

WNBA Draft

Thursday, April 15, 2021

Aari McDonald



Q. I was wondering if you could talk about the emotions behind -- obviously your stock rose a lot over the last few weeks. Just the emotional journey behind that, and coming from the tournament to today.

AARI McDONALD: It's been a lot going on, but I mean, through it all, I never got too high, never got too low. Even after losing the NCAA Tournament, I was never too low. I always took the positives from my situation. And this whole journey to get to the WNBA, I've been happy and just feeling blessed and just excited to play.

Q. Aari, how tired are you of people just getting your name wrong?

AARI McDONALD: It's very tiring. They should know my name by now. If not, I'll just keep doing my thing. Just taking them on notice. I let my game speak for my name, obviously. But it's very tiring.

Q. Just talk about the backcourt you guys have in Atlanta. I can't think of a much quicker group than you and Chennedy [Carter] in that backcourt right now.

AARI McDONALD: Did you just say my name and Chennedy? That sounds scary already. We haven't even touched the court together yet. I'm really excited. I've watched Chennedy a lot in her collegiate years and her first pro year. I'm just really excited to play with her, also Courtney Williams. So I can't wait to get to practice with them.

Q. Can you just tell the people kind of what you're bringing to Atlanta. In the NCAA Tournament we saw the kind of player you are and that's kind of really when maybe your name maybe like nationally was recognized on a much bigger scale. What are you bringing to the Dream?

AARI McDONALD: I will bring a relentless effort on both ends of the floor, scrappy style of play. I'm not afraid to do the dirty work. Dive on the floor, I'm not afraid. I can set my teammates up, create my own shots. I'm very quick, very pesky defender. I can shoot the ball a little bit, so I could help my teammates with that.

Q. Obviously you see what Renee Montgomery has

been able to do, go from player to owner. Just how inspiring is that to you as someone who is now entering the league and I'm sure has dreams bigger than basketball?

AARI McDONALD: It's very inspiring to see her do that. She's been a role model, not just for myself but for others. I just can't wait to pick her brain and always communicate with her about everything, even stuff bigger than basketball. So I'm just really excited.

Q. How excited are you to play with Courtney Williams and Chennedy?

AARI McDONALD: I'm so excited. Like they're dogs. I'm a dog myself, so I can't wait to get to the court together. We're going to be dangerous. We're going to be dangerous in the backcourt. I'm just ready to work.

Q. I just wanted to ask a little bit about the origin of that backdrop that you had and if you could take us through that moment in the NCAA Tournament when you spoke out and corrected people or informed them on how your name is pronounced, because I'm sure it took a lot of courage to do that.

AARI McDONALD: Yeah, so my backdrop was definitely inspired by the NCAA run. Just talking with my agent for my team, we thought that was a great idea and that was the theme. We want people to know my name. I mean, we thought that was really important, the incorporation of it tonight. I'm very excited. I can't even express it. I'm so excited.

Q. If they don't know it now, they'll know it soon.

AARI McDONALD: Oh, yeah, they'll know it for sure.

Q. Can you just sort of speak to the decision to transfer from Washington and then the whole journey that's led up to this, just a little bit about making that decision, that sort of fateful decision to transfer, how it's all panned out for you?

AARI McDONALD: Yeah, I wanted to leave, I wanted to



transfer because my coach took another job, and my grandfather died. I already had a connection with Coach Adia [Barnes]. We had known each other since I was 15, so I knew the other coaches over there, so I just felt like it would be a family environment. If it wasn't going to be home, away from home. I got there, and my journey wasn't easy, but I overcame so much adversity, but I just always stayed the course and I kept God first and I always worked hard. I just grew as a person and I came out a better individual and a better basketball player.

Q. Did you have any sense of where exactly you would go, and what was that moment like when you heard your name?

AARI McDONALD: I didn't know where I was going to go at all. I was waiting for my name to be called. I was kind of getting nervous. I kept picking at my nails and stuff. I was just nervous. When I finally heard my name called, I can't even put into words. This is something I've been working for my whole life and just talking about it, and now it's finally happening. I just heard my name, and it couldn't be a better feeling. I'm just blessed.

Q. You've drawn a lot of comparisons to another two-time Pac-12 All-Defensive Player in Jordin Canada. Do you feel like on the defensive end bringing that tenacity to Atlanta, that will be a part of your game that will be a success?

AARI McDONALD: Oh, yeah, for sure. I'm a two-way player, but I value defense. I put that above my offensive abilities. I know that defense, that creates offense, and I just want to be that spark for my teammates always. I know I can beat the break, we can just score. We can always be better because we're playing defense, and I just want to lead my team and just do whatever.

Q. When you think about sort of the next evolution for your game, any conversations you had with Nicki about it, whether it's more accuracy from beyond three, you've obviously been elite already finishing at the rim and creating your own shot. I just wonder what's next in your mind and if you've had those conversations with Nicki [Collen], as well.

AARI McDONALD: Coach Nicki and I haven't had that conversation yet, but she did tell me, she was like -- she asked me my strengths and weaknesses, and I told her my weaknesses, and she was like, it doesn't matter, keep doing what you're great at it. You can already get to your spots, just keep doing what I'm doing. She talked to me about stuff bigger than basketball, and what was my ultimate goal. I was just happy to play with her. She was easy to talk to.

Q. There's been a lot of talk from Arizona fans that they're finally going to watch the WNBA now. What does that mean for you to be part of growing a new fan base for the league, for people who may not have watched before?

AARI McDONALD: It means a lot. I mean, I think the women's game is disrespected and I think people need to open their eyes. We're talented women. There's something bigger than basketball. They stand up for stuff that they're very passionate about, and that's great. I think that people need to follow them and just keep opening their eyes. It's bigger than basketball, but definitely people need to just take notice of the league. I'm just happy I can be part of that, if people are starting to watch. I'm going to keep encouraging them and tell them to pass it on.

Q. What does it mean to you to be the first Arizona Wildcat ever selected in the first round of the WNBA draft?

AARI McDONALD: It means a lot. I'm excited to be the first. I'm paving the way for all the future Wildcats out there. I can't even explain it. There's been so much history since I've been here. I'm just excited. I couldn't be here without my coaches and my teammates for putting me in those positions. Thank you. I appreciate them for that.

Q. Can you speak on what this means for you personally as somebody who plays for your late grandfather, somebody who plays for those loved ones around you? What type of emotions have you felt in honor of those people who you play for?

AARI McDONALD: A lot of emotions. Happy, sometimes sad to see that my grandpa can't be here, but honestly just happy. Just excited emotions around here, and I've sacrificed a lot, and my parents did, so just to hear my name called, it's crazy. Just having my loved ones here, people who have been with me throughout my journey, it's amazing. I just can't wait to keep doing what I'm doing and make them even more proud.

Q. I'm out here in the Pac-12 country. How great is it for you and Michaela [Onyenwere] down at UCLA already being drafted and how well the Pac-12 is being represented, and of course of your championship game against Stanford?

AARI McDONALD: I didn't know Michaela got drafted yet. Big congrats to her. I'm a big fan of hers. Probably one of my favorite competitors, just the way she holds herself. She plays with so much class. She's a class act, so congrats to her.

We put the Pac-12 on notice. It's always "Back the Pac" over here. I'm just so happy for her and her journey. I mean, we're going to definitely make our names known in the league for sure.

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