

## **How Brittney Griner Became a Political Pawn: With Coach Dawn Staley**

### **Ep. 204 Final Transcript**

**Jon:** I don't know if you remember Ralph Sampson at all, but —

**Tocarra:** Yes. Yes. Yes.

**Jon:** So Ralph Sampson was nine feet, eight inches tall, [KASAUN LAUGHS] and he went to —

**Tocarra:** OK. Fact check. [KASAUN LAUGHS]

**Jon:** When I was at William and Mary, he was at UVA and he would dunk while in Charlottesville, playing against [LAUGHS] teams in Williamsburg. His — he had a wingspan. From what now, again, I obviously didn't measure it, 211 miles. [TOCARRA LAUGHS]

[INTRO MUSIC]

**Jon:** Hey everybody. Welcome to the podcast. It's The Problem. With me! I'm the problem, Jon Stewart. We also got a TV show there, Apple TV Plus you should check it out for God's sakes. It's apparently now they will pay you \$5 a month [KASAUN LAUGHS] to watch it. Kasaun Wilson. Tocarra Mallard are joining us today and we are gonna be talking to a basketball legend. She's presently, South Carolina women's basketball head coach, Dawn Staley. She can be — she's gonna be talking to us about this Brittney Griner situation. Kay. I know you're a huge basketball fan. Tacarra. I don't know if you're a huge basketball fan, but are you also a huge basketball fan?

**Tocarra:** Love, love, love college basketball.

**Jon:** What's your team? What's your, who do you got?

**Tocarra:** I — for college?

**Jon:** Yeah. What's your team?

**Tocarra:** The Indiana Hoosiers.

**Jon:** Really? That's your college basketball — for women's or for men's?

**Tocarra:** For women.

**Jon:** Indiana?

**Tocarra:** Yeah.

**Jon:** So you tried to go with a less successful program.

**Tocarra:** I'm rooting for them OK. [JON LAUGHS] I believe with the right consultant, the right program, the right star.

**Jon:** I heard Bobby Knight's coming back and he's decided —

**Tocarra:** Don't do this.

**Jon:** He's decided that he wants to throw a chair. [LAUGHS] He feels like that's the way to take on —

**Kasaun:** Thank God social media wasn't a thing when —

**Jon:** Oh, dear Lord. [KASAUN LAUGHS] Kasaun do you follow at all? Do you follow any women's basketball at all?

**Kasaun:** A hundred percent.

**Jon:** There you go.

**Kasaun:** I'm a big Ohio state fan for men's and women's basketball.

**Tocarra:** Oh, no judgment for that?

**Jon:** I was gonna say I'm a little like, you guys are really, you're not going any of the powerhouses. Now as big 10 schools, I understand where the lure is for you guys, but the world right now revolves around Baylor, University of South Carolina. Stanford.

**Tocarra:** This is correct. Yes, yes, yes.

**Jon:** University of Connecticut. Like these are the teams. I'm a little shocked that you guys are going with — it'd be like saying, "I love college football." "Really? Who do you love?" "I'm real into that Northwestern." [LAUGHS] I just — I think they're really, "I think they're gonna be maybe top eight in the big 10 this year, so I'm really looking forward to that."

**Tocarra:** Oh my goodness.

**Kasaun:** I went to Howard University, which is a historically black college. And when you go to a black school, generally the best part of the game is halftime [JON LAUGHS] and that's —

**Tocarra:** Well, well, well.

**Kasaun:** That is. That's —

**Tocarra:** Halftime is game time.

**Jon:** Halftime is game time.

**Kasaun:** I went to a Howard basketball game and I was like, "I think I could beat the point guard and I shouldn't."

**Jon:** Oh my God. That's hilarious. How did you guys become aware Brittney Griner? You were aware of her before this case, yes?

**Kasaun:** Oh, absolutely.

**Jon:** Yeah.

**Kasaun:** She was a huge, huge star, even in college. It was one of those —

**Jon:** The top.

**Kasaun:** Yeah, it was one of those kind of like LeBron James stories where —

**Jon:** Yes.

**Kasaun:** — the NBA players were like third on ESPN. You're like, "Wait, this kid is 17. Why is she front page? What is going on?"

**Jon:** Right. Right. Well, Brittney Griner was one. So she's one of those transformational players, like a Ralph Sampson, like an Anne Donovan, like a Dawn Staley who goes to a program that is not considered world class. Good. Brittney Griner makes them world class. Brittney Griner puts them on a par with UConn with the teams that have players, like, you know, they been getting the Maya Moores and the Brianna Stewarts and all those kind of players. And now when you see what's happening, it's, you're trying to impress upon people. This is like if Kevin Durant was arrested overseas and held for six months, like you're trying to impress upon people, the status that this player has. I mean, look, it's a tragedy when anybody is held in detention in these other countries, but like —

**Tocarra:** Yeah.

**Jon:** The fact that this has been going on for months —

**Tocarra:** Yeah.

**Jon:** — is stunning.

**Tocarra:** Absolutely.

## **Interview with Dawn Staley**

**Jon:** So I'm gonna bring in the coach. And she's gonna tell us a little bit more about this. So ladies and gentlemen, if you would welcome, she is currently South Carolina women's basketball head coach. And I'm gonna go with the defending champion for God's sakes. Coach Dawn Staley is joining us. Coach? Are you with us?

