

Washington Mystics Media Conference

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Kiki Iriafen

Media Conference



Q. I just asked Sonia this, too, but if you guys thought you had a young team last year, you guys have kind of leveled up with all the rookies this year. How is it for you just a year removed from being in their shoes but now one of the more experienced ones on the roster?

KIKI IRIAFEN: That's crazy to say. I'm just really excited. Our team is full of youth. It's only been one day in training camp and you can already tell everyone is super hungry. They know how to have fun and still compete.

I'm excited to see where we go this season. I know we're going to give Coach Syd some headaches just being super young, but I'm just really excited to play with this young group of women.

Q. How is it for you having Georgia back in the fold as well and how does she look?

KIKI IRIAFEN: Georgia is just amazing. She's just an amazing human, so I'm really happy for her. She's been through a lot, and to be able to go through training camp and get ready to play for this season, I'm just really excited for her.

She's already been amazing in just the drills that we've done. I think she's going to impress the whole world, and I'm just really excited to play with her.

Q. When you think about the front line now for the Mystics, what are you anticipating that feeling like, and not in terms of minutes but stylistically playing with Lauren Betts again? What do you think that's going to feel like for you guys?

KIKI IRIAFEN: I think it just gives Coach Syd many options. We can be very big. We can have switching. We have Kira, we have Lauren, we have Angela, we have myself, and we're all different type of bigs, so it gives our coach a lot of options to play with any given night. We have a lot of size and I think it allows us to match up with the different sizes of different teams. Team loaded up this

off-season, as well.

I think it's really special that we get to do this as a young core and hopefully build for the future, but again, just to answer your question, it just gives Coach a lot of options to play around with.

Q. What jump would you like to see in your game and your mentality coming into your second season?

KIKI IRIAFEN: I just know what to expect a little bit more. So I just want to be very consistent this season. I definitely need to take up more of a leadership role, and not that I'm claiming a vet or anything, but I've been through it one season, and just being able to help the rookies that we have coming in on this team.

And then I would say being a better perimeter defender is something that I really worked on this off-season. Definitely want to implement that here.

Again, Coach can play around with different things, whatever he needs on any given night. But I'm really excited to step into year two and all that comes with that. So yeah, just a lot of excitement.

Q. You briefly mentioned Shakira, but I want to ask you specifically, how important is it to have her back, especially given how young this team is?

KIKI IRIAFEN: Yes, Kira is definitely a vet on this team. She's been with this organization her whole career, and she's someone who's very dominant in the WNBA. So just having her be a leader for us, be a leader in the post, a post presence, I think it's super huge for myself and the young posts behind her.

I'm excited to have her back. I can't wait for her to get back here. She just brings such a tenacious effort offensively and defensively which is very contagious. So having a young team that's very impressionable, I think seeing someone like Kira and the way she approaches the game and her energy and intensity will be such a great benefit for the rest of us.



Q. I asked Sonia about what you all were able to do together last year, and she said she's excited to see how your chemistry continues to grow. Just want to get your perspective on that?

KIKI IRIAFEN: I agree with everything Sonia said. I'm excited to have Georgia implemented in that because she is a great floor general and very smart and intelligent and knows how to get people to their spots.

With these young women that came in, they have so much to bring to our team. I think they're only just going to elevate what we were able to do last season, and I'm really excited to see what that looks like.

Q. Obviously a great season a year ago and you carried that into the W's off-season, if you will. What are your goals building on everything you've done into year two?

KIKI IRIAFEN: Honestly, just not being complacent. Year one was amazing but that was year one. Everything I did last year is not necessarily going to come into this year. I think just having that same hunger, that same drive that I had last season, just bringing that again this season, and my role might look a little bit different, so just being flexible, being present and doing whatever the team needs me to do.

So coming into year two I want to have that same tenacity and just not be complacent.

Q. You kind of mentioned this, but I just want you to talk a little bit more about how -- we know that the team is dedicated to this youth movement. We saw it last year with you guys and it's carrying forward into this year too. Now that you've been through it for a year and you're going into training camp with 11 rookies, what is your view of where the team is at and that vision going forward?

KIKI IRIAFEN: It's a great question. I would say with our team, we have big goals. We want to win a WNBA championship, but we want to do it together. We want to do it by loving each other, by playing with joy.

I think just setting the foundation right now so that we can achieve that goal in hopefully a year or two is just really important, and our coaches allow us to be ourselves, but they also want us to -- they emphasize every day that yes, we're playing basketball, but it's bigger than that. We're a family, we're sisters, we're people, and we truly care about each other.

I think approaching the game from that sense where I

really care about my teammates is only going to set us up for success when we do get in those big championship moments because we're selfless, we care about each other, we're going to make the extra play, the extra pass to make sure we get the right possession.

I think our coaches investing in us, it also just breeds confidence. You're like, wow, you have an organization that believes in my potential. For me, last year I was like, I just want to get better. I want to stay in the gym if they're investing so much into me, why wouldn't I do the same to myself?

Q. We talked on Thursday a little bit about how Georgia is a vocal leader, has been a vocal leader on the bench as Coach Georgia, but how is her vocal leadership going to impact you this year and your cohesion as a team?

KIKI IRIAFEN: It's already impacted me. Yesterday was only day one of training camp and you can hear Georgia. Even when she's not on the court, she's always talking. What I love about Georgia is she's such an intentional leader. The way she talks to one person might not work for the other person. So some people take well to getting on them, screaming and some people don't. So Georgia is very intentional about how she approaches every single person, and I think that is just a testament to who she is as a person.

I don't think we've had anything like that. I've never seen anything like that in all my years of playing basketball, not that it was many. But I think Georgia is just one of one. We feel her whether she's on the court or off the court.

Q. Lauren developed a ton over her time in college, but I'm curious what you remember about that one season at Stanford with her and anything that stood out then and what it's like to see her now?

KIKI IRIAFEN: Lauren was just a baby and I was a baby, too. When she got drafted, I was super emotional because I know how much work she's put into, one, winning a National Championship, to be No. 4 pick, to be here. I'm just super happy to see how much growth she's had and how much she's pushed through and persevered. She's been vocal about her story and her journey with the game of basketball.

She's in the right hands here in D.C. I'm glad that I can be big sis and help her out in any way that she needs, but she's an amazing player. She doesn't need me to showcase that she's her best self, but I'm really happy and excited that she got drafted here and that I get to play with her again.

