



## Breakthrough by Design podcast series

# Breakthrough Bond:

## How building trust fuels winning teams with Aubrey Kingsbury

### Host:

Kim Christfort, Chief Innovation Leader, Deloitte Greenhouse®

### Guest Host:

Bec Heinrich, Strategic Growth Leader of Sports Practice, Deloitte

### Guest:

Aubrey Kingsbury, Captain & Goalkeeper, Washington Spirit

**KIM CHRISTFORT:** What happens when you take a team of wildly different personalities, backgrounds, and skills, and ask them not to just play together, but win together?

On today's episode, we're exploring how assembling a motley crew is the secret sauce behind real breakthrough, on and off the pitch.

**AUBREY KINGSBURY:** *"It's never just about talent. There's a feeling of togetherness and belief that, no matter what obstacle is in our way, we'll find a way. You can look in each other's eyes and know that they're with you."*

**KIM CHRISTFORT:** Today, you're in for a treat. That was Aubrey Kingsbury, two-time National Women's Soccer League Goalkeeper of the Year, MVP of the 2021 Championship, and captain of the Washington Spirit. Aubrey's lessons of her journey to the global soccer stage are more relevant than ever, as she leads her team through the Finals.

And making this episode even more special, I'm thrilled to introduce my longtime colleague and friend, Bec Heinrich as host for this episode. Bec is the Strategic Growth Leader for the Sports Practice at Deloitte. She is a passionate champion of sports and is the perfect choice to explore the magic of enlisting a motley crew to build high-performing teams.

I'm Kim Christfort, Chief Innovation Leader for Executive Accelerators and the Deloitte Greenhouse. You're listening to Breakthrough by Design, where we chat with a diverse array of guests—from scientists to CEOs, academics to athletes—exploring what it takes to get to breakthrough.

**BEC HEINRICH:** Aubrey, it's fantastic to have you here. Let's jump right in. It is so fun to be here with you.

I am in my Washington spirit garb because you all are having a fabulous season, it's

worth saying that unbeaten streak of 12, winning the challenge Cup, obviously recently making the playoffs. So, how's the reflection of the season of 2025 been?

**AUBREY KINGSBURY:** Yeah, thank you. Hoping to win it all this year after losing in the final last year. So, it's been a long year waiting to get back and hopefully get some revenge, but so far, so good. But it's one of those things where you're, you're measured almost by how well you do in the playoffs.

So, time will tell!

**BEC HEINRICH:** Absolutely. Can't wait for that moment. And, well, lots to unpack, in terms of the journey from last year to where you're standing today, but let's let our listeners get to know you a little bit, Aubrey.

Tell me what has been either a song or a book or a hobby that's inspired you lately?

**AUBREY KINGSBURY:** Ooh. Um, I love to read memoirs. I think it's just so fascinating to learn about other people's life experiences. I have a good amount of downtime when we travel, so I love to read, and particularly memoirs. I think they're easy reads, not too, heady and always something interesting to learn about other people's lives.

**BEC HEINRICH:** Great. Well, speaking of downtime, you are focused on many things outside of soccer. Off the field, I hear you're a baker, a music lover, and like hands-on projects. So, I'm curious, what do you spend your time doing when you're not on the field and how do any of these things kind of shape your mindset or leadership when it comes to actually playing soccer?

**AUBREY KINGSBURY:** Yeah, so being a goalkeeper, I do feel like I gravitate to these hands-on things. You know, like I almost just want to create things and build things or, you know, in the kitchen maybe I have some questionable vegetable chopping practices. I just like to work with my hands. I've been baking a lot of fall things now that we're getting into the fall weather here in Virginia. A lot of pumpkin flavored things. I recently made some pumpkin cinnamon rolls, pumpkin snickerdoodles. I bake for my teammates on their birthdays. So, I recently made some peanut butter cookies and a chocolate cake. I've been busy. October was a busy month for Washington spirit birthdays.

Anything with my hands, I just kind of like to get to work and see the outcome of your labor.

**BEC HEINRICH:** I love that. Your teammates have got to love you. You are like Captain extra there. So, let's go back in time for a little bit. You've been playing soccer for a long time. I know you're a twin. I've had the pleasure of meeting your family, who are just the most delightful people.

So tell us a little bit, where did you come from? How did you first get onto the field? What's sort of been your journey?

**AUBREY KINGSBURY:** I am from Cincinnati, Ohio. I'm one of four. I have a twin sister, and she is really part of my journey because we were both super competitive growing up, so always pushing each other in everything we did, whether that was in school with our grades or on the soccer field, basketball court, really anything.

