

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH ABBY WAMBACH

SUBJECT: RETIREMENT AND BEYOND

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**JOHN HUGHES:** (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome to this special National Press Club luncheon here at Georgetown University, a special National Press Club luncheon on the road in the nation's capital. My name is John Hughes. I'm an editor for Bloomberg's First Word, that's Bloomberg News's breaking news desk here in Washington. And I am the President of the National Press Club. Our guest today is U.S. Women's World Cup winner, Abby Wambach, the world's all time international goal score leader.

But first, I want to introduce our distinguished head table which includes club members and also guests of the speaker. From the audience's right, Pam Lambo, senior public affairs officer at the Canadian embassy; Salome Ramseier, head of communications at the Swiss embassy; Rachel Oswald, foreign policy reporter for Congressional Quarterly, and a native of Rochester, New York, our speaker's home town; Judy Wambach, the mother of our speaker; Angel Livas, president of DC Media Connection, and a member of the National Press Club softball team; Sarah Huffman, the wife of our speaker; Jerry Zremski, Washington bureau chief of *The Buffalo News*, chairman of the National Press Club Speakers Committee, and former president of the National Press Club.

Skipping over our speaker for a moment, Angela Greiling Keane, White House correspondent for Bloomberg News, a former president of the Press Club and the Speakers Committee member who organized today's lunch. Thank you, Angela; Pete Wambach, the father of our speaker; Gail DeGeorge, a freelance journalist who spent much of her career in south Florida where football doesn't just mean the Miami Dolphins;

Anna Miller, health and wellness reporter for *U.S. News & World Report*; Kevin Wensing, a retired Navy captain and a member of the American Sportscasters Association. (Applause)

I also want to welcome our guests here in the room today at Georgetown and our C-SPAN and Public Radio audiences. You can follow the action on Twitter. Use the hashtag NPCLive. That's hashtag NPCLive.

Well, our speaker today, as I said, is the all time leading scorer in the history of international soccer; that's both men and women. Abby Wambach has also played on two Olympic gold medal teams. She was the 2012 FIFA World Player of the Year. And in May, *Time* magazine included her in its list of the 100 most influential people in the world.

This summer, her team brought the Women's World Cup back to the United States for the first time since 1999 by beating Japan in that memorable match 5-2. Yesterday, President Obama welcomed the Women's National Team to the White House. He said the players have taught us that, "Playing like a girl means you're a badass." Now, that's not a word heard often in public at the White House or here at a National Press Club luncheon. But the audience thought it was an appropriate way to describe Wambach and her teammates.

Abby grew up as the youngest of seven children near Rochester, New York, and she began playing soccer when she was five years old. She scored 27 goals in her first three games and was immediately moved to be competing against the boys. She helped put women's soccer in the spotlight throughout her career. She has never shied away from speaking her mind, whether in talking about referees or turf or challenging homophobia in sports.

Yesterday, after visiting the White House, Wambach made some huge news. She announced her retirement. Within minutes of U.S. Soccer posting the announcement, the news lit up Twitter and quickly spread around the world. Now at age 35, Wambach begins the next phase of her career in life. What's in store? We now get a chance to hear directly from the source. Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in giving a warm National Press Club welcome to Abby Wambach. (Applause)

**MS. WAMBACH:** Thank you, guys, for being here. I very rarely, and my mom can attest to this, write a speech. She's wanted me to do that for my whole life. She wants me to be über prepared for everything. And so for this day, I actually put some stuff on paper. We'll see if I stick to the script. But first of all, I just want to thank the National Press Club for having me and my family and my friends. It's truly an honor to be here and have the opportunity to share this moment with you.

Just a few months ago, I was part of something special in representing my country winning a World Cup championship. I have to send my sincere thanks to all of you who covered the Women's World Cup. Without you pitching your ideas for articles, for

videos or any space you can put women in your respective outlets, our championship doesn't get shared in the positive light that it was. For that, I will forever be grateful. People don't realize how important the media is to the success of events like that. It not only changed my life and my perspective, but you have changed the lives of all the kids out there dreaming, dreaming of being whatever it is they want in life. You have that effect. Know that and never forget it.