**Dawn:** I'm here.

**Tocarra:** Ahhh!

**Jon:** First of all. Thank you. Thank you for joining us. And thank you for not wearing any of your I'm gonna say four gold medals. I figured a coach like you, a player like you, you just do everything from the trophy room.

**Dawn:** Nope. I don't do that. I actually don't have any of my trophies at home. I don't really have anything basketball in my home besides like a designer hoop and that's about it.

**Jon:** Really?

**Dawn:** Yeah. I got everything at my office. We got a trophy room.

**Jon:** OK.

**Dawn:** So when recruits come on campus, everything they would wanna do in sports, everything that they could imagine is right there in that room.

**Tocarra:** Strategy. That's a coach.

**Dawn:** Yes strategy, right?

**Tocarra:** Whew. [DAWN LAUGHS]

**Jon:** That's nice. Here's the other strategy that's smart and I know this from my coach at William and Mary. Never let them come to your house. [LAUGHS] that — because they will, first thing they will do is they look at that refrigerator. Like it's the trophy room.

**Dawn:** Well, you have to these days they wanna come and chill so I don't mind that. I don't mind that at all.

**Jon:** I don't know if people understand the history, necessarily of women's basketball. When I was, in college and watching the women didn't even have an NCAA tournament. Their — I think that didn't happen until 82 or — like Title IX was just getting going and they didn't have those opportunities. You started at UVA in like —

**Dawn:** 88.

**Jon:** 88. OK. So at that time it was still a pretty nascent operation. Yes?

**Dawn:** Yeah. Yeah. I mean, we were playing in a tournament, but, and quite honestly, what we didn't have, you know, what the comparisons to the men's program, we didn't feel as much. And maybe that was because I had a strong college coach, Debbie Ryan, who she, she was behind the scenes, working everything, the men's team got we got. And it was because of her and her fight and her ability to just, tirelessly, on the behalf of her student athletes. I don't think she was out nationally, you know, screaming at the top of her lungs to, you know, for equality. She did it in a space that she was given and —

**Jon:** That's right.

**Dawn:** — You know, part of that is, and you talk, you when you're a student athlete and you play the same sport or you play other sports, you say you all eat at the same places. And then, you know, conversations spark up and you'll ask like, you know, "How much meal money you get over the Christmas break."

**Jon:** Right.

**Dawn:** And if it's anything, you know, less than what the men's team was getting, you know, we ran and told Debbie and Debbie would fight the, you know, to even the score. So, I grew up in basketball, basically having no wants for anything. And I do feel like we got treated as equal as possible to our, you know, our male counterparts.

**Jon:** Well, this, the reason why I wanna bring it up is this, so Title IX, enforced a certain equality for women's sports on men's sports, but once you transition to the pro game, the resources are now no longer dictated. And it's a different ball game. And the reason I bring it up is people don't realize a lot of these — I mean, Brittney Griner is top five WNBA player like she's an all time great. She's a top five player in the league right now. And because of the finances of the WNBA and the payment is in many ways forced to play overseas as well. It's how they end up in Russia and China. And these other regimes. So coach is some of this, are we talking about this because of the disparity in what these athletes make now because maybe Brittney Griner wouldn't have even been in this situation, had it not been for that?

**Dawn:** Well, yeah, that brings the question, you know, everything, and, you know, part of me feels for the league, the WNBA in that, it is a startup league. Startup, you know, the same way the NBA started. The NBA in its 25th or sixth or seventh year, they weren't making the money that they're making now. They were probably, you know, very similar to what the WNBA is today, but they poured into the NBA and you continue to pour in and pour in and pour in and you make it incredibly valuable to be a part of it if you are a sponsor, if you are owner, if all of those things. It's not that valuable.

**Jon:** When the NBA started, I mean, the player, it looked like me. Five foot, eight inches tall [KASAUN LAUGHS] you know, just doing, getting a ball and just [JON MAKES A SMALL NOISE].

**Kasaun:** He had to finish a game so he could unclog a toilet at his second job. [LAUGHS]

**Jon:** But it's true. So these — coach Staley's exactly right. These nascent leagues haven't built the foundation, the global reach, the global brand yet. The college brand is still more powerful.

**Tocarra:** That's right.

**Jon:** The Olympic brand is still more powerful. but they're doing this. So even, coach, you played, when you got out there was no WNBA and you played, what countries did you play in?

**Dawn:** I played in Spain. I played in Italy. I played in France. I played in Brazil and I honestly, I hated every minute of it.

**Jon:** Oh really?

**Dawn:** The only reason — yeah. The only reason why I went over is because I wanted to be an Olympian and —

**Jon:** Oh wow. OK.

**Dawn:** — when I got cut in 1992, they told me two reasons. One was I was too short. I couldn't do anything about that. The other — [JON LAUGHS] Yeah. Too short, but they selected someone that was shorter than me on the team. So I don't know how that, I don't know how that works, so I didn't really let that bother me

**Jon:** That's insane.

**Dawn:** But I could do something about the second thing. And that was. I didn't have enough international experience. So I had to go over pack my bags. I lived out of a suitcase every day. Like I would wash my clothes, fold them, put it back in a suitcase, because I was ready to go home at any day.

**Jon:** Right.

**Dawn:** Because it was like you were there to score as many points as possible to win the game. It wasn't about strategy. It was all on the Americans to make it happen no matter what you were stacked up against. And, you know, I just, you know, I play basketball for other reasons. I was there for other reasons and I just feel like, felt like it was just imitating the NBA.