So, we were always kind of competing, trying to one up each other. I also have two brothers, one older, one younger. And just some helpful background for the listeners. I now currently play in the NWSL, which is the top tier women's professional soccer league. The National Women's Soccer League is the third iteration of a women's pro league in the U.S. and the first two folded after only three seasons.

So, I ended up going to play soccer at Wake Forest University in North Carolina. And that second league was called the WPS folded, I believe, maybe my sophomore year of college. So, for my generation or coming up in the early 2000 tens you really didn't have a dream of being a woman's professional soccer player because you'd seen one league fail. You're seeing another league fail. For me, I loved watching the US Women's National team. Like that was what every little girl wanted to be a part of – me as well, but I was just more interested in being an athlete. It wasn't like I had this massive passion for soccer, but I just wanted to compete. I wanted to win. And I love sports. I love being outside. So, I did basketball, track, softball. I did it all. And soccer was kind of what stuck. So yeah, I got this scholarship, go to Wake Forest and the league folds. But then in 2013, my junior year, the NWSL starts. So, I'm thinking, oh, maybe I'll play pro for a year or two before I join the real world. But you couldn't really bank on it, like people weren't making a sustainable living. The minimum wage at the time was \$6,000. So, I started my career playing overseas, just a short half season in Norway and then came back to the U.S. I began my career with Sky Blue, which is now, Gotham, then New Jersey, New York team.

And it's been a roundabout journey. I played a little bit overseas in the NWSL off season. So, I think that's an important thing to note as well. In the early days of the NWSL, the league was very short. The season was seven months, and then you're kind of homeless. You didn't have housing. You didn't really have any way to

train. So, for me, I would go play in Australia. So, I just kind of played year round between U.S., Australia, U.S., Australia.

But now where we are today, it's a 10-month league. Wages are much more sustainable, and we've grown exponentially in the past. This is the 13th year of the league. So yeah, that's pretty long-winded, but hopefully it kind of gives a sense of where I was growing up and how it wasn't really something I envisioned for myself, but now just due to the explosion of women's sports, the league is stable. We've been growing a ton and it's incredible to be a part of it.

**BEC HEINRICH:** It is amazing. And to your point of you weren't little girl with a dream. Now, there are little girls around the country. I mean, they're wearing your jersey for goodness sake. I was just at your game at the baseball stadium in San Francisco and seeing the number of goalie jerseys there on the sidelines cheering you on was really extraordinary.

**AUBREY KINGSBURY:** Yeah. We're breaking so many records and it's incredible to be part of it.

**BEC HEINRICH:** That's amazing. I'm curious before a game, do you have any rituals or sort of superstitions or traditions that help you get ready?

**AUBREY KINGSBURY:** Oh, I try not to have too many because especially on away games, there are so many things that are out of your control, like the bus will be late and then you're running around trying to get all these things done. But the main thing for me is, I try to avoid stress, lay low, but every game day I will go for a bike ride. If I'm home, I'll go on my actual bike. If I'm on the road, a hotel bike. I'll do yoga and I will rewatch, some scouting video and kind of review my game notes to make myself feel prepared.

And then for pre-game meal, I always have chicken and pancakes, which don't knock it till you try it! It's a good, easily digestible carb and good source of protein. So that's my go-to.

**BEC HEINRICH:** I love it. Chicken and pancakes. Do you put the chicken on top of the pancakes or next to the pancake?

**AUBREY KINGSBURY:** They're separate, but I'll have a little chicken and a little pancake with some syrup on each bite.

**BEC HEINRICH:** That's a new one. I'm going to give that a shot. That sounds pretty good.

Well, when you look back, I mean, my goodness, you've made literally thousands of saves. Is there a save, and this might be an unfair question, but sort of a save that is just top of mind for you as being truly memorable and a sort of a moment when you thrived under pressure.

**AUBREY KINGSBURY:** I'll go with technically three saves. Last year we were in the semi-final and the game went into penalty kicks. So, if you can't decide a winner in regular time you go to penalty kicks. Where someone steps up, they have to shoot against the goalkeeper 12 yards out, and the kicker is meant to make it. I think like 80% of the time they always make it.

So as a goalkeeper, you're kind of, you know, a sitting duck and you basically guess which way they're going, but you're not supposed to save it. So, we begin this penalty shootout, and usually there's five kickers, and after the five whoever scored the most wins. I think they shot first. I made the save, which is a great start already putting us in a good position. My teammate comes up, she scores, so we're up one zero. They come up again. I make another save. So, two in a row. We make it two zero. They come up, I make another save! Three saves in a row! So the shootout was over with only three kickers, which you never see.

