

# Washington Mystics Media Conference

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## Kiki Iriafen

Media Conference



**Q. I know you guys just got done last night, so it's kind of weird to do this introspection, but just as you look back at your initial season, and we've talked about the milestones and things like that, but kind of when you look back at it all as a big picture, what stands out to you about your growth, just learning the league, just the kind of journey of year one?**

KIKI IRIAFEN: Yeah, it's definitely been a journey to get here. I think the first thing is I feel super grateful and blessed. I think everything happens the way it's supposed to happen and at the time it's supposed to happen, but I know I mentioned before I was really unsure about playing at this level or how I would do in the W. To be able to come in my rookie year and have such an impact is something that I feel super grateful for, and I truly believe it's because of the people that I've been around every single day. They pour into me, my coaches, my teammates, the front office. They were like, just go out there, have fun, play basketball. They gave me the confidence in moments when I didn't feel like I was very confident. I think being here at the Mystics has helped me see myself as, okay, I'm capable of playing at this level.

It's been fun, the highs, the lows. I've had so much fun doing it with my sisters, and I'm sad we don't play, like, tomorrow. But I wouldn't trade my rookie year for anything. I think I've learned so much. I've grown as a player, but more importantly, I've grown as a person, and I'm excited for the off-season to just get ready, get better for next season.

**Q. Speaking of the off-season, you're not a rookie anymore and this is about to be a really strange off-season for the entire league as the CBA gets worked out and so many people unrestricted. As someone who's going to be here, who's a cornerstone of this franchise moving forward, do you talk to teammates and people on the way out about the off-season? Do you start recruiting for the franchise? How do you kind of approach this off-season now as one of the few pieces that we know will be back?**

KIKI IRIAFEN: Yeah, I definitely haven't thought too much about what that looks like for me, but obviously we want to build something. We want to have longevity. We want to become a championship team, and we know that takes time. So definitely whatever I can do in helping with that, I want to make sure I'm doing that, but most importantly, filling myself up first and my body. I haven't had a rest since July last year. I've been going straight. Just really taking care of my body.

I feel like that's the biggest thing I've learned being a pro is the vets, they don't play about their rehab, their recovery, so I think I can do a better job of that. But this off-season, just honestly from a holistic standpoint, my mind, my body, my spirit, I kind of want to make sure I'm filling all those cups up so that I can be ready to go next season.

**Q. Speaking also about yourself for the off-season, got to get some rest and recovery because it has been a long season going back to that last college year, but coming fresh off of this season now, a couple things that are in your mind that you want to work on? Everybody always kind of picks something, yeah, you want to come back better. Is there something in the forefront of your mind that, hey, I want to work on X this off-season kind of a thing?**

KIKI IRIAFEN: I think I'm excited because I feel like there's so many things to work on, and I'm not someone that thinks I have it all together.

But I will say, when we played Atlanta the last time at Atlanta, guarding those post players, and they were popping, rolling, shooting the three, you couldn't stop. I'm like, I need to come back next season and be able to shoot the three at a high clip. I would say that's something. I always say I'm going to be a three-point shooter, but no, that's happening next season. I want teams, the same way I have to guard their post players at the three-point line in the paint, I want teams to have to do the same thing with us as well. That's probably a main focus is really being comfortable shooting the three and making a high impact from the three-point line.

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**Q. Kiki, do you have any official off-season plans on if you're going to be playing or doing anything?**

KIKI IRIAFEN: TBD. Still figuring out everything. Definitely will be playing but not super sure on all of that yet. But yeah.

**Q. When you think of the year in totality, I know the season didn't end the way that the team collectively wanted it to, but where does that factor in in your impression of the year as a whole?**

KIKI IRIAFEN: I couldn't be prouder of this group and what we've done. I think we were picked 13 in the league, to finish 13th and we didn't. I think we've already exceeded expectations in that regard.

Obviously we have high expectations for ourselves so we would love to be in the Playoffs and at least have a shot at that, but I think we exceeded everybody's expectations, and we've grown so much. We've learned so much. We're such a young group.

To be able to compete night in, night out, like for the most part our losses were very close games, so I think that's just the youth. We have to learn to be a little bit more experienced, but I think we have a lot to be proud of, and we did a lot this season that I don't think we even expected.

It was a fun year with great people, my sisters. I hope that we can all be back together again next season, but I think there's so much to be grateful for and so much to be proud of.

**Q. You mentioned doing things that you guys didn't even think you could do. Is there something specifically to you that impressed yourself, the ability that you have?**

KIKI IRIAFEN: I think when we played the Aces the first time, we lost that game, but it was -- we lost by three, at a buzzer beater three or something like that, but we had key players, like Slim was out that day, Kira wasn't back with us, we had a bunch of injuries, so it was a bunch of rookies and Stef, and we were able to play the Aces, who have four Olympians and have won championships and to be close in that game, I feel like that was the moment -- Sonia and I have talked about it. That was the moment that we were like, okay, we can play at this level. It's not easy, but we're capable of doing it.

So I think that moment for us as a team. And we beat Atlanta our first game, we were like, okay, you know what, it's going to be tough, but we're very, very capable, and I

feel like that's when the belief and the confidence in each other really started to take form.

