

Washington Mystics Media Conference

Wednesday, September 10, 2025

Washington, DC, USA

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Media Conference



Q. We always get to this point and ask you guys to think big picture even though you just got off the court last night. When you look back at the entirety of the season, finally kind of getting healthy and taking a while to get your feet wet at the beginning, how do you when you look back and think about the evolution of this season, for you personally, the growth, the journey, all that stuff, how do you look back and evaluate your career?

SHAKIRA AUSTIN: I'm just proud of how resilient I was. Just how resilient I've been with different tests. I think I was finally able to kind of necessarily -- I guess I would say put the injuries aside, aside from concussions. But I was finally able to just focus on just being out there, in a sense, and I think I just continued to pour into myself no matter what the battle was, that God was still trying to teach me.

I think I've just learned a lot when it comes to leadership, when it comes to just showing up every day and kind of what that is supposed to look like.

Q. You were here before with the old regime and now new coaches, new teammates, new everything, as you look at the kind of transition from the team, how do you think you guys kind of stepped into this first year of this kind of new game plan, new path as far as both coaching, new teammates, how everybody was able to come together, the challenges of all of that? This has been the first step of that new journey for the organization, from someone who has been there both before and after, how did that come together?

SHAKIRA AUSTIN: I think they just created a pressure-free environment. I think it started with Coach and the front office, with kind of just giving everybody grace and allowing people to kind of, in a sense, do what they felt was natural. They didn't have much of guidelines or structure when it comes to, oh, you can't do that or this isn't what we want to see.

It was more so playing together, figuring out how to just get

better every day and just playing with joy. That was just something they just continued to repeat, that wins and losses don't matter, that we are thinking bigger picture, and we just want to kind of release the pressure of say, for instance, trying to make the Playoffs or trying to get a win because having such a young core and having rookies come in and have to play such a big role, having me coming off trying to play my first healthy season, it just allowed us to kind of just focus on getting better every day, whether that was in practice or just in a game, and figuring that out.

Q. I've got to ask about the future. Obviously restricted free agent coming up. I don't know if you guys have had much conversations about it yet. Jamila said a couple weeks ago she sees you as part of this core moving forward. I don't know if you guys have started those contract talks. How do you feel about it? Are you excited to come back here? Are you looking forward to it? Also, in this weird off-season where so many people are unrestricted free agents and the way the CBA is, how do you see your off-season role? Do you see yourself as someone who comes out and is kind of recruiting toward the organization, or do you just kind of sit back and let everything fall into the way it falls out? How do you look at this particular off-season in that stance?

SHAKIRA AUSTIN: For me, my off-season just starts with creating my plan of getting better. I haven't talked about what next year could look like yet. Obviously there's been a few discussions of you're a part of this franchise, and I'm still here at the end of the season, so clearly I'm valued in a sense.

But I think my approach is just, like I said, to get better, continue to figure out playing with Unrivaled, and just continue to figure out how I can get better every single day. Yeah, I don't really know what the future looks like. I love D.C.; this is my home. This is where I got drafted. This is where the first team believed in me.

I'm excited. I know that their future is going to be amazing. They have great rookies. They have a great team in general. Just full of life and full of joy. But I just have no

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idea what the next couple months will look like. If we make that decision faster or sooner, I'm definitely going to be recruiting as much as I can. I want to play with great people. I want to play with people that have also won, and just helping to put us in the best situation possible.

I think everything will just kind of be shown in how the front office handles things, and I think regardless, like, I'm just super blessed to be here, and I appreciate it so much what the Mystics have done, and I want to win with them. We'll see what the future holds.

I will be Unrivaled year two and possibly another job after. I definitely want to play 5-on-5, I think, before the season starts. I think Unrivaled is great in a sense, but for me, I just want to maximize this off-season as much as possible so that I can come in feeling just sharp.

Q. You mentioned you want to have that growth, and now you being healthy, since that was your whole focus of the season, what's the next step in your growth, whether it's on court skills or whether it's internal growth? What are you looking to get out of this off-season?

SHAKIRA AUSTIN: Just continue with my plan of training. Last year I think that was my first off-season of being healthy and figuring out what it looks like to build my strength, build my conditioning. I really had a dedicated routine. I really didn't get to see my family much, even though I was in the States. I just wanted to be consistent, and I really wanted this year to be really special.