It was really the stuff of a goalkeeper's dream just because [typically you may] make three saves out of five if it's a really great day, but you never, never make three saves of three. I've never seen that done before. So, it was very epic, and I think it was like the favorite moment of everyone in that stadium.

Everyone who sees me still brings that up from last year and they're like, "That was incredible!". [And I say] "I know! Me too!". My life peaked last year - it's only gone downhill. But no, it was just, like I said, you're not really supposed to save it. So, to make three saves in a row and just to

end the shootout like that, it was an incredible moment and yeah, propelled us to the finals.

So, just a highlight of my career and my life, quite honestly.

**BEC HEINRICH:** You're going to be talking about that for generations to come. It's an amazing story.

As we think about a motley crew, obviously you are renowned for your leadership being named captain here of Washington spirit and your ability to team is really impressive.

As you reflect back maybe to your early days pre being pro, whether it be at St. Ursulas or at Wake Forest. Is there a moment or a kind of a memory where you sort of had an aha moment about teaming and this idea of bringing together, you know, different people from different backgrounds with different skills, et cetera, to sort of perform together, sort of a formative, I guess, reflection of what it takes to team well?

**AUBREY KINGSBURY:** I think the main thing I've noticed as I've gotten more of a veteran in my career is you kind of have to put aside your ego and your desire to be liked if you want to help lead and be part of a successful team. Because being a team captain, you're the liaison between the staff and the players and you have to kind of balance competing agendas.

Usually those viewpoints are very different. The players will want something other than what the staff want for us. And you have to be diplomatic in terms of weighing what is best for the team. I know we would love tomorrow off, but like, is that going to help us win? I mean, sometimes maybe, but other times no, you got to go in and do the work.

So figuring out what to advocate for and what to push for and just balancing that tension. It's hard to do if you're worried about people liking you because usually you've got to be kind of the bad guy at times. So, I think now I'm less concerned about being liked and more concerned about being respected and knowing that my teammates believe that I have their best interests at heart at all times.

And ultimately, if I'm always acting in the best interest for the team, then I can live with it. And yeah, not necessarily like what's going to make me most popular or everyone's favorite teammate, but what is the best for the team in order to accomplish the goals that we've set out for ourselves.

**BEC HEINRICH:** You know, one of my favorite mentors in Australia told me when I was younger – leadership sucks, but do it anyway. And it reminds me of that, that sort of have to embrace the suck. You have to embrace the hard choices, the hard decisions, be willing to do things that are unpopular, but it's the right thing to do and it's what's required of leadership.

And it sounds like you're doing that in spades on the pitch.

**AUBREY KINGSBURY:** Yeah, for sure. I think everyone wants to be a captain, but then you're like, 'this isn't that fun'. The moment that you think you're doing a good job, you're probably not. Always questioning and making sure that you're acting in the best interest of everyone.

**BEC HEINRICH:** I loved your point, too, about just having to leave your ego at the door in order to do it effectively.

You were sharing a lot about I'd call it teams of teams or crews of crews in the sense that you've got your team on the pitch, on the field, your direct teammates, but then there are these other teams, surrounding the women on the field in terms of the support staff and coaching staff and so on.

I guess if we come to the players for a second and the 11 of you on the pitch and obviously the bench who are all part of one team. You have players from all around the world, as part of the Washington Spirit, and I would love you to reflect a little bit on that diversity, like what makes up your team and I assume each of the athletes have had pretty different life experiences, journeys to get there, to now be pro. As you bring that motley crew together, is there anything you've sort of learned or you've been taught about building those diverse relationships and bringing that group together?

**AUBREY KINGSBURY:** Yeah, we are the epitome of diverse. A lot of people joke and call us like the United Nations instead of the Washington Spirit or the United Spirits.

As the league has advanced, the NWSL is one of the best women's professional leagues in the globe, we've attracted all the best talent in the world, and that's not only been great for the advancement of the sport, but like you're saying, for the advancement of the Washington spirit.

So, on our team, I think we've about 12 girls from other countries. One from France, Ivory Coast, Columbia, England, Scotland, Nigeria, two from Nigeria, Mexico, Japan. Yeah, the list goes on and on. I'm probably missing a couple in there. At first it was kind of overwhelming, so the majority of them will come and they don't necessarily speak English or varying degrees. It takes a while for them to feel comfortable enough and they get very nervous to speak, especially in front of others. But it was definitely hard to build a cohesive team environment without everyone's main language being English, because it's hard to know like what motivates someone or what do they think is the best interest of the team.