**Jon:** Right, right.

**Dawn:** And that's impossible to do.

**Kasaun:** When you come out of college, you have to go overseas because there's no WNBA. And that's the reason why you go overseas. But now Brittney Griner is an all star hall of fame, caliber, WNBA player and she's still in the same position to in the off season go overseas. Do you feel like the progress of what you kind of trailblazed hasn't really translated into people like Brittney not having to go overseas in the off season?

**Dawn:** Well, here's what I do like this, about the situation. You're able to play in the WNBA make some money in the summer. And you have the option of going overseas and for Brittney, Brittney was probably one of, you know, a handful of players that was able to demand, a million dollars plus to play overseas during the traditional months of this —

**Jon:** You make it four times, four times, five times what he's making in the WNBA.

**Dawn:** Well it's five times now.

**Jon:** Yeah.

**Dawn:** It's probably 10 times, you know, before the collective bargain agreement that they just signed maybe two years ago.

**Jon:** Right. OK.

**Dawn:** You know, that's money on the table that you can't leave on the table. So Brittney had to do it. Brittney, you know, you got a small window to play this game. And you have to make as much money as possible in that small window. So you could secure a future, like, you know, there's not even, you know, there's not even a future in, you know, in sports as far as women's sports. You can go to broadcasting, but you know.

**Jon:** Right.

**Dawn:** ESPN. They're gonna look at probably the next UConn star that comes out to give them a job and everybody else is pretty much outta luck. So I mean —

**Jon:** I believe the word she was [DAWN LAUGHS] searching for is s\*\*t.

**Tocarra:** Well, thank you, Jon. I was confused.

**Jon:** Believe it is s\*\*t. [KASAUN LAUGHS]

**Dawn:** So, you know, so Brittney was doing what she had to do to make as much money as possible. And. Should that be? No, it shouldn't be. We need more people, corporations pouring into the WNBA, because I mean, it is an incredible sport. I mean, women's basketball has not been treated like a sport in a very long time. We've been treated with crumbs so to speak. Like if you really pour into it, I'm just gonna go into the field in which I am in, which is college basketball. Women's college basketball. The NCAA — they partner or they sign deals for women's basketball and the other 89 sports. I'm talking soccer men's and women's,

I'm talking softball. I'm talking baseball. All those other Olympic sports. We're all part of this one pot that our championships are, have to come out of this one pot and then men's basketball. March Madness is this billion dollar conglomerate.

**Tocarra:** Yeah. Behemoth of a thing. Yeah.

**Dawn:** Right? And if you did the same thing, if you — and, sorry, I don't mean to leave those other sports [DAWN LAUGHS] behind, but if you just take women's basketball out of that, you know, there's no doubt that we could be a hundreds of millions of revenue producing.

**Jon:** Just the tournament alone, the NCAA tournament for women's basketball. Does the, I mean, when you look at a player like Brittney Griner, imagine if this name image likeness deal had been around when she was at Baylor. She was — she's on the cover of sports Illustrated. This is one of the biggest athletes in the country at that time. She'd have made millions of dollars on that, on that NIL and is it possible that the NCAA, because they so fumbled the ball, not to excuse the pun on pretending that these college sports are amateur while they're paying coaches \$6 million a year, \$8 million a year. They're making billions, as you said, on the tournament.

**Dawn:** Yeah.

**Jon:** By not evolving so that the players would benefit, is that what's created a lot of this mess?

**Dawn:** Yeah. I mean they've, you know, they've padded their pockets.

**Jon:** Yes.

**Dawn:** They have, they've padded their pockets and it worked for them. Honestly, it worked for a very, very long time. But they didn't evolve. They didn't evolve. They didn't evolve with the other sports because if they did, we would be in a much better position where we don't have to deal with NIL, but now it's, it is too late that can of worms is open. And there is no putting a lid on it. Like it is, it is going to be out of control. Like it's going to be probably more than I can handle. And I'm probably a person that I love the fa — I love newness. I love new challenges. I love to be able to figure out how everybody can be happy and everybody can eat. So I work with my players, you know, tirelessly to get them in positions of making as much money, as much money as possible. Getting them with agents and helping them create generational wealth. Like Brittney was making generational wealth when she was playing over in Russia. She had to do it. Like you can't leave that money on the table 30 years from now. She's gonna be OK. As far as I know she does right by her money, but we did other, other sports a disservice. While all the energy was put into March Madness on the men's side.

**Jon:** This brings up the point about Brittney. So we sort of have that idea that, you know, the players in WNBA, even the biggest players have to, to go to these places. You've had experiences overseas when you're playing in a foreign country so the politics of that particular country, I would imagine, don't enter into it at all for you. This is a sport you love.

It's a place you can go to. How do they help you negotiate living in a culture you've never lived in? You're a Philly, a native. Yes?

**Dawn:** Yes.

**Jon:** Now you're living overseas. How do the teams protect you? How do they help bring you into the culture? Or are you isolated?

**Dawn:** You gotta treat it like a job, like, you know, do they provide things that will make you comfortable? Yes. You have an apartment. You have a car and then it's a job. You gotta find your way to the grocery store. You gotta figure out, you know what —

**Jon:** She's kind of on her own. She's kind of on her own in Russia to begin with.

**Dawn:** Yeah, she is — Russia was probably a little bit different.

**Jon:** OK.

**Dawn:** Russia was probably a little more hands. Because, you know, the language barrier. I mean, she was playing for one of the top teams in the world, you know, so, I mean, she was treated with royalty and, you know, the encouraging thing. The last time that she was in court, which was last week, I believe her general manager was able to testify for her.

