

Washington Mystics Media Conference

Monday, April 13, 2026
Washington, DC, USA

Coach Sydney Johnson

Media Conference



Q. Can you talk us through the big-picture strategy? Obviously you guys had a lot of picks but what were you looking -- overall what were your non-negotiables? How did you do that without (inaudible)?

SYDNEY JOHNSON: Maybe go in reverse order. Michael Winger and John Thompson, III, our STIR team, you know, coaches, like everybody, it takes a village. You know what I mean? I think all those phenomenal people putting in a ton of work. STIR being our analytic folks, that's Wizards and Mystics.

It's been pretty cool to see. You never get tired of watching the collaborative effort. Like, I don't. And so that's kind of how we have gotten to this point and got through the week. We'll continue on.

And overall strategy, like, you know, look, I'm always going to be honest and real, is, like, we're not the Aces, but we've got some good players, some good, young players, and we're trying to add to that core.

The word that keeps coming to mind is "ascending." We're growing, and we're learning. And so the strategy was to identify really good players who kind of fit that mold of good, young, hungry.

We're also mindful of what we can do in free agency. Super thrilled to have Michaela with us. So you know, we don't want just a bunch of teenagers. Just as it relates to the draft, just who can add to this and be super professional, hungry and ready to grow and learn and get better.

Q. You mentioned Mick (phonetic). What made you think that she was the right fit for the youth you drafted today? And did you talk her at all of the UCLA picks, how did she feel about that?

SYDNEY JOHNSON: No, can't give any of that stuff away. Sworn to secrecy until the moment. But I've lived it. I coached her in Chicago when I was an assistant coach.

She's off the charts, it's ridiculous how good she is on and off the court -- her readiness, her toughness, her skill. She's a giver. So I think the city's going to love her. I know our team is going to love her. I'm really happy and looking forward to coaching here in D.C.

Q. With Betts at 4, when you added her to the roster, how do you feel she will bolster the interior play of your team this year?

SYDNEY JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean, that's what she does, right? You've got to have some kind of downhill presence just to play good basketball. You've got to get to the rim. So sometimes it's a guard who is driving and is relentless. And we might have one of those in Cotie, but Lauren is one that you can do it back to the basket.

So in addition to the tremendous front court that we have, you kind of feel like when Kiki needs a break and Kira needs a break, you know, I think Lauren for the most part will be backing up Kira. But when Kira comes out and you feel like, man, I don't know if you have a drop-off there, because Lauren is so good -- and then at the other end as well, in terms of rim protector.

But I think just the ability to not have a drop-off from the comeback player of the year and the level that Kira sets to then come with Lauren, I think it's a pretty healthy combination.

Q. Just with Cotie, how did her moving to the perimeter more this past season at Ole Miss help in terms of having that versatility in her skill set from Ohio State to Ole Miss a big difference there, how did that help you decide on her?

SYDNEY JOHNSON: She caught my eye at Ohio State. I was paying attention, and I really thought she had some very good play there. Then she went to Coach Yo at Ole Miss, and she got to play some point guard. Yeah, she showed off. She played really well. It's a very, very good league, as we all know, in the college game. And Cotie showed off.

She showed her versatility in terms of being strong and



aggressive and athletic, but also having a finesse to Euro-step at times and find nifty passes.

Coach Yo has her players playing hard defensively. So you saw a real two-way player who was super effective. That was fun for me to watch and certainly paying attention to that.

Q. My question to you is, outsourced to training camp contract (inaudible), what is the expected timeline for Georgia Amoore?

SYDNEY JOHNSON: We're thrilled. Georgia is coming along great. She's playing 5s, built up -- I don't want to give away her whole turn-and-play protocol. But no, we're expecting her to play. I'm elated. She's a thinker. So make no mistake, she's part of our core.

Georgia Amoore is part of our core. We're excited to have her out there. We have some people who will be battling to kind of see how that minute split goes. But Georgia will be up there on the court.

So it's Ally, it's Rori. It's whomever. Like, giving it a good run to see how they mix in and how they support the whole court, who can help lead us on and off the court.

Q. And my follow-up, with the drafting of Cass Prosper, could you talk to us about that?

SYDNEY JOHNSON: Another player that caught my eye. I think it was in the fall. I texted the coaches and I said like, who is this and how old is she? And she's just making plays all over the place.

Another excellent program that plays at a high level. Obviously familiar with her when she was sharing the court with Sonia at times.

And Cassandra, you know, she looks like a player. You walk in the gym and you're like, who's that? I think a lot about that with Shakira, you walk in the gym, you see her moving, you know that's a basketball player. I think Cassandra at a different position has that versatility. Another player who can play both ways, long, athletic.

Yeah, so just excited to see how that looks and really hope that she's able to hit the ground running because I think athletically and with the IQ, she can contribute. We'll just have to see how much.

Q. What specifically about this class's strength fits what the team needs?

SYDNEY JOHNSON: I think we really leaned into pro

habits. We really understand how young we're going to be. I think if Angela, who is very, very mature, and all the way through, but we really emphasized, like, listen, we want to be joyful around here. I get made fun about it by our local media and others.

But like, we do want to enjoy this ride, but when we're in the gym, we're working, trying to get better, because we know the gains that we want to make.

We want D.C. to be a place that's recognized for women's basketball and our ability to have success on the court. So that's going to take work.

We need players who come in here, young or old, who -- or young or more mature, who are about their business.

So we really just listen closely and watched and talked to coaches and work with our strategy team here to find players who are good, who had a humility to work with others, who wanted to get better, like really want to get better and move this thing forward, as we said we're ascending, and we want to close that gap between us and the absolute best team in the league. And at this point that's Vegas.