It's easy when you can talk about it. Like, you know, "I thought we were trying this". And you know, everyone has kind of different ideas on the field, so you got to get everybody figuratively speaking the same language when you have the ball and you're playing soccer. But, yeah, everyone has come from such various backgrounds.

Some of my teammates have not even really gone to school. A lot of them will support their families back home. It's crazy just getting to know the different life experiences. The way we support professionals in the U.S. is way different than any other country.

We've got all the resources we need, the medical attention, the staff, and so players, aren't used to that. But anyways, we bring them all together, the goal to win championships. I think it's important in being one of the leaders of the team to try to get to know everyone, try to get people out of their shell.

Like we talked about earlier, I like to bake for my teammates for their birthdays. A lot of these players being away from their families – birthday can be pretty sad. So, I'll try to figure out what they like and make them something even if it's something I've never made, but like something from home or whatever their favorite thing may be. One of the Italian girls just had a birthday, so I surprised them with some biscotti.

I think the key really is to just try to get to know people and like who they are because before you do that it's really hard to be committed to achieving your goals together. Or like, you don't really know what that work looks like when you're just kind of each doing what you think is right.

You need to be on the same page and get to know each other and figure out like what each person can also bring. Because having all those diverse backgrounds, perspective, ways that they view the game very different from an American mindset adds so much value. You got to tap into people, make them feel known, safe, cared for, and then they can bring that out on the field.

**BEC HEINRICH:** I love that. And I can only imagine the gift of those birthday treats that you're making and just the care that you're pouring into your teammates.

As someone new joins the team and maybe this happens in preseason, maybe it happens, at other times in the year, but are there any, I guess, traditions, processes, sort of, rituals that you deploy in order to accelerate that process of getting to know your teammates and getting your teammates to know each other given, you know, all of you need to sort of have that common trust on the field and that psychological safety that you were talking about?

**AUBREY KINGSBURY:** We'll do like a preseason camp of course, and a lot of that happens there. A lot of the long days on the field and the gym. But then also we have a team sports psychologist who will usually lead us in some sort of exercise where we all will present, staff included, and get to know each other.

So, this past preseason, we all picked one image from on the field and then off the field and kind of shared a story behind it.

So yeah, some of them were pretty lighthearted, but some of them were like very deep getting to know about their upbringing or their family back home. I think that was huge to just get to know each other outside of soccer.

Because like I was saying, once you can know each other on that level it just makes everything richer on the field.

**BEC HEINRICH:** Couldn't agree more. And love that, image of building those relationships off the field helps your team perform on the field. That's fantastic.

You've played at clubs around the world, as you said. Obviously my heart skips a beat when you say playing in Australia. From all the new teams, the new clubs, you pick up different things, the different places you go. Is there a practical lesson or I guess a habit you picked up from abroad that you apply and how you lead today and how you think about teaming with people?

**AUBREY KINGSBURY:** So, I played a little bit in Norway and Denmark. And the Nordic countries, they always score high in these happiness scales. And they're also just like very simple people. In Danish, there's this word 'hygge', spelled H-Y-G-G-E, but it's kind of the concept of just enjoying the simple things. And so that could be something about like simple as lighting a candle and cuddling up by a fireplace or a picnic with family and friends. It's just like this concept of enjoying the little pleasures in life.

So that's something that I definitely have taken with me. And when I was playing in Denmark, we actually went grocery shopping together, me and all my housemates, and we would cook meals together. And at first I was like, this is so weird. Like I'm just, you know, used to being independent and just, you know, American free spirit independence, like, just want to do what I want to do and want to do it when I want to do it.

But over time I was like, wow, like this is life giving. Just great community and yeah, that to me kind of epitomizes the culture. And the funny thing too is it almost showed itself on the field. Americans that would come over and play there usually tend to be dribblers. They would shoot more.

They'd be a little bit more selfish on the ball.

Whereas the Danes, you'd almost have to be like, "Shoot! You're open!" Because they're always looking to pass and they're just very nice, unselfish players, but nothing flashy, so to speak. So, it's really cool just getting to play overseas and seeing how those cultures kind of manifested itself on the field.

