

# Washington Mystics Media Conference

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**Jamila Wideman**

Media Conference



**Q. Thanks for taking the time to do this, first of all. We definitely appreciate it. Just to kind of start a little bit big picture overall as the season wrapped up and you looked back at the whole evolving space of year one and all the tinkering and all the decisions you made, how did you look back and look at this year as year one foundation of what you guys want to do moving forward?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: So a small question to start. Thanks.

Well, first of all, just a thank you to those of you who came out today and gathered in the room, and certainly for anyone who is on the line, just really appreciate your interest and your presence and your coverage of our team this year. We're very grateful to have eyes and ears.

I happen to come from a time in the league where there were fewer of both, so it's really wonderful to walk through a season with a group that is interested and thoughtful and present. So thank you for that.

In terms of the season overall, I'll just say this: You used the phrase "looking back at the season," and I'll just note that it's been a couple days. So we're actually literally in the process of doing that look back and doing that very intentionally with a kind of collaborative spirit that I think marks part of what became the character of our team this year, which means I'm looking back, our coaches are looking back, our incredible care and performance team is looking back, our players are looking back, our mental health professionals are looking back.

All of us have a particular focus and an insight on what we did well this year and on where we can improve.

But I would emphasize that part of, I think, what I would name as a success of our season is that that group that I just mentioned, which we grew in numbers and grew in expertise, both in terms of our coaching staff, our care and performance staff, that those are groups that are incredibly integrated and communicative with one another, and what

that means is that this year I think we were able to deliver an extraordinary level of professionalism and support to our players.

I can say that our players, in response to that, shared out as they were leaving the building that the Mystics are a place that they felt like they improved, that they felt like it was a place that they were cared for, and it felt like it was a place where they grew to become better versions of themselves on the court and off.

So I would name that as one of our successes because I think seeding that foundation of professionalism and seeding a foundation where development isn't just something you do one year but as something that you do as part of the core of your culture were two of the most important things that we set out to do.

**Q. As you look forward to try and envision how you're going to put together this roster in 2026, and this isn't just you guys, this is everybody in the league, how do you approach that? We were talking about before, how do you approach that with the CBA having not been decided upon yet and so not knowing all the rules and details that you'll be working with until that's written in paper, but it's not like you just sit around until that happens. I'm curious, how is the process or how do you approach trying to think about year two without knowing how you can construct the roster, especially with so many free agents?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, it's a great question. Really, I think what you're saying is that there's a tremendous amount of uncertainty around some of the details that will connect up to what our next looks like. And maybe in a way, that's a blessing, because the truth is even if we had those details, there would be a tremendous amount of uncertainty in terms of what's next.

So I think our focus is right where it would otherwise be, which is what are the things that we can be certain about, what are the things that we can control.

I think there's two things I'd mention there. What we know is that in this off-season we'll be looking to get better, and

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there are a number of ways that we can do that. Some of those are connected to the draft. Some of those are connected to free agency. Some of those are actually connected to diving even deeper to where we spent a lot of the season, which is helping the players who are on our roster now continue to grow and get better and develop.

**Q. As you go into all those facets or look at those facets and looking back at this season, when you look at wanting to get better and wanting to add more talent to the team and all that kind of stuff, what are a few areas of just kind of knowing the rookie core that you have, what kind of skill sets or complementary pieces as you went through the season did you say, okay, Syd mentioned more shooting? Any of those details of what you would like to add to the team as far as whoever it may be, but skill set-wise?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, I think you heard Syd talk about a few skill sets that attach to a style of play that I think we were really clear about at the beginning of the season that we wanted to play, which was a very dynamic and fast game. I think we continued to lean into that as a style of play, and I know Syd mentioned shooting, being able to get downhill, just an overall pace.

I guess I would say I think you can either see those things as individual skill sets, or you can see each of those capacities as reflecting something that you're able to produce as a team. So getting downhill may be about your ability to break down somebody off the dribble. Getting downhill may actually mean that you are playing with other players who create the kind of spacing on the floor, that give you room to do exactly that.

So one way you might think about being able to attack the basket better is how can we scheme differently or more creatively with the players that we have in a way that creates that space and creates that room; how do we add talent that maybe includes the particular skill that you mentioned, a player who can get downhill.