**Jon:** Right.

**Dawn:** I think one of her doctors was able to, Russian doctors were able to, was able to testify. And one of her teammates, I don't know how many other foreigners or Americans would have that kind of, support from natives. So I'm hoping, you know, that with, with all of that happening we, we hope that there's a human element of someone who's —

**Jon:** Right.

**Dawn:** — played seven, eight years in your country —

**Tocarra:** yeah.

**Dawn:** — if there, you know, there's some leniency. Like, you know, as soon as Brittney got a, you know, arrested, you tap into who that local contact is. And then that local contact finds, a lawyer to represent her and then, you know, then it becomes, then it does become a thing where it's bigger than your agent and agency. It's much bigger than the WNBA. It's much bigger than the NBA.

**Jon:** Yep.

**Dawn:** So —

**Jon:** Coach, that's exactly right. It's when cultural power collides with real power.

**Dawn:** Yep.

**Tocarra:** Yes.

**Jon:** With actual power. With state power.

**Dawn:** Yep.

**Jon:** And you're seeing some of that now with the live tournament. The live tournament is the, golf tournament that is competing now with the PGA, the Saudis have bankrolled that with, I don't know, billions and billions of dollars.

**Dawn:** Yeah.

**Jon:** When you have regimes that are repressive and authoritarian, cultural power is a tool that they use. But boy, when that collides with real power.

**Dawn:** Yes.

**Kasaun:** Can I ask a question, coach?

**Dawn:** Of course.

**Kasaun:** Can you discuss like timeline wise? What does a year look like from the beginning to the end of the WNBA season and then going overseas? Like how long you overseas, like how does that work? We think of the NBA season. That's 82 games, the playoffs

**Tocarra:** That's right.

**Kasaun:** So we're only looking at it like, oh, she's over, only there for a weekend for maybe like a weekend tournament.

**Dawn:** Yeah, it's year round. So the WNBA starts at the end of April. Right? And it'll end like this year, it'll end. Probably, and this is a short season because the World Cup is in September. So it'll end mid September or the end of September, right?

**Jon:** That's playoffs and everything.

**Dawn:** Playoffs championships. Yes.

**Tocarra:** Wow.

**Dawn:** So it'll end there. Some players are going overseas a week later.

**Jon:** Wow.

**Dawn:** So they go over between the end of September and October. And they're staying until April, May.

**Tocarra:** Oh my gosh.

**Dawn:** So it is during the traditional months of a basketball season.

**Tocarra:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Dawn:** I'm gonna tell you this though.

**Jon:** Yeah.

**Dawn:** This is what's gonna happen next year with the collective bargain agreement. Like every player must be in training camp next. Like they have to attend, like it's in April. So some seasons overseas aren't over until May.

**Jon:** Oh, wow.

**Dawn:** So they're gonna have to choose either go overseas and play maybe a half a season, or tell their team overseas that they're leaving. Because they gotta go play in the WNBA or don't go over. So there's a choice and the collective bargain agreement was signed two years ago. I'm eager to see how many players will choose the WNBA versus staying overseas.

**Jon:** Well, don't you think Brittney's story now also will impact that Decem —, I mean, imagine an athlete, not just talking about this is my family's future. Generational wealth. But now I've gotta be careful about the stability of the country that I'm going to.

**Dawn:** Yeah.

**Jon:** The authoritarian nature, will they make an example of me?

**Dawn:** Well depending on how this thing ends, you know, I do think, I do feel in my heart of hearts that Brittney's going to get home.

**Jon:** Right.

**Dawn:** What it's going to take to get home? It might be a prisoner exchange. And if it does, I never really thought about this, because I'm reading articles after articles after articles.

**Jon:** Right.

**Dawn:** Is you you're putting yourself in jeopardy because we become very valuable to other countries. Russia, of course, but other countries where, you know, some of their natives are serving time in, in our country.

**Jon:** Right, right, right.

**Dawn:** And so —

**Jon:** It's a geopolitical chess game.

**Dawn:** Yes it is.

**Jon:** And you are the pawns.

**Dawn:** Yes.

**Tocarra:** Exactly.

**Dawn:** Yes.

**Jon:** I heard they're trying to get her, Brittney Griner, in exchange for a guy who's like an arms —

**Dawn:** Viktor Bout. Yeah, yeah.

**Jon:** Yes. An arms dealer called the merchant of death and you're like, she had a vape pen. A medical marijuana vape pen.

**Kasaun:** It's also like we're trading the merchant of death for the starting center of the Phoenix Mercury. Like that's the —

**Jon:** Right! It's —

**Tocarra:** Ludicrous, ludicrous.

**Dawn:** Yes. Wrongfully detained.

**Jon:** Wrongfully detained.

**Tocarra:** Yeah. Coach, please excuse my ignorance, but I wanna make sure that we have this right. Does Brittney have any more court dates coming up?

**Dawn:** Yeah, I think it's the 26th.

**Tocarra:** OK.

**Dawn:** Yeah.

**Tocarra:** And do you know if there'll be other folks from the United States testifying on her behalf? Like what else can be done at this point? Through the court system in Russia?