In terms of my takeaways, it was cool to see what they brought to the game and how we could kind of help each other. Like, you didn't need to be a selfish American ball hog and take all the shots, but you also have to shoot to score. Right? But, yeah, I really enjoyed my time, in Norway and Denmark and just the slower pace of life.

And they were less concerned about, you know, all the busyness and the day-to-day nonsense that I feel like I can get myself caught up in back in America.

**BEC HEINRICH:** I love that juxtaposition of the, you know, U.S. culture versus the Danish culture. You know, I often think of a leader and a captain, in your case on the field, you know, you're a culture maker.

You know, your job is to help build that culture and then protect that culture and sort of be a steward of it. I am curious to know, you've talked a lot about the sort of things you personally do to help build culture. I guess as you step back on the pitch, how do you encourage that in your teammates? And are there particular attributes that you are trying as captain to really cultivate in the team culturally?

**AUBREY KINGSBURY:** Hmm. I think personal accountability is the main thing. Accountability, responsibility. Because you can't just be harping on people all the time. You've got to get them to uphold the standards as well, right? Like if me, as one of the captains and the other few co-captains are trying, we're severely outnumbered in a team of 26 or 30 people, and people are quick to kind of come and complain or share about things that they want improved.

And as leaders of the team, we're always like, "okay, well, what's your solution?" Because we find that people are quick to offer criticism but then don't necessarily

want to be part of the solution. So as much as we can keep things solution focused, that's been tremendous. But then also like I said, personal accountability, encouraging people to have tough conversations, from player to player, but also player to staff. So, we've had a lot of new staff members coming in and as much as the players themselves are very diverse and quite the motley crew, our staff is as well. We've brought in staff members from Spain and Japan and England.

And so, there's that kind of clash of cultures too, where some of our European-based staff members may think like, 'oh, this is the best philosophy' and us American players think, 'we have this best philosophy'. So how can we communicate and share like what we like, what we don't like, what we feel helps us be the best on the field, and bring that together and come up with the Spirit philosophy.

So, I think we're always kind of working on that. It's like we each have our ideas of what we need and what might be best for the team, but like, what is kind of our North star? What is this Washington Spirit way? What are the standards? So, I think it's tough work, kind of like swimming upstream, like you can't just coast and think it's just going to arrive there. You have to put the work in to get there. But I think if you can get ahead of it and have those tough conversations, it doesn't blow out of proportion. And then you've got the team ready to mutiny against the staff and all these problems later on.

But just encourage people to go have the tough conversation and solve a problem. Look to solve and just not, bring critiques, but just work together towards a solution.

**BEC HEINRICH:** You shared earlier just the language variety on the team getting literally the potential challenge of getting people's voices heard.

I guess it's easier off the pitch to take more time to debrief and unpack things when you are on the pitch, 40,000 potential fans cheering for you or against you. And maybe you can see there's a player there that has a perspective or is trying to do something that maybe the whole team's not aligned around at the same time.

How do you pull forth the voices of the team in those critical moments to ensure that you are staying connected and all heading towards the North Star?

**AUBREY KINGSBURY:** Right. Because you have halftime, you can kind of fix things, but in the middle of the game it's difficult.

So, maybe it's just a short couple words and then it's like, alright, I'll catch them later to explain something. So, for me, being a goalkeeper, I'll clearly see that in set pieces. So, I'm in charge of making sure everyone is clearly organized when the opponent has a set piece, which is basically just like a free kick and both teams kind of set up to defend or to score the goal.

And so, everyone has a very clear role to play defensively, exactly like where they should stand, to-the-T. And if there are moments, and there have been where people are out of place, I've actually gone and physically kind of like moved somebody a couple feet over, or just be like very visual with pointing or just simple commands.

Because it's not the moment for a conversation about how maybe they're out of position or should consider this instead of that. I think it's identifying what you have time for. Literally in the moment, you can't have this conversation about who's right, who's wrong. It's just - let's get you in the right spot and we will discuss at halftime or at the end of the game or in the next morning's video review.

So yeah, it just depends kind of on the context, knowing that there'll probably be a better moment for a follow up later and making sure like, "Hey, this is what I saw at that moment. That's why I did that." It wasn't meant to be aggressive. Do what the moment requires and have a follow up later.

**BEC HEINRICH:** If you're down in a game and you're heading into the locker room, what happens in the locker room in that halftime break?

