluff? And also what it's like evaluating someone not going against power 4 players and going against power 4 players?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, no, great question. Our look at Zaay was full, so we saw that transition. I think when you look at -- and in some ways, like her transition was unique. The fact of her transitioning from team to team, system to system, school to school, conference to conference isn't. That's now a part of our game as you see players jump in the portal.

Couple example, Georgia obviously; KiKi as well going from Stanford to UNC. And so I think what's on you is not just how do they do against the competition but their capacity to change, shift, and meet that transition.

I can't imagine what that's like as a 19, 20 year old to be making those choices and adapting at that level with as much pressure as there is to compete. I say that because as I look back at myself it was all I could do just to be in one place and concentrate to try to perform there.

So I have just a lot of respect for players who have been through that. So I think what we have really is a view of how they manage adversity and change. That's probably as important to us as watching how she shows up against a different defender.

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