Q. How big (inaudible) in the Rori Harmon third round (inaudible) at that position?

SYDNEY JOHNSON: I know that Coach Vic has talked about her being the best point guard in the country. There's a lot of winning there. You can see she's absolutely the heart and soul of that program. Special connection with the coach, how she's come back from injury.

You guys can keep me going. I know the stories of these women and the gains they want to continue to make. Rori, she's got a lot of winning DNA in there. So a bit surprising, but everybody's kind of trying to figure out what's best for them, and I don't think we're the only team that got better tonight, but I certainly know -- I feel like we took a step forward and Rori's a part of that.

Q. Going back to Lauren Betts. Her college career, 250-plus blocks. How do you think she'll fit defensively in the league alongside Shakira and Kiki, having those three bigs?

SYDNEY JOHNSON: There will be an adjustment to the quickness, the speed. Some of these guards are -- they're above the rim and they're crafty. Think about the speed of Slim Sykes, who had an all-star year here, but then balance that with how Chelsea Gray goes about it and gets people in foul trouble or pump fakes, Kelsey Plum.



Those are going to be things that as Lauren is rotating over, even switching at times, she'll have to learn from that.

I think Kira will be one that will kind of show her the way. Kiki will as well. I think she'll learn fast because that's the type of player she is. But after some level of adjustment, I also think she's going to make an impact. And the more uncomfortable we can get and the more support we can provide for her, I think that impact comes sooner.

Q. Coach, with some of the (indiscernible) picks you have in this draft, looking at the later rounds, how do you guys in the war room kind of look between players that could potentially make an immediate impact versus players that you know are just coming to try to fight for a roster spot to see what you can find late in the draft?

SYDNEY JOHNSON: We'll see how it all shakes out. I think the W, thank goodness the CBA got done and thank goodness the players are earning salaries that they're well worth it. And everything that they put in, thank goodness there's two developmental roles.

And so there's some eye on could that play in? We'll have to see. But it allows us to bring in players and be a part of our program. And that's really what it is. We really lean into player development. It's not just toss that around. We take that seriously.

So our player development for our young players, our veteran players, that will be a key. And maybe some of those picks we'll get on the roster and maybe some of those they will be rosters but they could be developmental players. We'll have to let that shake out, let training camp decide. But it's an opportunity. That's why we were so very detailed in terms of who we wanted even in the late rounds.

Q. As far as the CBA agreement, you mentioned D.C. was waiting on pins and needles to see if Shakira Austin was going to re-sign with the Washington Mystics. How important has it been to make sure that Shakira stayed in the D.C. area?

SYDNEY JOHNSON: It's fundamental, man. I don't know what to tell you. I'll tell you what I told her. I'll tell you, like, she's part of our core. I mean, she's absolutely, like, she's DC through and through.

I fundamentally believe that this is the best team in the league, in the world. And this place, to get the best out of Shakira and to see her grow into the player that she's already become, but there's more. There's a lot more in

the tank. So I never ever ever looked at this thing without Shakira Austin with us, with the Mystics.

So super excited about kind of close that out. And free agency, that's kind of -- that's what happens. But literally, there wasn't a day that's gone by that I was, like, you know, we're letting Shakira walk out of the door, we're letting somebody else claim her. That was never going to happen. She's a big part of this, and we're thrilled to be moving forward with her.

Q. Follow-up question, I know I asked you last year, and you circled back to this year, I read the average size of the first-round draft picks was 6'4". How do you plan on utilizing all of these bigs? I know it's pretty early, but --

SYDNEY JOHNSON: 6'4" for us?

Q. Yeah, the first-round draft picks.

SYDNEY JOHNSON: I was saying, I hope that's not everybody. (Laughter).

Last year, at times, you know, we were on the other side of things in terms of physicality and length.

And that's a part of this puzzle. Like, it's grown women. They play hard, and they're athletic, and they're long and they can make plays.

On some level, you just need those tools to compete, and we have a bit more of that. And we're excited. We can possibly do some different things defensively. Sometimes we had to be a little bit more conservative and measured.

Can we take some chances? Can we take some risks and bother some people and get them out of their comfort zone? And encourage them to get to the rim and smack it out of bounds, all these kinds of things.

Again, have to get everybody comfortable, have to get everybody on the same page. But it is exciting to have some modern kind of basketball and some length that we can try to bother some people and see if we can do some different things than last year.

Q. With the departure of GM Jamila Wideman, how do you best perceive managing basketball operations alongside head coaching duties thus far in this moment in time?

SYDNEY JOHNSON: Yeah, really good question. Greatly appreciate what Jamila contributed to the organization. You know, Michael Winger is our president, operates all

three teams with the Wizards, the Mystics, the Go-Go.
He's been amazing. He's been amazing, set an incredible
foundation of people who really, really care about
basketball and are trying to do it the right way.

He, as much as anybody, John Thompson III as well, Don
Wolfe is one of our senior VPs, but these three folks,
they've just really kind of set the tone for we're doing it as a
group collaboratively I'm just a part of it. I'm not the whole
thing.

Our analytics folks, our coaching staff, medical -- and so
back to kind of the strategy piece, it's just everyone doing a
little bit more, and that collectively, I think, will carry us
through. It's certainly got us to this moment where we felt
like we got some good players and got better this evening.

And that will be the approach moving forward. I certainly
will be leaning on them, and I think they've been eager and
willing to learn on me. And that's how we're going to make
it work.

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