**AUBREY KINGSBURY:** Could be anything from absolutely silent to just a lot of chatter. Honestly, people are pretty exhausted. So, at first it's just getting snacks, getting water, and kind of waiting for the staff to come in. But there is that

couple minutes where it's just the team. And I find that when we're silent, that's usually not the best indicator of team morale. So, I'll try to say a couple things about like, "oh, this looks good", "need to tighten up here or there" and then ask, "oh, what are you seeing?", "What are you guys thinking?" Just to kind of get some different perspectives, get some people to share what they're feeling.

And then the coaches will come in and either confirm or deny everything we've just said. But I find that when it's quiet, people get in their heads and you can make assumptions about maybe we're not doing well, or this or that. So, I think it's always good to just, "Hey, let's get it out there. What are we thinking before the coaches come in? Is there anything we need to get off our chest?". Open forum and see what's on people's minds.

**BEC HEINRICH:** That's great. You mentioned earlier about the importance of having tough conversations.

You are a team, so much diversity that you, you've talked about already, combine that with sort of the pressure of high performance in a professional league, you know, championships are on the line. If you do need to have a tough conversation with someone - like if you know you are out of alignment with a teammate, or maybe you can see two teammates are not on the same page, obviously this isn't going to happen in the middle of a game - how do you encourage the giving and receiving of feedback, amongst the locker room, when you're trying to enhance those relationships and keep the team rowing in the same direction?

**AUBREY KINGSBURY:** I think the first thing is just to have a good relationship with everyone. Where then you can kind of speak into their life or the scenario and that it will be received well.

So, we have, little ways that we do that. We have breakfast and lunch together every day. So, for me, I like to hang around. I'm not really in too much of a rush to leave the facility, but I'll stay, I'll eat, I'll chat with players and staff. We also like to go get coffees together. So, we'll grab a coffee after training if it's a shorter day, or on the road. We love to go get coffees before the game or if we get there early, we will explore a little bit. And then also we like to

play games. We'll bring little board games or cards. So, we're in the hotel the night before. We'll just kind of stay and hang out. Or even after the game it's hard to sleep, so we'll just chat anyways.

So, I think that it is important to lay the foundation, like I said, like to have a relationship where then you can come to someone and have a difficult conversation. Because it's like, oh, you never talked to me and now you want to say this or that'. They probably aren't going to be receptive to hearing it.

So, I think a, a lot of the hard work is done just in those communal spaces and kind of the downtime. That doesn't seem important but just spending time together then gives you permission and the liberty to be able to have a conversation when you need to. For me it's always about having the right time and place.

This is totally theoretical, hasn't happened, but, if it's somebody who maybe needs to step up more as a leader or you feel like they're not upholding team standards like that wouldn't be in front of the team. That wouldn't be, you know, on the side as everyone's lifting and thinking like, 'oh, what's that conversation over there?'

That would be in a separate place where you have the time to actually have the appropriate conversation for both sides to talk, to listen, to understand. So, I think just the time and place is super important. And like I said, having a foundation of a relationship where they know you care, they know you've got their best interest in mind, not just like waiting until the end, but having some open dialogue so it's not just "Hey, we need to talk." It's never like that. I try to be intentional about checking in on players. You can kind of tell who's not in the best form or you can tell if someone feels like maybe their confidence is a bit low. Because only 11 players play, and we've got a roster of like 26. So, there's always things going on, whether it's injuries, performance, things like that. So, I try to make my rounds and see how people are doing and then if there needs to be more of a talk, just finding the appropriate time for that.

**BEC HEINRICH:** You've been on wildly successful teams, obviously and Spirit comes to mind, previously and in 2025, I'm going to speak that into existence.

And you've had some teams I know you've been part of that maybe haven't lived up to expectations and dealing with that. I'd love to just to reflect on those two different experiences and are there any observations you'd make that, where you see the conditions are different, like the conditions are this way when a team has done really well and the conditions perhaps were this way when it didn't. Curious for your reflections on that?

**AUBREY KINGSBURY:** Yeah. I think that's like the most important question, right? Why do some teams underperform versus overperform, right? Because I definitely believe it's never just talent. Sure, there's maybe a little bit of luck in there at times, but also, I think over the long run, you'll never achieve way above for too long or way below. You eventually hit that sweet spot. I think in the teams that have overperformed maybe there was just this feeling of togetherness and sheer belief that no matter what obstacles be in our way, come what may, we would find a way. We didn't necessarily know how, but, it's just kind of this feeling [that] you could look in each other's eyes and know that they're with you.

So, I think that's huge. And again, there's not, I can't really put too many words to it, just this belief that you're looking around and everyone's committed, whether you're down a goal or two, whatever minute it is in the game, the belief that we're going to score.