**Dawn:** I mean, you know, it's unpredictable.

**Tocarra:** OK.

**Jon:** Right.

**Dawn:** Like it's truly unpredictable, like, but I will say this, Brittney's case has gone pretty smoothly compared to other cases so, you know —

**Tocarra:** Wow.

**Dawn:** — that is a, yeah, that is a —

**Tocarra:** I've not heard that.

**Dawn:** Yeah. That's — that is a good thing.

**Tocarra:** OK.

**Dawn:** You know? I do think it helped that she pled guilty. She was gonna have to plead guilty. Whether she had the vape pens or not, she was going to have to do that.

**Jon:** Right.

**Dawn:** In order for the process to get sped up to a place where she could get home a lot sooner. She's gonna have to be sentenced in order for anything, to happen, the prisoner swap. All of that's gonna have to take place in order for them to actually start negotiating.

**Tocarra:** So, and that's the most viable thing we could do that prisoner exchange?

**Dawn:** That and hope that she has a just a lenient sentence.

**Tocarra:** OK.

**Dawn:** You know, much shorter than a 10-year sentence.

**Jon:** Coach, who is working on her behalf, you know, in Russia, but also in America, have you been able to speak with, with her or her family or the people that are trying to, to help her?

**Dawn:** Yep. I speak with her agent.

**Jon:** OK.

**Dawn:** You know, when I, when I first heard it, I think it was like March the fifth. I first heard of this and we all first heard of this. I text her agent, you know, asking what can we do to help. And, I've been in constant communication with her agent. I just saw her wife Sherell at the WNBA all star game. I've called on people that I know at the White House, because it's super important for that to happen. You gotta talk to the president, you have to have communication directly with the president. That's when you know, things are taking place. And I do know that there are people working on her behalf at the State Department.

**Jon:** Right.

**Dawn:** I'm a part of this group called, Win with Black Women, who wrote a letter to the White House to President Biden, to Vice President Harris. And shortly after that, Sherell got a call. Well, shortly after that, but also Brittney's plea. Brittney wrote to the President. Asking him not to forget about them, not just her.

**Tocarra:** Yeah.

**Dawn:** Them.

**Jon:** Right.

**Dawn:** The prisoners says and her —

**Jon:** Other prisoners that are there, other Americans. Yeah. Yeah.

**Dawn:** Yes. So.

**Jon:** Is she in solitary or does she have people that she can talk to?

**Dawn:** From what I understand, she is being held in a cell with two other people that speak English.

**Tocarra:** OK.

**Dawn:** So it's, there's three of them and I do believe they've gotten her a bed that would accommodate her.

**Tocarra:** How?

**Dawn:** To —

**Jon:** Wow I didn't even think of that. That she's 6, she's like 6'8". Yeah.

**Dawn:** Yep.

**Tocarra:** I'm sorry. How's her health like meant just mentally, physically. I know you're checking in with her agent. How's she doing?

**Dawn:** I — as well as you could be doing at that time. Like, I'm just gonna say this, cause I think with basketball, you know, and playing a sport, it challenges you to strengthen your mentals. It does. The players forced to travel to do all those things that we do at a high level. You're mentally strong and you don't think ever that you'd be in a position where you'd have to tap into that in this kind of way,

**Tocarra:** Yeah.

**Jon:** Right.

**Dawn:** Like what Brittney's going through, but you know, the, the last pictures that we saw Brittney of her court case last week wasv— she held a picture up of the WNBA All-Stars wearing her jersey with a smile. Like, you know, that warmed my heart.

**Jon:** Right.

**Dawn:** Just to see her smile through that. So I do think she's not in a bad place. I think she's at a place where she's settling in and not, you know? Yeah. You think about coming home, but you also just take the day as it is, as it comes.

**Jon:** Right.

**Dawn:** And you just get through, I mean, she knows that we're working extremely hard to get her home and screaming at the top of our lungs.

**Jon:** Well, do they say that's a great point though, you make, is screaming at the top of your lungs, is that the strategy or is the strategy is the more noise that is made does that make Russia view it as easier to embarrass the United States government by not complying, or does it make them feel like how do we put pressure on Russia, which seems to be, you know, a country that is not behaving in a particularly collegial or even rational manner at this point.

**Dawn:** Well, I mean, at, in the beginning they just said, you know, don't say anything don't cause yet.

**Jon:** OK.

**Dawn:** In the very, very beginning, they were like, stay silent, just let you know, let you know, keep the noise down.

**Jon:** OK.

**Dawn:** And then you know, when nothing was taking place, then we started ramping up. Saying things and then you see Trevor Reed. Trevor Reed says scream —

**Jon:** Right.

**Tocarra:** Yes.

**Dawn:** — to the top of your lungs. Do not —

**Tocarra:** Right.

**Jon:** That's Right.

**Dawn:** — leave your loved one over there and he's been through it. So I'm gonna follow what he says.

**Jon:** Right

**Dawn:** He's been through it.

**Jon:** Trevor Reed of course, is the gentleman who was imprisoned in Russia and was the, they just did a prisoner swap.

**Tocarra:** That's right.

**Dawn:** Yep.

**Jon:** And he was just now, does this bring up to you, because something that occurred to me was you mentioned it earlier, don't forget about us. Brittney Griner is still talking about the team. She sort of considers these other prisoners that are there. Now part of her situation, she is a leader. Even amongst, in her incarceration, but it does, it triggers in my mind a couple of things. One is we are not so innocent when it comes to also imprisoning people and our policies can leave these athletes vulnerable to this kind of thing. And also in this country, We have people imprisoned for marijuana and other infractions. And we talk about this, it is not a justified incarceration. She is a political prisoner. Does it also make you reflect a little bit on our system of justice and what, and how we've taken people's freedom away in this country and they might not have the power of that platform to get that result?