I think now that I've seen, I just was going over some of my strength results from testing and just things like that, and it's continuing to head in an upwards direction. I've showed things that are better than year one, came in as a rookie.

Just knowing that my body is prepared and trusting that I'll be healthy, now I can focus on just getting better in all senses. I wasn't proud, honestly, of my season this year. I just have super high expectations for myself. It was really hard to get a flow and just be aggressive and efficient and figuring out how to also get my teammates involved.

Obviously we have PGs, but just figuring out how I can make everybody else better. There's just so much I want to work on and just get better at so that I can continue to be dependable in a sense. I think this year I showed that from a health standpoint.

But I need to be able to show it offensively and defensively, and I think personally, like, my defense needs to get a lot sharper. I think I'm great with weak side and possibly

going for the shot-blocking plays, but I think my one-on-one defense needs to get better so that I can be the anchor.

I just want that to be a standard that I'm held to. I'm hoping that with our talks in the next couple weeks that we can kind of figure out what that'll look like. I think this year I could have been held to a higher standard. I think I could have been pushed a little bit more, and I just want my off-season to kind of align with that, with just getting the most out of every day, focusing on my nutrition, focusing on my sleep and my recovery, and just building my confidence up to be the player I know I can be.

Q. It almost felt like this year you were beginning to transition a little bit into being a veteran, especially with this roster being so young. I know that's not something you necessarily want to choose to be, a veteran, but what does being a vet look like to you or what do you want to be a veteran for other players, if that makes sense?

SHAKIRA AUSTIN: Yeah. I could say I know the vet that I would want maybe isn't what everyone else wants. I want a vet who's going to hold me accountable. I want a vet who is going to show what it looks like every day. I want a vet that isn't afraid to get on my ass, say the things that need to be said, speak up, but also show it on the court.

I think a vet is supposed to bring energy. Personally, I think I like just someone with fire and passion. But I don't think everybody responds the same, and I think that's what I've learned with leadership is that you have to figure out how to reach everybody on the level that they're at, and that could be with spending more one-on-one time and talking to someone on the sidelines. It could be talking at breakfast, just having a less pressured environment. You could also have a player like me who needs to be pushed in a certain way, who needs to know that you care and that you have passion and shows that energy on the court.

I think this year just encompassed everything of there's different leaders, there's different roles, and the oldest player doesn't make the best leader, and the best player doesn't make the best leader. It's just about figuring out what you can bring that the team needs and just being consistent in that.

Q. You said one word to sum up your season would be transitioning like we talked about today. You talked about room for improvement. What's a pride point for you, where you did have the transition in a positive role in your life and in your season, whether it's personally or on the court, that you can take pride in this year?

SHAKIRA AUSTIN: That's tough. I look at things so negatively. (Laughter).

I mean, I think I'll just go back to just being resilient. The season didn't start the way I wanted it to. I came in with some tendonitis, leading on I think from the different type of game Unrivaled brought, and that just was not how I wanted to start it. I wanted to really make an impact this season. I really wanted to show the rookies what it looks like to go out there and play on both ends.

First came back I got ejected. Just looking back at everything that I've been through that you guys have seen but just things that I've dealt with personally on my own, like I said, I've been tested in ways I didn't think I was prepared for. But I showed up every time. I showed up for my team, and I just continued to figure out how to look at things from a better perspective.

There's so much that I could have got lost and kind of drowned in in a sense, but I just continued to lean on the people that I know will guide me in the right direction. I don't have people in my circle that are biased towards what I think I should be. I have people that will tell me the reality.

Every time, we kind of just show appreciation that I'm still looking at it in a positive way. I just appreciate myself for that. I don't think if this was any other year, I would have handled things the same. But I think I just really wanted to be on the floor so much this year, and I wanted to just show that I'm healthy, show that I can produce, show that I'm building towards who I want to be, and as much as my talk is very high, a lot of people don't understand it.

I just know where I'm trying to go, and I just want to continue to work and have that belief in myself.

I'm proud of that. I'm proud of making it through a season. I finished the last game on the court where it was my first major injury. It was a really big full-circle moment for me. I'm just excited for next season. I think it's going to be way bigger than this one.

I'm excited for D.C. I think we're heading in the right direction. Just ready to get to work.

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