NINA MOINI: These days, Natasha Howard is Jersey number 1 on the Minnesota Lynx. She returned to the team this season after nearly a decade of competing on other WNBA teams and internationally. The last time she played for Minnesota, they won the 2017 championship. She won two other titles with the Seattle Storm, and was named the 2019 Defensive Player of the Year.

Howard is a three time All-Star, and now she's also an author. Her memoir,*The Vision Through My Lens-- My Life in Basketball and Beyond,* is out this week. Natasha Howard joins me now. Welcome to the program. Thank you so much for sharing this with us.

NATASHA HOWARD: No problem. Thank you for having me.

NINA MOINI: Congratulations on this and on all of your continued success. I know you're busy, and the WNBA has a very demanding schedule. We mentioned you also play overseas in the offseason. What made you decide to take the time and that now was really the time to tell your story in a book.

NATASHA HOWARD: Well, I always wanted to write a book when I was in college, and I never had the chance to do it because college is very busy with school and stuff practice. So I never really had the time. And it just came out of nowhere that my marketing team was like asking me like that they heard that I wanted to write a book one day. And I'm like, yeah, actually want to write a book about my life.

And it ended up happening, what, a couple years ago that we actually started the process. And a lot of people don't me outside of basketball. So I want to give everybody an inside of who I am as Natasha Howard and not Natasha Howard, the basketball player.

NINA MOINI: Totally, totally. No, that makes sense. And you write about a lot of growing up and your different experiences and the well-roundedness of who you are and all your different parts of your life. You write about your uncle Greg getting you started with basketball by, I think it was offering you $2 for dribbling the ball.

NATASHA HOWARD: Yeah.

NINA MOINI: Tell me, how did you feel about the game back then? Is it something you always you loved as soon as you started?

NATASHA HOWARD: I actually didn't love basketball. That's the thing. I was only 10 years old. I was only 10 years old when I started playing basketball. So I didn't really care for it.

I just wanted to be a kid. I wanted to figure out what I wanted to do growing up as a kid in life and stuff. But I give credit to my uncle. Everybody asked me who started me? My uncle, he started me.

And I give credit to him because I wouldn't be where I'm at without him putting a ball in my hand. So I thank my uncle for also doing that and stuff. So I always wanted to be like a firefighter or a police officer growing up, but it turned out that I'm a basketball player. [LAUGHS]

NINA MOINI: Well, and you're good at it. So again, thanks, uncle Greg. [LAUGHS] You also, though, you write about difficult aspects of your childhood too, alongside all of that love and support. What did you most want people to about the experiences that you did have growing up, that you feel like other people could relate to or take something away from It?

NATASHA HOWARD: Don't let your experience define who you are as a person and stuff. Especially growing up for me, just growing up, just growing up struggling as a kid and stuff, don't let that define you when you get older and stuff. A lot of people-- me, I didn't have a lot of stuff growing up, and I made the best out of what I had.

And me, I turned my mindset, like I'm going to have to work 10 times harder than other people to get what I want or get to where I need to be at. And that's what I always told myself, even till this day. Now, I tell myself I might have to work a little bit harder. I might have to do a little extra work to get what I want or what I deserve.

NINA MOINI: Mm-hmm. And you've been doing work and giving it more than your 100% in the WNBA now for 13 years. So, I mean, you've seen a lot of things. And you've seen some transformation in the league in terms of maybe new fans, new teams, just more attention maybe. How different does it feel to be a player now compared to a decade ago?

NATASHA HOWARD: It's amazing. I'm happy that I'm able to still play the game that I love.

NINA MOINI: Mm-hmm.

NATASHA HOWARD: Just me staying healthy and stuff, but also you're seeing the league just grow and just change over the years than when I started. It's just an amazing feeling to be a part of this history that what the leaders' going through.

So it's a blessing. It's an honor that I'm still able to play, like I said, and also, teams that still want a player like me to be a part of their team. So I'm very grateful. I'm very honored. I'm just happy that things are changing for the league and also changing for the players that been in League for so long, too.

NINA MOINI: And we know the FIBA World Cup just ended. And I did want to talk about your experience just playing internationally, because players today do have more options to your point about growing attention and popularity, more options to stay in the US maybe during the offseason. Do you plan to stick with playing internationally?

NATASHA HOWARD: Absolutely I am. This offseason, I'm going to play in Turkey one more time.

NINA MOINI: Cool.

NATASHA HOWARD: Last time. I'm done playing overseas after that.

NINA MOINI: Mm-hmm. And your team here, I mean, Lynx rookie Olivia Miles has said that you're one of her favorite teammates she's ever played with. You've made a great duo on the court helping each other out.

It seems like you're serving as a mentor on the team, having a great season on your own. How is it having been in the league for a while now? Do you see yourself as a mentor? And maybe you always did in a way.

NATASHA HOWARD: I do see myself as a mentor for some of these for some of the young players, that's coming into the league. Some of them actually look up to me on different teams and stuff. And a player that I play with, they actually look up to me as well. They've even been in the league longer than some of the rookies, some of the people that been in the league for a little bit now. And I'm happy that I'm grateful to give anybody the knowledge that they need to become a better player or a better person, whatever they want.

NINA MOINI: Mm-hmm.

NATASHA HOWARD: But I definitely see myself as a mentor for the generation that's in the league right now and also the people that came in the league with me.

NINA MOINI: Mm-hmm. And in a way, your book and writing your book and wanting to share that knowledge, I think, speaks to that as well. Just wanting to open doors for others and saying, hey, I worked so hard. I made it this far.

I've got some stuff to share to help other people along on their journey. That's you don't have to do that, but it's an amazing thing to do for others. Speaking of watching the league change, WNBA Commissioner, Cathy Engelbert, recently announced she was stepping away from the role. What are you hoping to see in the next leader of the league?

NATASHA HOWARD: I just want somebody to listen to what we want as players.

NINA MOINI: Mm-hmm.

NATASHA HOWARD: And you know, no bad blood between me and Cathy or anything like that. She was a good commissioner. Don't get me wrong, she was.

But we-- I feel like the whole league want somebody that understands us as an athlete, as a basketball players, as a person, but as an athlete as well. So I feel like we want somebody that understands us as pro athletes that actually play the game as well too. So that's what I think that we want. That's for the next commissioner that's going to be coming in.

NINA MOINI: So the Lynx's next game is coming up on Friday against the New York Liberty. You're coming off a break. The playoffs are just a few weeks away. How are you getting prepared? What are your days looking like?

NATASHA HOWARD: I had a good week off.

[LAUGHTER]

Our coach gave us a good week off. So I had a good week on a little vacation and stuff like that.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

NATASHA HOWARD: --we've been back after that, we've been going hard for a whole week in practice and stuff. Some of our players have been at the FIBA World Cup and stuff. The people that [INAUDIBLE] wasn't on the team, we've been here just working on the things that we need to work on to be better and get ready for the playoff push.

So we only have four games left. And that's the main focus that we're focusing on right now is getting these last four games, four wins under our belt. And then they're focusing on playoffs.

NINA MOINI: Well, Natasha, thank you so much for your time and for sharing about your new book with us. We really appreciate it.

NATASHA HOWARD: No problem. You guys are welcome.

NINA MOINI: Minnesota Lynx forward Natasha Howard's memoir, *The Vision Through My Lens-- My Life in Basketball and Beyond,* is out today.