**Dawn:** It's hard when that mirror reflects back on you.

**Jon:** Boy. Yup.

**Dawn:** It really does and you know, we have a lot of work to do. You know, a lot of work to do with our penal systems and how they operate, especially in the communities that I grew up in. I'm hoping this isn't karma. I surely don't. Not when it's someone that I really love and I know. You know, but we all have work to do, and it's on us to keep screaming at the top of our lungs when injustices are taking place in our neighborhoods, in our country, and we need strong people in power to make sure that we clean it up. I mean, it's a hard thing because we don't, you don't get to this place and where we are overnight. Systemic racism is real. It's real in our country. And, we hope that Brittney coming home will be a feel good story. Brittney, Paul, you know, any other prisoner that is being wrongfully detained over in a foreign country. And if, even if they're not being wrongfully detained, bring him all home.

**Kasaun:** We always, on our show, like Jon always talks to us about clarity over noise, and I feel like that's always something that we all experience like for instance, the noise and your career is being criticized openly for your team not coming out for the National Anthem. And then the clarity is that a part of your pre-game rituals, not to be out at a certain time. So they played it before you guys had a chance to even come out. So it happens in so many different kinds of ways. I'm curious what Jon, coach, and Tocarra like, I'm curious what you guys believe is the noise about Brittney's situation? And then what's the clarity. Like what's the thing that we are not talking about in regards to the treatment of women, women's sports and then Brittney Griner specifically?

**Dawn:** Here's what I would like to happen in Brittney's case. I would like for networks, all the networks to treat this, to treat Brittney's situation, like they're gonna be, they're gonna get the first interview when she returns —

**Jon:** Wow.

**Dawn:** — to the states —

**Jon:** Right, right.

**Tocarra:** Yeah.

**Dawn:** — when she gets home.

**Tocarra:** Yeah.

**Jon:** Treat her like she matters economically to you.

**Dawn:** Yes.

**Jon:** Right.

**Dawn:** Yes. Yes. I mean, she is an American. She, I mean, she's an Olympian. Two time Olympian. I mean, she is someone who will give you the shirt off of her back. She is the voice for the voiceless. She gives, you know, sneakers to people in need. I mean, she's just like you and I. And I just feel for some of us, I post about her every single day and some of the comments that occur under my post art are, you know, inhumane, like inhumane. Like if, again, that mirror, if that mirror was turned to those people who put those posts out there, you know, they've done things in their lives that are far more treacherous than what Brittney's been through. And they're not even in that situation, but you can comment on it, and say something. You know what she's done, maybe a peaceful protest.

**Jon:** Right, right, right.

**Dawn:** But certainly she's not one that's unpatriotic. She's got a father, you know, that served in the military. So it isn't that.

**Jon:** And it shouldn't matter. It should like —

**Dawn:** Yeah.

**Jon:** You know, but I think you're right. You look at, so listen, she's queer, she's a basketball player. You know, she has all these identities that are — that go along the cultural fault lines in this country and she can be used as a political paw, not just in Russia, but in America. And you saw, [DAWN LAUGHS] there was Curt Schilling, who is this a\*\*hole pitcher who played for the Red Sox who came out and said, “Hey, why don't you obey the laws in those countries?” And you just wanna say, like, be a human being. [DAWN LAUGHS]

**Tocarra:** Yeah.

**Jon:** Be a f\*\*king human being.

**Tocarra:** I completely agree with you, Jon. I think the noise to your point, Kay, is the fact that Brittney's identity sits on all these pressure points that people consider woke.

**Jon:** Yes.

**Tocarra:** She is queer. She is black. She is masculine presenting, and I think people see that and I feel like they don't think she's worth protecting.

**Jon:** Wow.

**Tocarra:** And that bothers me.

**Jon:** As it should.

**Tocarra:** And I think a lot of the things that we see online and on social media relate specifically to her identity.

**Jon:** Right.

**Tocarra:** And I cannot believe that.

**Jon:** Well, Tocarra I think that's really well put. Coach, is there any lever of power that you believe can be exercised here that could have some effect on the Russian government [DAWN LAUGHS] or on the powers of it?

**Jon:** Is there, is there anything that you can think of or that you've been suggested to that that could bring about some form of pressure?

**Dawn:** Oh, child. I'm — I don't wanna say this, but good Lord I'm gonna say it.

**Jon:** Say it.

**Dawn:** It's probably Trump.

**Jon:** Wow. [DAWN LAUGHS] Now in what regard, because you feel like he's got the relationship with Putin?

**Dawn:** I mean, they're buddies.

**Jon:** Wow. So he could, he's the one who could place a call and go. Now you wonder, is this part of a larger strategy?

