



Janel McCarville is living every female basketball player's dream. She was drafted No. 1 overall in the 2005 WNBA draft, appeared in the 2004 Final Four for the Minnesota Golden Gophers, won Most Improved Player in 2007 and she gets to travel overseas and play basketball in Europe during the WNBA's offseason. McCarville isn't your average WNBA player. For one thing, she's not afraid to talk about her sexuality in a sport that has actively shied away from all things LGBT. Now she's going on the record regarding her recent suspension from the New York Liberty. In early 2011, rumors began swirling that McCarville wasn't going to show up for training camp and the media speculated, painting her as a rebellious player. The truth is, McCarville doesn't really care what the media or anyone else has to say. She knows who she is and what she's about—and for this lesbian baller that will always be her family and friends.

LADY LIBERTY



The WNBA star talks about living the dream and why she was really suspended from the game she loves. **By Lyndsey D'Arcangelo**

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When did you first get involved in basketball?

I grew up playing football with my brothers and never thought much about basketball. My brother Tracy really pushed me to get better. It wasn't until my freshman year that I started to really apply myself and tried to make myself a better player. It was [then] that I realized I could play and that I was relatively better than the other girls. **Some players lose their love of basketball over time, especially because of the work that goes into it. Did that happen to you?**

I am not going to lie, I do love this sport but [over] time it turns into a job. You have to train mentally and physically to endure the things we have to overcome. It's hard always being in the public eye. You always have eyes and ears on what you do. People think athletes get better treatment from professors in college and I'm going to go on record and say that's not true. You have to work so hard as a student athlete to keep good grades. Throw in 20 hours of basketball practice, plus games and travel into that, whew—I am surprised I made it when I think back on it.

How did your professional and personal life change during and after the 2004 Final Four appearance?

I guess it changed because before that only people in the Big 10 conference knew who I was and what I could do. Obviously, playing against UCONN in the 2004 Final Four [in front of] a national audience of about 20,000 people changed that. It was kind of a weird feeling, almost as if people were always watching [me]. It comes with the territory and it was something I had to get used to.

What was it like to get drafted No. 1 overall in the WNBA?

It was great, period! I always joked when I was younger that I was going to be the number one pick [in the WNBA]. Ha—makes me laugh just thinking about it. I honestly lived every single female basketball player's dream.

You seem to have found a home with the New York Liberty.

I really meshed well with former general manager, Carol Blazejowski. We were similar in so many ways and we really just clicked. I am very appreciative of the opportunities she gave me, and the relationship that we had. She will be missed in New York.

At the beginning of the 2011 season, you were suspended for failing to show up for training camp. Is there more to the story?

Bad communication started it all, but these are the events

that followed: My season ended in Italy on May 11. I packed my things on the 12th and had a flight out the morning of the 13th. It took me 24 hours to get home. I pulled into my driveway in Wisconsin at 1 a.m. on Sunday morning. Sunday was the day we were supposed to be in camp for physicals because camp started on Monday. So I asked for four to five days to unpack and relax. I was told I would be fined \$1,000 per day for being late. Remember how I said it was mentally hard earlier? Five months away from friends and family is a lot. I needed to see my family, friends and relax. Since my [overseas] season ended so close to the start of the WNBA camp, I didn't think my mind and body could jump right back into the thick of it. On the fifth day, I said I was ready to go [to camp] and the New York Liberty told me I was going to be fined \$5,000. I felt it was unfair and decided to take the summer for myself. Since 2006, I have not been home for more than 14 days at a time.

Homosexuality is a taboo subject in sports at both the college and professional level. Why?

I don't know. People are scared of things they don't understand.

Does being out negatively affect you professionally?

I don't know if I am "out" or not to be honest. I have not held a press conference or anything. I just live my life as I want. I don't hide or change who I am. As of now, if you know me then you know my business. Not once has my lifestyle affected my ability as a player to perform. Nor has it affected my basketball career. I have never been told to hide anything, since college and so on. It's not like a straight woman runs around saying she is straight just so everyone knows!

Do closeted athletes negatively affect LGBT youth?

I don't think people hide, I just think privacy is nice. You see celebrities get married and cameras are everywhere. I feel like lesbian athletes just try and fly under the radar, and live their lives happily and media free. In our personal lives we are who we want to be—fans and media just don't see that side of us.

What advice would you give aspiring lesbian athletes?

I think there is less scrutiny these days or least I hope it's less. Just be who you are comfortable being. If you hide who you are, you are hiding the best part. People will accept you as you are no matter what you think. If your friends are true friends, they will be there for you. I'm not saying it was always smooth sailing for me, but every now and again I enjoy rocking the boat. (wnba.com/liberty) ■