So I think our work is layered in that sense. I think our work is about continuing to grow the roster that we have. I do think it's about talent, and that's why I think the phrase "time and talent" is an appropriate one, because we will continue to grow. This isn't a finished process.

I think, as I said, we planted some really good seeds this year, and so I think the real question is how do we nurture those seeds.

**Q. We talked to obviously Shakira, we've talked about her before and you said you see her as part of this franchise moving forward. Obviously she'll be a**

**restricted free agent. When we talked to her the other day, she said a lot of complimentary things about the franchise but also said I don't know how this will work out. Have you guys started having those discussions with her, with her representatives, and how do you envision/hope that that could work out as we get to the point, once we get a CBA and you guys can start signing things and all of that kind of stuff?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, I think Kira, like all of our players, we're just in this moment incredibly proud of what she accomplished. I think when you look at her, her just coming off of winning AP Comeback Player of the Year, what that represents for her is a real achievement, what it reflects for our team, and again, our care and performance staff is a real achievement.

I would highlight something I know Kira is very proud of is simply her availability this year. I think she played 36 games in her rookie year, and I think this year she hit 37. So seeing that growth from her was amazing, and what that allowed her to do I think was also displayed, just the versatility of her game.

I think she had single career highs in terms of points, steals, assists, rebounds, free throws made.

But I think overall, she just was able to have a presence on the court that we were all very much hoping to see. So those are the pieces in both her game and where she's at that we hope to continue to grow during this off-season.

**Q. You mentioned how this season has just been a whole process for you guys as you move forward and the overarching plan of where you guys want to be long-term. You've already mentioned some things you guys have done successfully this year and how you guys were able to lay the framework, plant seeds as you just said. Kind of what's that next phase for you guys, if you will? Now that you've laid the seeds, what's next?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, this may be a boring answer, but I think it's more of the same. I think when we look at what we did this year that gave some of our rookies some space to grow and look at what they were able to accomplish, I think that grew out of not only a commitment to development but also a commitment to try things.

I think Coach Johnson and his staff did a wonderful job this year of being willing to put out different lineups, different schemes, both offensively and defensively, and in some ways, those were an attempt for us to get a look at what we've got.



I think what we discovered was a quality of resiliency in our team that I think is remarkable. We've got to figure out how to put our hands around that and continue to grow that.

I also think when we talk about our rookies, who I will separate in name, there is, in fact, a Soni and a Kiki, and yes, they have played wonderfully together, but they're different players and they're different personalities, and we had a team where there was room for that to be true.

At the same time, it was fun to think of them a duo. I think part of what allowed their growth and part of what allowed their achievement that shows up in the statistics and in some of the franchise records, the fact that they were both All-Stars, I think a lot of that is remarkable, but I think for us, one of the best things that we saw out of both of those players and our team is that as good as they are individually, they're players who can make extraordinary contributions and there's still room for the floor for other people, and there's still room for the floor for other extraordinary talent.

I can't say enough how important that is when you're trying to build around a young core. It begs the question, well, what is there room for? I think with those two players in particular, we see them in different scenarios.

You know, pre-All-Star, we watched Soni being able to play alongside of Slim. Post-All-Star we saw Soni being able to play without a Slim and we see somebody like Sug stepping up to take a different leadership role. Again, coming into the season playing a ton more minutes but also career best in field goal percentage, career best in three-point percentage. We saw a kind of adaptability.

So those qualities of resiliency and adaptability, maybe not named all the time as the kinds of things that are a takeaway, but I think for us, they very much are, and those represent the pieces that we'll build on from here.

**Q. I love it when you go right to my next question with the topics that you're bringing up, but you mentioned that adaptability, resiliency. Those weren't necessarily things you guys set out at the beginning of the year, at least in name to us, of what you wanted this team to represent. You've talked about how culture is a dynamic thing for this team, leaving the door open for this stuff to come in. How does that work in balance with you guys' goals and what you have set forth for the foundation and also bringing players in of Sonia and Kiki that reflect all those things that you just said and other players that may have other aspirational goals but you still see being a part of this team?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, it's all additive. When you think about building anything, you have to start with some sort of a foundation, and then the fun part is when you get to add those next layers that you're referring to.

