

**Head Coach and General Manager
James Wade
Media Availability
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Update on the team

“I mean, it’s going. I think we have to get used to the bugs that want a piece of us because they don’t know us so I think that’s the biggest thing. I’m from the south, so I’m used to this humid weather. It’s a little bit of an adaptation phase for everybody but it’s OK.”

On how practice went today/schedule outlook

“I think it’s interesting because we have I think 10 games where we have a day off between each game. And we knew it was going to be challenging but to actually see it on paper is really something. So, we’re trying to accomplish as much as we can as far as language and rhythm of play where we can put pressure on their legs and pressure on their bodies because we know the season is going to be a lot of film work and things like that. But we’re excited for the season. We’re excited for all the challenges. Today was the first chance we got an actual practice on the game floor, what is going to be the game floor. So to get that in and to get a rhythm of the baskets and spots on the floor that we like it was actually pretty interesting, pretty good for us. So, it was a spirited practice because I think everybody was pretty excited about being on the floor.”

On Stella Johnson

“She’s been on our radar I would say since what would have been the second half of the season. Right before their conference started. I couldn’t say she was on our radar as a junior but the fact that she was leading the league in scoring and she was pretty consistent those last 14 games, those last 13 games of the year. We paid attention to her. The fact that she has a WNBA body. She seems to have WNBA toughness. She’s really strong for a guard and she’s efficient for her usage rate. We thought that she was pretty good. But, once we saw that we couldn’t get

her because Phoenix took her into draft, we had to focus elsewhere. But, she’s somebody that’s been on our radar for some time and we like her so far here in camp. Really humble, mild person, but has tenacity on defense that we really like.”

On what his reaction was to the Phoenix Mercury selecting Johnson

“No, actually we had our team. It just worked out where unfortunately we got a chance to look at her because of the COVID case for Syd[ney] [Colson]. She was somebody that we initially said, ‘Hey this is somebody that we can bring into camp next year.’ But once it looked like we were able to get a hardship for Sydney, then we said, ‘Why not get a look at her this year?’ ”

On playing the Las Vegas Aces in the season opener

“I’m just looking forward to us playing basketball. This is a new year. So we’re we’re not really focused on anything that happened last year. We just want to get off to a good start. I’m more reminiscent of our first game last year against Minnesota, where I didn’t think that we were physically ready so we just want to make sure we don’t make that same mistake and we come out with a high level of play and a high intensity and ready to get to our spot. So that’s what I’m thinking about more of is us getting off to a good start and being ready to play WNBA basketball from the beginning.”

On if he has any concerns toward the players doing too much in preparation for the season

“That’s always in the back of your head, especially if it’s someone like myself. You always try to find that balance. It always kind of I guess concerns you because we have a youthful team, but we do have veterans on this team. So, we want to strike a balance as far as getting them ready with a sense of urgency, but we also want to pay attention to their health and listen to their bodies and what is telling us. We have some protocols in place where we see what we’re doing and how much we’re pushing them. I just heard Rome wasn’t built in a day. I keep hearing that but I want to still have a sense of urgency but I don’t want to put it in a place where we set ourselves back because we’re recovering from injury or anything like that so we just have to be smart about it.”

On what the team can do better from last year

“I think the key for us is going to be how well we take care of the ball offensively. I think that’s one thing that we want to make sure that we’re doing. I think if we’re not giving teams easy run outs, or giving teams easy opportunities or extra possessions. I think it’s going to make us an even better team so we can talk about things defensively. But I think offensively, us taking care of the ball and us protecting the paint on defense are probably the two main things.”

On Ruthy Hebard

“She’s someone that’s an intelligent player but she’s taking it all in. So I mean it’s a lot of information for her. The fact she has a natural flow to her game. Even when she’s thinking she’s still moving and still doing things that make her special. The little things come naturally to her so it doesn’t take away from her. When we give her so much information that she has to think [about], it slows her up a little bit. But she’s on a good track. We’re very happy with her. We’re pleased with where she is right now. With the loss of Jantel [Lavender], it’s going to give her an opportunity to play right away so it’s a good opportunity for her.

We think she’s ready for that challenge. We’re trying to get her there, but we’re pleased with where she is right now.”

On what’s it like to have an Alaskan on the team

“I mean it’s basically been the same. I haven’t really thought about it as much. I think when she first came we asked her about Alaska a little bit. It’s been so many distractions as far as being in a new environment and a new place and trying to get the season started and having to wear a mask and having to social distance. So we haven’t really gotten the chance to talk about it as much. And plus, we’re not at home, like we’re not in Chicago. So everybody’s kind of foreigners here. We haven’t got a chance to really I guess digest it as much. But we know it’s a special thing that you have somebody that’s off the mainland from Alaska or from Hawaii. We know it’s a different thing so I’m sure the team has talked to her about how Alaska is but I haven’t gotten a chance to talk to her and I will. We’ll talk about that at some point. I’ve always seen pictures of how beautiful Alaska is and it’s a place I would love to visit so maybe I’ll get some advice from her on where to go. I’m sure she’ll probably send me to Fairbanks but I’ll be okay with that.”

On if Stella Johnson’s game reminds him of any player

“That would take me a while to think about. Normally some players they naturally kind of give me an idea but I haven’t seen her in the game. So that’s what’s really going to dictate what she can do. I tell you what. She has Jia Perkins potential defensively. But Jia Perkins was one of the great

players in our league. But she has that kind of defensive tenacity potential. I'm not saying she has that now but that potential you can see that in her. Offensively, I'm not sure."

On how he's improved as a coach

"I don't know. I work at it every day. I watch video. I watch coaches. I listen to coaches. I don't know how I've improved. I only see that by how the team responds. I don't really look at it. I just put my head down and try to work every day. That's a good question I guess. I don't feel like I've won any awards or anything like that. I still feel like I have a lot of grounds to improve, but I'm very critical of myself. I see a lot of errors in myself as a coach and I just try to improve on those errors knowing that I won't be perfect. It's just what I can get out of the team is probably my biggest thing that I'm trying to get right. I don't know, we'll see where the wins and losses come from that."