**Dawn:** Yeah.

**Jon:** By Russia.

**Dawn:** Right I don't know, but you know.

**Jon:** Wow. Wow.

**Dawn:** I mean he's the one that's outwardly, you know, saying what a great leader he is. I mean he's been he's said it throughout his whole presidency. I mean he did some things that we would've never done. You know, with Russia, for Russia so —

**Jon:** Call your — so basically the pitch is this call your friend. Call your friend and get these prisoners released.

**Dawn:** Yup.

**Jon:** And in exchange, Putin can give him the presidency in 2024. [LAUGHS] So this is, one hand washes the other, but boy —

**Dawn:** Or a golf course over there in Russia. Or —

**Jon:** Listen, he's hosting the guy, the former president of the United States is hosting a golf tournament funded by the Saudi government in the shadow of the Twin Towers. He's hosting it in New Jersey where 9/11 families still have this incredibly raw wound, but it shows you when an individual becomes a pawn in a much larger geopolitical game. Boy, does that make you feel helpless? And it makes you feel like if something like this can happen to Brittney Griner, what chance do the rest of us have? Or maybe it happened because she's Brittney Griner and they're looking for a high profile target.

**Dawn:** Yeah. I just to, to me, Brittney Griner has probably gone through that airport hundreds of times.

**Tocarra:** Yes.

**Dawn:** Hundreds of times. And I don't know if she had it. She pled guilty. I don't know, but —

**Jon:** Right. Even she did —

**Dawn:** Maybe it was there before as well. So I —

**Jon:** Right.

**Dawn:** You know, it is just the worst possible time. The worst. The worst, you know, if in fact she did have it.

**Jon:** Coach I can't thank you enough for taking the time, and talking to us any last thoughts of in terms of the media, you'd like to see them be a little bit more vociferous and, put that out there. Are there any resources that our listeners, you know, can reach out to, to perhaps help put pressure, whether it be on our government or on media organizations. Is that something that you feel coach would be appropriate and can the NCAA, and other athletic organizations, not just, you know, let's not leave the WNBA hung out to dry let's have all the athletic organizations come together.

**Dawn:** I just feel like, you know, we need to trade places sometimes and put your, you know, put the shoe on the other foot. If this was a loved one, you know, if this was your wife, if this was your child, if this was your, you know, your church member, if this was, you know, your neighbor. And what would you do? Like what would you do? Would you just sit there, allow them to be in that situation or would you fight? And you would do anything, you know, do I like, yeah, I do actually like doing podcasts and interviews for Brittney, but that ain't, that's not what I wanted — that's not what I wanna do and spend my time doing, but I know her, I know her heart and I, there isn't anything that I would not do to bring her home as swiftly as possible. So, you know, whatever you can do if it is just post on social media, do that. If it's pray.

**Jon:** Right.

**Dawn:** Do that. If it's just give good energy and synergy to bringing her home, do that. But don't be someone that detracts from that, that synergy that must happen in order for her to get home.

**Jon:** Well, coach, we, you know, first of all, always been a huge fan of yours. Always been so just impressed with the journey that you've been on and the good that you've done in this world and brought to this world and the strength that you've always showed in it. And hashtag do that, I think would be the message that goes out. So, coach, thanks so much for joining us, really appreciate it and continued success.

**Dawn:** Thank you for using your platform to give a voice to Brittney being in this situation.

### **Interview with Coach Dawn Staley Ends**

[TRANSITION MUSIC]

**Jon:** Coach Dawn Staley. Right?

**Tocarra:** Hot damn.

**Jon:** Hot damn.

**Tocarra:** Legend.

**Jon:** Yeah. And just, you know, you can feel her frustration at trying to marshal the forces. I mean, you're trying to negotiate with a country that is at war with another country for no apparent reason. That's withholding gas from Western Europe and we're sanctioning them. And they've got this individual that they consider probably a bargaining chip. And now she's at the center of actual power and it's gotta be terrifying.

**Kasaun:** This is why I can't watch the news as much as you Jon, because —

**Jon:** Yeah.

**Kasaun:** — my first question is we're holding the merchant of death? [JON LAUGHS] I don't think we're supposed, I don't think we're supposed to know that. Like where is it?

**Tocarra:** I missed that.

**Kasaun:** What? Yeah. Like,

**Tocarra:** We have the merchant of death?

**Jon:** Here's the crazy thing about the merchant of death. Apparently the judge in the merchant of death case, would've only sentenced him to 10 years. He's in there, I think for 20,

because it was a mandatory sentencing. So as far as the judge is concerned, the merchant of death has already served his time. And by the way, the merchant of death is just some, he's like a Russian arms dealer, I think. Like we don't have arms dealers, like we've given —

**Tocarra:** OK.

**Jon:** But I mean, come on.

**Tocarra:** They made it sound very Book of Revelations.

**Jon:** Yeah.

**Tocarra:** Like, I was very concerned that we had the merchant of death here.

**Jon:** He's some, he's some dude that, that we locked into, like some scheme to sell weapons to FARC you know, the Colombian revolutionaries. And then he went up for 10 years. And so he's now the merchant of death. Like we don't have meetings in the Pentagon where we're like, hmm. Let's send a billion dollars of missiles to, you know, [KASAUN LAUGHS] I mean, come on.

**Kasaun:** He's just a Walmart cashier. [TOCARRA LAUGHS]

**Jon:** He's one of those dudes that makes the weapons go round. But somebody's making those f\*\*king weapons and making money out.

**Tocarra:** Like where's our- who's our version of the merchant of death. I mean, he has to have a peer, they have conferences. I'm sure.

**Jon:** Where do you think they're getting the weapons from? Like not to get [INAUDIBLE]

**Tocarra:** I don't know.

**Jon:** Like who do you think makes them.

**Tocarra:** I don't know.

**Jon:** Yeah. Yeah. [LAUGHS]

**Kasaun:** Jon, before we go.

**Jon:** Yeah.

**Kasaun:** Tocarra and I, we were this Brittney Griner conversation brought up some stuff with the staff about players going overseas.