I think a great example of one of the ways that we tried to do that this year was how we brought in some veteran leadership in Alysha Clark, Stef Dolson certainly giving us that from the beginning of the season and throughout, and that was an ingredient that we felt like was really important for our young core to continue to develop, and that's not even speaking to obviously the things that AC brings to us, her talents on the court, but her presence as somebody with experience, her presence as somebody with amazing professional habits, to give our young core the opportunity to learn from her.

She's not us; she is her own person. She has her own experience. But we trust that leadership.

So when she comes in the room, what she's adding, we may call it, quote-unquote, veteran leadership, but it's also unique, and I think your environment has to leave room for that kind of a player to come in and give what is very unique to them.

**Q. Michael at you guys' opening press conference, talked about how the Mystics, Wizards, you guys were going to be integrated in your approach and they began their build process far earlier than you guys have. With the success that you guys have now in having two rookie All-Stars, do you feel like now you guys can chart your own path a little bit and kind of also be leaders in a way that maybe the Wizards were leaders to you guys earlier in the season?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, I think that that collaboration and integration is -- certainly marks our team from the beginning, and I think what makes Monumental a dynamic place to be is that we can precisely leverage experience, we can leverage wisdoms.

But I think from the beginning, we've always been aware that we have different teams. We have different environments. So I think those two things coexist.

I think there is an ability to lean into one another and still maintain the distinct identities and challenges that we have. So I see that kind of integration just continuing to reap dividends for both teams and for the Go-Go as well.

**Q. Have you thought about Kiki and Sonia from the standpoint of how Georgia missed a whole season and now next season she can finally come back and mix in with them? How do you feel like Georgia can sort of**



**chart her own path forward after having those two have so much success early on?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, I think what's always true is when you're on the inside of a team, you're aware of a lot that happens that doesn't necessarily reach the court or become visible in a game or in a practice. So what I would say is Georgia is already very far down the process of carving an independence for herself, both in terms of her role on the team and in terms of her having her own unique personality.

I think you got glimpses of that probably through some of our social media, some of the interviews that she has been able to give, but Georgia had a big role on our team this year. She is mature beyond her years. I think she was committed from the beginning to making this year something that meant something to her career.

So as much as she and certainly we expected some of her growth to happen on the court as a rookie, she made sure that that growth happened off of the court, so she's at every single practice. She's at every single film session. She's on every trip that we took this year. She's behind the bench and in the huddle in every single game. She's in the locker room before. She's in the locker room after. She's training right alongside Kiki, Soni, everybody else on the team.

In doing that, her sense of wisdom, her sense of competitiveness came shining through. So I see her really next year as a chance to continue that. It's just that you guys will get the benefit of seeing, I think, a lot more of it.

**Q. Did anything about this season kind of catch you by surprise, by any chance?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: I think the speed. I think the pace of the season. Anytime you're walking through something the first time, it's like when you take a walk in the woods and you go one direction and it seems like it takes like 100 years and then you turn around and everything becomes a little bit more familiar and you wonder, you're like, wait a minute, I walked 500 yards away. The season was this crazy mix of that first time just not knowing and then just an extraordinary speed.

I think post-All-Star just felt like an absolute avalanche. You think you're halfway through the season; the reality is it gets a lot quicker after that.

I think just that pace and learning that pace and seeing what that looks like and feels like for our players and staff is something that we'll take very much as a lesson into next year.

**Q. What did you learn from this season navigating your role that you can put forth for next season?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, I think what we learned is that what you start with and the goals that you begin with are both aspirational, but they also sort of define the path that you're walking from the beginning. So I think it's really important from the outset of the season just to know what your pillars are that you're going to touch and return to because that's what you end up doing.

There's a lot of unexpected that happens, and so as much as you can build and establish, that you can put out there that folks can reach back to and remember and that you can consistently pull back into the day is something that proved very important this year and I think will be going forward as well.

**Q. You talked about more of the same next year. Just from a results standpoint, obviously there are a lot of unknowns to fill, so not in the sense of asking you to predict anything, but do you feel like making the Playoffs next year is a reasonable goal?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, I think one of our goals this year was to set out metrics that were things that we understood would create habits, and habits that you return to, whether you're winning games or you're not winning games.

I think something that AC said recently when asked is really important to hold on to, which is the things that we learn to do now, the things we become disciplined at now, will become more and more important as we win more and more games, as we find ourselves in new situations that we didn't hit this year.

