

# Washington Mystics Media Conference

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## Sydney Johnson

Media Conference



SYDNEY JOHNSON: Good to see you. All right if I jump in? Just want to thank you all for being here. Super excited to get the '26 season going. Thank goodness the CBA got sorted out, and we're ready to push forward with all the players throughout the league. It's super exciting for all the teams, in particular here in D.C. Couldn't be more excited.

Every coach is going to say that. None of us have lost a game just yet, so we're all super positive. But for us here in D.C., just the moment that we have with Monumental Basketball, just very grateful to Michael Winger and John Thompson III and Don Wolf, our front office, our analytics, our coaches, our support staff. It's a special time here for us to kind of build on some of the gains that we made last year, and I couldn't be more elated to take it on with this group.

We started practice yesterday. It's a young group, but that shouldn't throw off people in terms of the clarity is there in terms of what we want to accomplish and try to move forward.

Just want to be thankful and share my excitement and open things up for any kind of questions you all have. We appreciate you being here.

**Q. Sydney, picking up on that clarity piece, you mentioned on draft night that Georgia will be part of your core group this season. Just curious what you're thinking right now. I know it can change, but about her role or the responsibility you want to give her this season.**

SYDNEY JOHNSON: Yeah, our core, that's where this clarity is. You go through these waves of games and all kinds of things, officiating -- I had to throw that in there. But the clarity of Shakira Austin, Kiki Iriafen, Sonia Citron and 100 percent Georgia Amoore is being, like, our core. That group that we want to build around and move forward. Georgia being healthy, and again, Sonia, Kiki, Kira, we're excited, the gains that we can make.

Georgia is coming along great and is full of energy and leadership and creativity and communication, so it's really fun to see how she's adding to that young core, and our job is to push them forward. That is our core. I've said that like seven times already. I'll just be clear that, like, whoever is on our roster, like our commitment is full-out player development for everybody.

Even when Georgia was out, there's a lot of coaching, a lot of communication to try to help her be at this point. We would do that with every single person on our roster, regardless of age, experience, position, all that good stuff.

**Q. To follow up on the development piece, can you talk us through the decision with Darianna to designate her as a developmental player right away, and more broadly, how do you envision using your developmental spots this year?**

SYDNEY JOHNSON: Yeah, we had that in mind in terms of -- frankly, as we were advancing into the draft, of looking at players with that eye of who do we feel like can come in and be a part of our program long-term, and maybe not necessarily have to carry the weight, if you will, and expectations of a roster spot. And also trying to have a long-term view, again, of that core and who can support it.

Buggs, as we call her, is someone that we feel like could very well be someone who supports that core, and so we wanted to make that commitment early. That may, as we go these next few days, that may pop up with someone else in our gym, or as we survey the landscape, but we felt strong enough on draft night that Buggs was one of those players, and we wanted to make that commitment early.

**Q. With you being in this new role where you're overseeing the roster a little bit more, how have you been able to kind of balance being in that position? I know obviously that was you when you were in college and you had to make all those type of decisions, but being in the W, how do you feel like the process over the past two weeks have gone for you?**

SYDNEY JOHNSON: Yeah, I think it may be a bit of

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naivete, to be honest. It's gone really smoothly, and I say sometimes you don't know what you don't know, okay, so all right, there's that. But it's a team. It's not just me.

I think I said that last week, as well. There's a collaborative effort here that starts with Michael Winger, but soon, very quickly after, I'm acknowledging Coach Thompson and Don Wolf and our analytics team and our coaches. We're all kind of like leveling up, if you will, and really working well together.

It could be the weight of the world on me, and it just doesn't feel that way. It just doesn't. I think there's real strong alignment in terms of what we're trying to do, the tone of the organization, crystal clear.

If I didn't have that, I would be anxious, like really. But I just don't feel that way. I feel like I can give my input but also lean on others who are very, very good and knowledgeable at their jobs, and we can try to do this as a group.

**Q. Last year you talked so glowingly about the veterans that you had at camp and how they were able to help you and help teach the other younger players. You have 11 rookies plus Georgia. I know some of those rookies have vast international experience, but they'll be WNBA rookies this year. Can you walk us through the decision making of not bringing in other veterans to help you and the staff lead the charge?**

SYDNEY JOHNSON: Yeah, I think there's best fits, and we certainly want veteran experience. This league doesn't suffer fools. These players are really, really good. There's no two ways about that. You have to have a certain level of experience to advance far, say, in the Playoffs.

But we're also very mindful of where we are as an organization and as a team, and player development is something I was just talking to Coach Thompson just on my drive home last night, and just like, we have a staff, and I don't mean just coaches, that are just so into what it is here in terms of our player development.

At times that'll mean that we'll have some younger players. There's nothing wrong with that, as long as they fit, they go hard, they want to compete, they want to get better, they want to work together.

I guess I'd just say, we will have veteran experience; that'll come. We have a limited amount of it right now. But it doesn't change what we're trying to do ultimately, which is to get everybody better and to ascend, to build on our gains.

That's about the best way I can answer that. Slim (Sykes) and Stef (Dolson) were just perfectly suited for that team in '25. I think Michaela is going to give us a lot. And I know that they're only second-year players, Sonia and Kiki and Georgia in particular, they're growing up right in front of our eyes, and that doesn't equate to a 10-year vet, but it equates to something. I'm already turning to them and leaning on them for leadership in ways -- small and big ways that I couldn't last year.

It may look like we are the youngest team in the league, but we have some key young players that are really going to step up and show the lead, take the lead, along with Michaela, and we're excited about that, honestly. We're excited about that, and frankly, I wanted to make room for that. That's where we are right now.

**Q. Along the same lines, when a roster is this young, what is your approach on balancing long-term big-picture player development, talking about building that core up over the course of ideally multiple seasons with what you see on the floor every night being more competitive now?**

SYDNEY JOHNSON: Yeah, you've got to have players. At the end of the day, you've got to have players, and you've got to have players who want the moment. Again, maybe it's just youthful enthusiasm, but I just think -- I look at Kira, I look at Kiki, I look at Sonia, I look at Georgia, they want more. They want more than what we had last year. They want to build on that.

We're creating the space to allow that to happen, and in D.C., we're really excited about it and undeterred. Like fully understand the challenges that are out there. Las Vegas, outstanding; Los Angeles; Minnesota; Phoenix; New York. They're all making these gains or have a core group of proven players. But we want that challenge.

So I guess I would say our player development, we're going to build on what we did last year. We're not starting from scratch. We've already made some gains, and we want to just be in a much better position, much more advanced at the end of the season with these players, and we're going to do it every day. Every day we're going to commit to that.

**Q. With how quick the transition is sometimes from college to the league, how important is the next few weeks and the early part of the season for some of these rookies in terms of getting them acclimated, not only to your team but to life in the league in general?**

SYDNEY JOHNSON: Yeah, it's really key. It's a great, great question. I'm not sure -- I think people know but they

don't really, really know. Nyla Harris is in camp right now. She's still taking classes at Carolina. It's crazy. There's a lot on their plate.

I think for us, we're extremely mindful of the load that our rookies have and that transition, and some of that is physical, but a lot of it is mental and emotional. We're kind of ramping up and always talking as a support staff of how we can best serve them to get 44 games and hopefully more out of them.

When you go from one intense season to another, you talk about our UCLA players and the longest ride you can take in the season, and also the emotional emotions of all that, we are very mindful that we're not just going to throw them into the fire and say, figure it out. That's not how we do things here. That's part of our player development, as well. It's not just the basketball piece.

Really, really good question, and yes, we are very, very organized and thoughtful in terms of how we're going to ease them into this full season.

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