

INTERVIEWER: It is big news. Minnesota Lynx and WNBA fans won't get a chance to see the great Maya Moore Irons play again. The Minnesota Lynx and WNBA star and Olympic champion announced yesterday that she is officially retiring from professional basketball, after stepping away four years ago. Now the story is back in 2019, she helped overturn the wrongful conviction of the man who became her future husband, Jonathan Irons.

And today she's releasing a book she wrote in partnership with her husband called *Love and Justice*. It's about the couple's journey to overturning Jonathan Irons wrongful conviction. He was serving a 50 year sentence that began when he was 16 years old. And after serving 23 years, his conviction was overturned and he was released in 2020. Here to talk about her work with Jonathan on their new book and her retirement is the one AND the only Maya Moore. Maya, thank you so much for being here.

MAYA MOORE Well, thank you for having me.

IRONS:

INTERVIEWER: It's a pleasure. You know, you were at the height of your career in 2019 when you left to help get your now husband Jonathan released from prison after that wrongful conviction. Walk us through that life changing decision.

MAYA MOORE Yeah, it was a decision that was unexpected. And it kind of happened over time. As many of you know, I was very active and committed to the basketball world, the basketball rhythm, playing in overseas countries, playing in Minneapolis and the Twin City area, and also for the Olympic team. And my presence was very much committed to that space.

But as every year would go by with Jonathan's fight for freedom and our family committing to Jonathan and him committed to our family, it was just becoming more I think apparent to my soul that I needed to be more present for his fight. And just more present at home. And kind get a more restful rhythm. And create space in my life to be able to actually engage in this super meaningful kind of once in a lifetime experience that was Jonathan's fight for freedom.

INTERVIEWER: You covered a lot of ground in this book *Love and Justice*. You and Jonathan got to tell each of your stories over the course of 20 years from your individual perspectives. Your husband really went into depth about the more than 20 years that he was incarcerated. How tough was that for you to read and process all that?

MAYA MOORE Yeah, that's been one of the biggest concerns that I had as we were thinking through what does writing a book look like. Because my protective heart just first and foremost being his friend like, I don't want you to have to relive those moments. I don't want you to have to think about that ever again.

But Jonathan he prayed through it and thought about it and processed with us about how he wanted to shine light on those things, so that it would help prevent it from happening again. To help change the culture, to have other people's minds exposed to the damage that can be done when we don't do the right thing. When people and systems are not designed and set up to humanize people and to protect people. And we just kind of just, again, just look at the profit or how we can take advantage of those who are most vulnerable. These are the kinds of things that can happen. So, Jonathan had so much courage and decided to write it.

INTERVIEWER: When he was released from prison I remember seeing photos of you too outside the prison. Have you learned new things about your husband now that you're able to be together?

MAYA MOORE Yeah, oh man, marriage. It's a whole thing. You're just learning each other. And you're learning about yourself in ways that you weren't aware of because you have this person that now gets to see all of you.

And I think one of the highlights for me is just to see really how much of a leader Jonathan is. I would hear about his life through his mouth all these years, but now to actually watch his life right next to him. And to see what kind of shepherd's heart that he has and how creative he is. And he started his own dog business. And he's just really good at putting teams together and leading people. So I've been really nicely surprised by that.

But also one of the things that surprised me too is the fact that I have to remind him literally to eat. Like he'll just go, go, go, go doing stuff, doing stuff. And I'm like, Hon. You need to eat lunch. And he's like, oh yeah. I am kind of hungry. So I've had to really step up and be like making sure he's eating three meals a day.

INTERVIEWER: Good, good, good, good. You are one of the rare athletes to leave their sport in the prime of their career. Many athletes seem to be kind of lost after retirement because their identity is wrapped up in what they've done. Well, actually, many people are like that. You've looked beyond basketball and have charted a life. How long have you been thinking about your next steps?

MAYA MOORE Great question. It's so true, right? We do find meaning in what we do. That's a big part of how we're wired as humans, to find satisfaction and a sense of purpose and identity in the things that we do. But at the same time, we need to have a well-balanced life. We need to be able to know when to put something down, and when to pick something up, and when to shift our attention and our energy, and to rest. And all these different things.

And so as I've grown older and just matured in my faith, in my life, and my perspective, I've just really started to realize how important it is to have balance and rest. And a lot of times when you see really high level things done, it's not necessarily because of balance and rest. It's because you're grinding and you're really just going after something super, super hard, which has its time and its place. But I think the balance for me was needing to be more rooted in my community, to be able to have some more intimate relationships consistently.

Because as pros we're bouncing around and moving around. We're rarely rooted in one place. And also just rest. Being able to rest from public life, in a sense, which again has its time in its place. Rest my body, and then rest my mind so that I can engage and pick up some of these weighty emotional and mental and spiritual things that is justice. And so I was very thoughtful about it.

And wanting to make sure that I also communicated as best as I could to people who appreciate me as an athlete. And I did the best that I could. And I think it turned out pretty well.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, well, that's an understatement, my friend. It turned out very, very well. As you leave the court, as you leave the court, what do you want to be known for? Because you are this multifaceted individual, that's kind of a hard question, I suppose, to answer.

MAYA MOORE Yeah, the impact that you leave on people that's legacy, right? If you are fortunate enough to leave a legacy that is able to impact people beyond your life, you want to do that. And so I really tried my best to leave everything out on the court. Leave my best with the fan after the game when I was engaging with them in an autograph line. Or my best to my teammates. Or my friends that I have in Minnesota.

I was just somebody who tried to be fully engaged in whatever I was doing. And so that's really more of a posture necessarily than an accomplishment or a style. I like to bring passion. I like to bring fun. And I hope people remember me not just for the way I played the game, which was great. I'm aware of my game and the great things that I was able to do with my teammates.

But I also tried to see people. I also tried to make people feel how special they are and appreciate and gratitude and celebration. I was cultivated that way by great coaches, great family members. And so I just tried to pour that out. Really that spirit of celebration and working hard and joy when you play.

INTERVIEWER: Well, we celebrate you, your accomplishments, your life, and with gratitude and appreciation for everything you've done. And it was just a joy to watch you on the court. And we wish you all the best, Maya Moore. Thank you so much.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

We have been talking to Maya Moore, of course, Minnesota Lynx star, Olympic champion. Her book is called *Love and Justice*. Thank you for listening to Minnesota Now here on MPR News.