Whether that includes the Playoffs or not, I think the important thing for us is to remember that we are building for something even bigger than that. I think we are building with an aspiration to create a culture of competitiveness that lets us have the Playoffs in our sight year in and year out.

So I think we're one year into building that foundation, and we look forward to continuing to build next year.

**Q. In whatever specifics you can provide at this point, how do you want the off-season to go in terms of that player development piece that you talked about? How do you see that going for the players who are in market or what do you think your team can bring in that area that's maybe a little bit unique?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, I mean, I think one of the things that was really important to us this year was to establish the professional habits in our players and to do that in all ways. We asked our players, whether it was in the training room, in the weight room, whether it was with respect to their mental preparedness, certainly their skill development on the court, to not only do those things in the moment but to begin to build their tool kit so that when we reach this out-of-season moment, they would have the opportunity to continue to build.

We certainly hope to see many of our players playing some competitive basketball, and I think they all walked out of here with performance plans in hand, and we know that our staff will continue to be in touch throughout the off-season and continue to touch and help along the way.

**Q. You obviously hit on picking Sonia and Kiki in the draft, even though you only came in in the middle of the off-season, right? So looking back on your process for scouting, what do you want to replicate about that process that got you Sonia and Kiki, and what about your process might change now that you have the benefit of a whole off-season to prepare and scout?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, I guess what I would emphasize about the process is that it involved a lot of really smart and thoughtful and experienced people. It was very much leveraging, I think, an organizational capacity in terms of the insights that we had from a scouting perspective, from a data and analytics perspective, just from a basketball IQ perspective, in terms of thinking about how do parts go together.

That draft represented a lot of work from a lot of people, and so that group, I look forward to reconvening and taking a deep dive and learning what the talent is that's out there for next year.

**Q. How are you kind of looking back at those trades you made at the deadline? Obviously a tough finish to the season, JC didn't get a lot of court time, but you've got that extra first-round draft pick. And kind of related, how you look at the 2026 draft right now, how valuable it is to you to have the extra picks that you do?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, I think as I said before, we look at the off-season as having a number of different tools for us to continue to get better, and I think the draft is one of those.

As I look back at the trades that we did, I think we accomplished what we wanted to. I think we earned an

ability that allows us to look and continue to get stronger for our future. As I said at the time, I think we knew that there was an opportunity out there for Slim that would allow her to compete now, and I think we brought in a great player in JC, and we know she'll get healthy and get back out there soon.

**Q. Obviously she was hurt, didn't get to play a whole ton, but she's still on a rookie deal. We talked so much about all the other rookies, but how do you envision her? Do you put her in kind of the same group as them, seeing her as a potential foundation of this group moving forward, or is it kind of we'll see, we've got some flexibility with her so we'll see how it works out? How do you envision her with the other young folks that you have on this team knowing that you control her contract moving forward?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, I think we think all the things we thought about JC the day she walked in the door, which is that she's a young talent with a lot of potential, really, really tremendous work ethic, I think a good shooter, somebody that plays with pace. She is, as are we, disappointed that we all didn't get to see more of that in a game situation this year, but I think we saw a little bit, and I think we also saw how she responded to adversity, which you never want to see. You never want a lesson to come or a learning to come from what she's faced in terms of the injury that she suffered.

But it happened, and what we've seen is somebody who's attacked their recovery and also somebody that was willing to stay present with our team. She was very much coming in and hoping to play, and immediately when she got to the sideline began looking for ways to contribute.

So when you talk about culture and you talk about wanting to build, you can't overstate how important some of those pieces are, and so we were thrilled to see that from her.

**Q. Is there anything that you didn't see? The expansion draft is coming up and we have an idea of what it would be. We don't know exactly what it's going to be. Do you feel like you were able to get a fair evaluation of all of your players, JC only having played two games for you guys, to be informed?**

JAMILA WIDEMAN: Yeah, I think the expansion draft is obviously, as you just said, one of those pieces that adds up to some of the uncertainty of the off-season. I'll just say I think without knowing more about what that's going to look like, I am just not in a position to frame with any specificity how we would approach that, what our strategy would look like. Right now it's a wait-and-see for me and unfortunately therefore for you.