I think especially on the soccer field, body language is super important. So, if you get scored on, are people slouching? Are they getting quiet? Are they in their heads or is it, "hey, pick it up!", "We've got this next five, come on, we're going to get it back." I think that makes all the difference. So those teams that have outperformed or had great seasons. I think it's that second example that we didn't hang our heads.

We knew we had the ability to come back, that we would win, we could win. Whereas the other is kind of like this almost victim mentality of, 'oh shoot, like we just got scored on. Oh, we're going to lose.' 'This is tough.' I think you can respond to those challenges, either of those two ways. And the teams that have succeeded and done great things always kind of rose to the occasion as opposed to kind of shrunk and felt that the circumstances were against them.

**BEC HEINRICH:** Believe! So, so powerful. And the togetherness and that confidence, having the swagger and confidence to keep believing even if maybe what's shown on the scoreboard is not reflecting what you believe could happen.

I have to admit, your job on the field is intense. I mean, you're standing there, you're at the back of the pitch. You can see the field, you've got this amazing view. But when the ball's coming at you. I feel terrified for you! I was like, "I can't watch, this is too intense!"

But how do you deal with your own nerves, the pressure, when you're sitting there and the opposition are charging at you and maybe their striker has the ball in front of the nets? What things keep you up at night? I'd be curious how do you handle yourself and get yourself ready in those moments, given that they're split second, obviously, and high stakes?

**AUBREY KINGSBURY:** A lot of it is just staying present. If I'm projecting too far in the future, thinking like, 'oh, we're up, we're gonna win this game.' Or thinking back in the past of maybe I made a bad pass or we gave up a silly goal. If I'm in the future or in the past, I'm not present, I'm not able to do good work.

So, a lot of it, I'll have simple techniques, whether that's box breathing or saying like some sort of mantra or something that I've identified might be helpful for the game or even just communicating to my defenders. Like, if you come watch me at a game, you will most definitely hear me. And that is for my teammates benefit, of course, but also it just keeps me present. I'll find I go quiet if I'm in my head. So, it's like, 'okay, Aubrey, snap out of this'. Start talking, communicate, always be connected with my back line. Because it may seem like the goalkeeper just stands at the box and it's a very reactive position, you only have to do something when somebody shoots, but I promise you that is not the case. I am always involved. I'm definitely playing right behind our back lines when the opposition tries to play a through ball, we call it, like a ball in behind our defense. I'm there to kind of sweep it away.

I actually use my feet more than I do with my hands. Some people might be surprised to hear that, but yeah, the rule of a keeper is much, much more than just

making saves, from shots on goal. I catch crosses, always organizing, there's so much that goes into it. So, I find that just being present, communicating is the way that I do that – helps me kind of get rid of those nerves, but there are always nerves. I'd be lying if I didn't say that. I don't get nervous at all for games! But it helps me. There's a saying, pressure is a privilege. It is a privilege to be in those high-pressure games and have those high-pressure moments and there's also the self-belief of knowing that I can come through in those moments that I've done it in the past, and I can do it again in the future.

**BEC HEINRICH:** I'm a big fan of the quote, pressure is a privilege, but I think your mindset of being present, carrying swagger, of trusting all the training and the past performance, for goodness sake, those three saves in a penalty shootout. It's got to set success forever!

Looking ahead, Aubrey, the playoffs are coming, I assume that's going to be a big goal here for the championship, but what are you and Spirit working on? What are you most excited about in the next season of your career?

I know you're mid-course of a season right now. But I guess as you look to, you called yourself a veteran earlier, that's sort of terrifying given your youth and vitality, but as you think about this stage of your career and where you're at, beyond this season of '25 too, I'm curious sort of what your hopes are coming forward.

**AUBREY KINGSBURY:** Obviously want to win the championship this year. Like I said, losing the finals, that is a great motivator. Losing definitely stings more than winning feels great. That is very true. Your losses kind of stick with you. So, that's the most immediate goal I think for me. I just want to be like a serial winner.

So, I won the championship in 2021 and have other accolades or successes with the Spirit and other teams. But I think the hard thing is to do that consistently, year in and year out. So, I would love to be part of a Washington Spirit dynasty. I think that kind of speaks to having a solid foundation.

Even in the corporate world, you can have success for maybe a quarter or a year, but like, are you a company that's still going to

be on top and making profits in the next decade or two? That's more what I'm interested in, is building something that's sustainable and not just like this rollercoaster that you never know what you're going to get on game day.