**Jon:** Yeah.

**Kasaun:** Did you know Stephon Marbury has a lucrative career in China.

**Jon:** Sure.

**Kasaun:** And went so well that there's a musical about his life that they've —

**Jon:** That's not true.

**Kasaun:** That they started to-

**Tocarra:** He doesn't know!

**Kasaun:** Tocarra. Do you want to, do you wanna fill 'em in here?

**Jon:** That's not true.

**Tocarra:** There is a musical in Chinese.

**Jon:** About Stephon —

**Tocarra:** That's starring him.

**Jon:** He's in it?

**Kasaun:** He's the only one who can't understand the show. He the — [TOCARRA LAUGHS], the only person who doesn't, who can't translate the show is the star.

**Tocarra:** Yes.

**Kasaun:** But it is, yes, Tocarra is correct.

**Tocarra:** But it's an inspirational musical about his life and [KASAUN LAUGHS] how he can inspire others to pursue their dreams. It's hot. And I hear we have a clip.

**Jon:** What?

[VICE SPORTS CLIP]

**Stephon Marbury:** I am Marbury.

**Chorus:** [Speaking Chinese] 我是马布里。Wǒ shì mǎ bù lǐ.

[JON INTERRUPTS CLIP]

**Jon:** Come on.

[CLIP RESUMES]

**Stephon Marbury:** We are all Marbury.

**Chorus:** [Speaking Chinese] 我们都是马布里。Wǒmen dōu shì mǎbù lǐ.

**Stephon Marbury:** I am a champion.

**Chorus:** [Speaking Chinese] 我是冠軍 Wǒ shì guànjūn.

**Stephon Marbury:** You are a champion!

**Chorus:** [Speaking Chinese] 你是冠军！ Nǐ shì guànjūn!

**Stephon Marbury:** But it was all yesterday.

**Chorus:** [Speaking Chinese] 但這一切都是昨天。Dàn zhè yīqiè dōu shì zuótiān.

[VICE SPORTS CLIP ENDS]

**Jon:** Come on.

**Tocarra:** It was all the dream. [KASAUN LAUGHS] Wasn't that —

**Jon:** But wait. So in the Chinese musical, he speaks English! So audiences must just go like I don't. Man. People will do a lot to sell more sneakers. That's incredible. That's — I am Marbury, you know what? We — it's like he's Spartacus. It really had Spartacus vibes to it. I am Marbury. I am Marbury. We are all Marbury.

**Tocarra:** I just wanna know where's your musical, Jon?

**Kasaun:** Wow.

**Jon:** I am. I am Stewart. [LAUGHS] Listen. I don't know. I don't know where I would be even presenting, I guess at Kutsher's up in the Catskills, but holy s\*\*t, you know, just imagine how differently his life would've been if it had just worked out in the ending, if he just was a little less ball dominant. That's all we needed. We just needed him to distribute and then we could have avoided all this s\*\*t.

**Tocarra:** Are we all hearing this? That was, that is not an inspirational story to Jon. That is a cautionary tale —

**Jon:** Thank you. [KASAUN LAUGHS]

**Tocarra:** — about his performance in the NBA.

**Jon:** It's a cautionary tale about shot distribution [TOCARRA LAUGHS] and not getting lost in the dribble.

**Tocarra:** I was moved. OK. All right. That's right.

**Kasaun:** Are we letting go of the opportunity of talking through the plotline of the, I am Stewart musical?

**Jon:** Oh I don't —

**Tocarra:** I think he let it go. That's fine.

**Jon:** Yeah.

**Kasaun:** OK.

**Jon:** I let it go. It just we don't need to have the first act of me just getting fired from 15 different jobs. [LAUGHS] It should be, we should be fine.

**Tocarra:** I'm going to write the song to that scene right now.

**Jon:** I think that would be lovely and we could get a klezmer band and put the whole thing together. It should be very easy. Should be [JON SINGS KLEZMER MELODY]

**Kasaun:** It'll be someone choreographing, a kickball chain in a bodega aisle. [LAUGHS]

**Tocarra:** [TOCARRA SINGS] You're fired. You're fired. [LAUGHS] You're fired. You're fired. You're fired. [TOCARRA STOPS SINGING] That's hot s\*\*t. Alright. Where is Lin Manuel?

**Jon:** Get this thing written, because I think I can bring a lot of hope to people everywhere that that people said like, do you have any skills that [TOCARRA LAUGHS] can help us here in this clothing store? Or are you just gonna f\*\*k the whole thing up? [LAUGHS] Well, ladies and gentlemen, a solid end to a solid program. We wanna thank coach Dawn Staley. Thank you Kasaun. Thank you Tocarra. Thank you to everybody who's working to try and get Brittney Griner outta Russia. I mean, let's continue to 1000% think about that. And as always, you can check out the show, The Problem on Apple TV+ in the meantime, you know, leave us your comments and quotes and anything else that you need. But guys, very nice to talk to you both. And, I will see you on my monthly visit to the office. [TOCARRA LAUGHS] Where we will discuss casting and costume for the your fired musical.

**Tocarra:** Absolutely. [JON LAUGHS]

**Kasaun:** We'll have something ready for you.

**Tocarra:** See you at the table read.

**Jon:** See you at the table read

[OUTRO MUSIC]

**Jon:** The Problem with Jon Stewart Podcast is an Apple TV+ podcast and a joint Busboy Production.