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Michaela Onyenwere Media Conference



Q. Can you take us through what you were prioritizing in free agency and why you thought D.C. was the best spot for you?

MICHAELA ONYENWERE: Yeah, I think I had an amazing opportunity to obviously enter free agency. It was kind of an unprecedented time with how quick it all was. I think for me it was the role. Obviously being on four different teams at this time, that was really important for me. I've been in a lot of different roles on a lot of different teams, so that was very important for me to contribute to a team impactfully.

Obviously I know Syd, he was my assistant coach in Chicago my first year. So that played a big role, just the person he was and how he ran things when we were in Chicago, too.

Obviously the young core, I know Kiki I've known her for a little bit and playing against them last year and seeing what they were building was enticing. The professionalism of the organization. Even in my first few days the way they treat players I think is so amazing. To come to an organization, super professional, have all the resources, and really care and prioritize the players, and that's really important, I think, in this day and age. I think we're past the point where we're just, women just get what you get. We're at the point where we need to get what we deserve. I think that Washington champions that in a really great way.

Q. What are your goals for yourself and for this team this year?

MICHAELA ONYENWERE: Yeah, I think with an expanded role, I think I can have a level of consistency that maybe I haven't had in the past. So that's really important. I obviously want to win games, as well, but also grow my game and be a leader on this team, too. I'm one of the oldest ones, which is freaking crazy. I'm only 26 and I'm like the oldest on this team. But being a leader in that way will be super important for me and have me grow in that

area, too.

Q. With your experience as a coach, how is that dynamic, and not necessarily with players whom you coached, but just the overall understanding from that side of things and then coming back to the court, what does that feel like or what has that felt like for you?

MICHAELA ONYENWERE: That was an amazing experience. I loved UCLA so much. When Coach Cori gave me the opportunity to come back, I was like let's try it and see what it is. It's something I can't even describe how amazing it was. Obviously winning a national championship was super important too, but it was really the journey and process of being with those girls and how committed and dedicated they were, which was super refreshing to be around.

So that was really cool for me. I was also able to hone in on my basketball knowledge and learn a lot from the perspective of a coach, which is very different than a player, obviously with the schemes and how we approach things defensively. So having that perspective I think will definitely help me in this new experience of just seeing things a little bit differently. Obviously also being an older player, too, being able to help the younger players in that way. So having that experience I think is a perfect transition into this for sure.

Q. Do you feel more aggressive in terms of being able to teach? When I say that, if you see something and you're in it, too, and you're running this play, do you have a stronger urge to insert your voice?

MICHAELA ONYENWERE: Definitely. I think that was something that grew as I coached, it's where do you see your place and how do I see my voice in this situation. I think the coaches at UCLA empowered me to be like, Michaela, if you see things, you need to say something.

So for me coming into this new situation, same kind of process, like I'm new here, but I do have thoughts. So I think being able to collaborate with Syd and the rest of the coaching staff but also the players, too, and having my voice be heard I think is super important.



Q. Thinking about this being a young team but now a vet-heavy league, how do you anticipate imparting your experience in this league, because like you said, you are the vet on this team. You have experience with these vets throughout the Dub. How do you incorporate?

MICHAELA ONYENWERE: Yeah, I think what's really important, because I've been on so many different teams, I've been able to interact with a lot of different people and I know my rookie year how the vets really helped me in my process and just learning the league as well.

So just kind of taking what they've taught me and the way you show up, the way that you are a pro, the professionalism you show, the way you take care of your body, the way you recover, I think that's super important. It's something I learned really young. They also have a really good base of that right now, but just continuing to add to that and what I learned will be super important.

Q. Since you do have experience with Coach Syd, does that give you a pseudo-coach-on-the-court dynamic at play at all?

MICHAELA ONYENWERE: I think at times. Definitely more than before. I think when I was usually playing it was doing the game plan, what the coaches kind of said, but I think now I can think through this is why we're doing this, this is why we're doing this scheme, and really put into play this makes sense about why we're doing it. Now I understand from a coach's perspective.

Q. Michaela, you mentioned role as being part of the reason why you came here. Could you expound on that a little bit, how you see your role obviously being a veteran, being able to have a voice on the court, having a familiarity with Syd?

MICHAELA ONYENWERE: Yeah, I think in the WNBA I've played a lot of different roles. I've started, I've not played, I've been on the bench, I've done a lot of different things. I think having that consistency is something I was looking for in year six. Just coming in, being really impactful. It doesn't mean I need to start. It doesn't mean I need to be the go-to player. I just want to have a consistent, this is what you expect from me every single night.

I think at this point in my career that's what I was looking for. I think with Coach Syd just the conversations that we had, and obviously there's some comfortability there as well. He feels very confident about my ability to score, to facilitate or just be a leader in that way. So that was really important for me coming into free agency.

Q. During the NCAA Tournament, Cori Close was talking about her coaching evolution and she brought up you as a part of that, where she said you were always so sunshiney and so positive, that it took her some time to realize, oh, a player can be super locked in while also being this happy and joyous all the time. Curious if you feel like you brought that kind of perspective and sunshiney-ness as you've become a professional over the past few years, how that's changed or haven't changed for you since college?

MICHAELA ONYENWERE: Yeah, I think that's just my personality. I am very much so a glass-half-full person in everything that I do. I think that it's so much more fun to think about life like that. At the end of the day basketball is super fun. Obviously it's our job, we get to paid to do it but we are so blessed and grateful to be able to play this game. I approach it like that all the time.

Obviously, I'm always locked in when I need to be but I think there's an innocence and fun to be playing this game, and I never want to lose that, especially being in this business it can be hard being traded, having different coaches, whatever it may be. That can be something that can stay the same. That's just how I approach life, honestly.

Q. When we talked to Lauren a little bit earlier, she was saying that she's getting used to you being on the court with her now. What's that been like for you transitioning to being on the court with someone that you were on the coaching staff with last year?

MICHAELA ONYENWERE: Yeah, and even before that. Me and Lauren are from the same place. I've known her since she was 11 years old. She used to watch me play in high school; her and her dad would come to my high school games. We went to the same high school. It is extremely full circle. I'm really excited about that.

I think she's grown into an amazing basketball player but also an amazing woman, and I've seen her since she was young to now, so it's very, very weird. She's like my little sister.

But yeah, I'm really proud of her and her growth especially in the year I was with her at UCLA. You just saw how much confidence she stepped into in herself, as a person and as a player, so I'm very excited. She's a dominant center who has great hands, very versatile, defensive presence, so I'm very excited to play with her.

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