And that's kind of the spirit of years past. Like, we could be great one game and then just tank the next, and we are all over the place, but now we've kind of built to this sweet spot where I do believe, like we're learning and improving every game. And that's really, really exciting to me. And that's ultimately what I care about. Me getting better every day I go to work and my teammates getting better and seeing them reach their potential. Because ultimately if you have that happening across the board, you will be successful as a team. There's just no way you're not going to win if everyone is improving, day in, day out.

That's kind of my goal, is to be part of a spirit dynasty and for people to look back and a decade or two and be like, wow. They were a solid team.

**BEC HEINRICH:** I mean, if that's not breakthrough, I don't know what is. "I wanna be a serial winner." That's like quotable quote. I love that. I love that as you unpack that, you know, when you think about, how do you consistently bring that high performance and excellence on the field, with all of this motley crew that you're having to galvanize as captain, that it, you know, just listening to you, it really comes down to these small decisions consistently applied. Being fully present. The ability to learn constantly and have this commitment to up your performance little by little day after day, game after game consistently, season after season. I love that mindset and that mentality, and no doubt, it's a big reason for why you have been a such an amazing winner so far.

I want to do a few rapid fire questions here as we round this out. What are you most proud of in your career so far?

**AUBREY KINGSBURY:** Oh, I had the opportunity to go to the World Cup in 2023. I made the squad, so I think that would be my most proud moment. Something that every girl playing soccer dreams of and yeah it was an incredible experience.

It didn't end quite the way we wanted. We lost in the quarterfinals to Sweden, but still just to be a part of that team. Talk about, yeah, a high performance team, that was it. Just making that team. I'm so proud of myself for that.

**BEC HEINRICH:** I obviously work in the business world. Many of our listeners do too, though. We have a motley crew of audience as well. But what advice would you give for those leaders that are in other sport, other fields, I would say other than sport, just in terms of their pursuit of trying to enlist a motley crew and really build a winning team culture. And what, what advice would you give me?

**AUBREY KINGSBURY:** I think, honestly, you just kind of said it, um, that it's built day by day. I think you kind of look past the simple things of life and just think of these grand actions or just the big things. But, Rome wasn't built in a day like nothing that's worth having is achieved quickly. It takes time. Any good relationship, anything good just takes time. So, it's just doing the right things every day, like being better tomorrow than you were yesterday. And also just having avenues to discuss like what's going well, what's not going well, because you can't fix problems that you're not aware of, so I think open lines of communication, like respect, trust, and just

vulnerability is hugely important. But just doing that day in, day out, you know, like a string of good days leads to a good week, month, year life, everything.

**BEC HEINRICH:** I suspect there might be some 10-year-old girls out there and boys for that matter, who are, are eager to hear from you here. And I'm curious if one of them is out there, what advice would you give them in terms of getting the best out of themselves as a soccer player?

**AUBREY KINGSBURY:** Ooh, that's tough because I feel like kids nowadays have so much pressure, that I wasn't necessarily under when I was a kid. Again, I had no dreams of playing women's pro soccer. But now these kids are asked to specialize and to pick their sport at such a young age. So really, I would say to just enjoy the game for the pure love of it, because if you enjoy what you do, you're going to want to practice, you're going to want to put time and effort into getting better. If you're not enjoying it, then you're not going to want to stick with it. So, yeah, to just enjoy it for the love of it. And I think that ultimately that's what leads to success.

**BEC HEINRICH:** That's great. So this is the Breakthrough By Design podcast and I want to ask you this final question. What does breakthrough mean to you?

**AUBREY KINGSBURY:** Breakthrough means to me – finding a new way of seeing and doing things. Getting out of your old ways to kind of discover something new.

**KIM CHRISTFORT:** What a fantastic conversation! Thank you to our inspiring guest, Aubrey Kingsbury, for sharing her breakthrough lessons on leadership, resilience, and building a winning team, especially as she and the Spirit chase the championship this year.

And a huge thank you to Bec Heinrich for stepping into the host's chair. Bec, your energy, insight, and passion for building transformative teams absolutely shines through.

As we cheer on Aubrey and the Spirit through the playoffs, I hope you take away some motley crew inspiration: that breakthrough can come from small daily choices, celebrating each other's strengths, and never backing down under pressure.

For more stories like this, visit [breakthroughmanifesto.com](https://breakthroughmanifesto.com)—and until next time, keep pursuing your own breakthroughs!

Thank you for listening to Breakthrough by Design, where we believe everyone has the potential for breakthrough.

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