**Q. Kind of piggybacking off that, when you think about lessons from this year, obviously you've had to deal with some challenging matchups down in the post but you continued to take it in stride. What is one of the most valuable things that you've learned about yourself throughout your rookie season?**

KIKI IRIAFEN: I think this season was all about being resilient. There is some matchups that maybe aren't very favorable for yourself or a game that you didn't really like how you performed, but you play in 48 hours, so I think just pushing through adversity, pushing through -- we had a lot of changes on our team, and having to still show up every single day, I think that was the real, you're professional, this is the job; everybody does this at their job. Really just staying professional through everything, but truly, I think the resilient part is, like -- I think in college it's easy to be hung up on a loss or hung up on a bad performance and let it derail you and you're sad all day, but here it's kind of like you have to move on, move to the next game.

It's the best league in the world, so some nights it doesn't matter if the team is, quote-unquote, supposed to be a bad team. Everybody is great at this level. So just being resilient, pushing through, and understanding that it's a marathon, not a sprint, I think is the biggest lesson that I've learned.

**Q. In that marathon, obviously the amount of personal accolades and accomplishments that you've had this season, most people find that happening for a rookie if they're the only rookie on the team, but now you and Sonia do that together as a tandem. What does that say about not only your game but Sonia's, and organizationally to be able to have two rookies excel at such a high level in one year?**

KIKI IRIAFEN: Again, I think it's the support that we get from our coaches, our teammates, front office, staff, everybody. The women that have been on the team before, they were not like, you're rookies, stay in this -- they were like, go play basketball, have fun, do what you're good at.

So I think just the support has allowed Sonia and I -- again, early on we were very nervous, but everyone was like, no, you're capable of doing this. And then having each other, Sonia has been great for me, and when I'm feeling a certain type of way she's got my back and vice versa, I have her back. It's been great to be on this journey together, and again, I just think we're in the right environment, and I feel like the environment that



year-round really has an impact on how you can flourish and succeed.

**Q. As you go home for this off-season, first thing you're going to do when you touch down back home?**

KIKI IRIAFEN: I'm going to eat my mom's food.

**Q. Is there a particular dish?**

KIKI IRIAFEN: I love Jollof fries. Just anything my mom cooks I'll eat, but Nigerian food for sure.

**Q. When day one when you were drafted until coming into now, you mentioned in the off-season that you will be playing basketball. Has Unrivaled reached out to you just yet?**

KIKI IRIAFEN: They have, yeah.

**Q. So we can expect you in an Unrivaled jersey possibly?**

KIKI IRIAFEN: I don't know, but possibility.

**Q. Just as everybody else has mentioned, obviously you were a standout in college, but we've really seen you step into your own in this league. You've kind of put the league on notice. When do you think -- obviously there was a lot of games, but when do you think it finally started to click for you that you're really about to put the league on notice?**

KIKI IRIAFEN: I think it was the approach that I had coming in. My senior year was tough, and I think in terms of how I felt mentally and my confidence, it was honestly on the floor.

I looked at being with the Mystics as a new opportunity. I didn't know in what capacity that would be like, but I knew I wanted to come in training camp and really work my ass off and force my coaches to be like, okay, we have to use Kiki. I didn't know it was going to be in this way.

But I think the mindset that I had coming into training camp and kind of just saying that I have an opportunity to define how I want to show up in the WNBA, so rather than having someone define that for me, I want to do that myself.

I think from that moment on and then my coaches putting me on the matchups, like I had BG my first game and having me guard the best players in the world, I was like, okay, they see something in me, and from there it kind of kick-started something within me.

But I would say, again, when we played the Aces, it was like, okay, I'm capable of playing here. There's still a lot of work to do, but you're meant to be here.

**Q. You touched on a little bit about resilience, but I think you had 20 total losses in your college career, around there, and then 28 this year. What did the journey look like for you in terms of giving yourself grace in losses and trying to have fun playing basketball and avoiding burnout when you are losing a lot of games?**

KIKI IRIAFEN: It's tough. I think that's the biggest thing coming in as a rookie, especially coming from programs where you win a lot. But I think it's just a shift in perspective. We're kind of going through these growing pains now so that in the next two, three years we can be holding up that trophy.

I think just shifting the perspective, and our losses, I looked at it as something like, what could I learn from this, what can I learn tonight rather than we sucked and they scored more than us. I think it was just a shift in perspective, and then again, going through it with all these other rookies who have played at the highest level, they've won a lot of games so we're kind of going through it together. I'd say our vets, as well, they really imprinted that this is the best league in the world; anyone can win or lose on any given night and that you have to have the memory of a goldfish because you play again the next 48 hours.

I think it took time. The first couple ones it was like, ouch. But it took time, and I think it's just understanding that we're in the process of building something, and it takes time.

**Q. You talked about what you want to develop on the court like three-point shooting. I'm curious in terms of leadership, I'm sure there will be a little bit more expected of you next year. What do you think your growth is going to look like in that realm? What do you think you could bring next year?**

KIKI IRIAFEN: Definitely. I would like to say I'm an emotional player, but I like to use it for good and kind of get my teammates fired up and rallied up, but I think for me, it's not being so reactive to certain things, so just being more consistent, whether -- I think being more like Sonia, whether it's high or low, Sonia is just like this and obviously I'm going to be my own person, but just understanding if I'm going to eventually become a leader of this team, I have to be consistent and kind of lead by example regardless of what's going on.

I think that's another area of growth for me, and it's great



because I don't have to do it alone either.

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