Bringing back the World Cup to the U.S. with my teammates was absolutely the highlight of my career. It was special not just because we won, but how we won and how we transcended the game itself. It was clear it wasn't just about soccer anymore, but about how our team defined what is so beautiful about sport and our country. If you dare to dream and you work towards that dream, things you never thought possible can happen. Yes, winning was our goal, but as a byproduct of winning is what made it even more special.

We have a unique opportunity to effect real change. I believe this summer is another example of where we are and where we want to go in regards to women in sport and beyond. It's been an epic summer for many reasons. Serena Williams, the Supreme Court ruling, presidential candidates, all things that will go down in history as life changing. I believe winning the World Cup will be among these things that we look back upon and say it was life changing. Not just because I experienced it, or I got to hoist the trophy, but what it means to all those who get to cherish and the magnitude of the possibilities it will provide millions of people with hope; hope of a brighter future, a future full of equal opportunity.

And then a strange thing happened when I started to consider my own future. I accomplished everything I set out to; Olympic gold medals, broken records, hundreds of appearances for my country, and that elusive World Cup championship. So on paper, I did it all. But it doesn't make it any easier to say to you today what I'm about to say. At the end of this year, I will be retiring from the game of soccer. Wow. There, I said it out loud. You know, it's actually appropriate because I started my career here in D.C. in 2002 so it makes it a very fitting end to be announcing this here in our nation's capital.

I was lucky enough to get drafted here to play from the University of Florida by the Washington Freedom. And I don't know if you guys know her, but her name is Mia Hamm. She was on the team that I got drafted to play on. And not many people know how vital it was to my success as a soccer player. But more, even as a person. Mia taught me so much on the field. But the things I soaked up from her off of it may have been more instrumental. She taught me that it wasn't about how many goals you scored or championships you won, but how you conducted yourself amid all of that glory that defined you.

Character is a funny thing. I've found that your character is tested the most when things don't go your way. Mia and all the '99ers taught me that. So many women came before me, and it's my hope and belief that there will be many more that come after me. I was worried at one point that I wasn't going to be able to leave the game better than I

found it, much like my idols Mia and Julie did. I feared, “Man, this isn't going to turn out how I envisioned. This isn't going to be that fairy tale ending.” I can safely say that not only is it my time to step away, but that I know deep down in my heart that the game has grown, and will continue to grow. And in this culture and in our current climate, I know that it's no longer the feel good thing to invest in women's sport, but in fact it's a smart business decision. That is when it became clear to me that my time as an athlete on the field is over.

I know that the next generation of players will grow the game in different ways. My role will be different now, but I still am committed to continuing the growth of women's sports and beyond. It's hard to believe that this day is here. I've played the game for 30 years, and during these 30 years, I've so many people I need to thank for the life I've been able to have. I honestly-- this could probably take four days in how many people I actually need to thank. So first and foremost, if I miss you or I don't say your name, it doesn't mean that you weren't part of this or part of my life, but I just have to thank specifically a few people.

The organization, U.S. Soccer. Without you guys, without your support, there's no way I'm standing here having television cameras looking at me retiring. When I was a little girl, and first started out playing in the Olympic development program, and then beyond into the youth national team programs, I didn't dream that this was even a possibility. I had no idea. And without this environment, without U.S. Soccer's help, the Abby Wambach that you've all come to know wouldn't be me, wouldn't be here. So Sunil Gulati, Dan Flynn, thank you guys very much for giving me the platform to be able to do what I do, and have been able to do what I've done for so many years.

I have sponsors like Nike and Gatorade that have believed in me for over ten years. I'm a loyal person and a firm believer in the concept of family. I've been so lucky to have had the opportunity to call some of the greatest brands on the planet my family. You will never know how valuable you have been to me. And all I ask is that you keep investing in women and continue that fight. It will pay off, I promise.

I have to thank all the coaches I've had, and there's a bunch, all the way from my high school days, Kathy Boughton, to college, Becky Burleigh, and all the national team coaches that have given me the chance to represent my country for all these years. Jerry Smith, you gave me the belief that I could play at the highest level. April Heinrichs, you gave me my first cap and my first Olympic gold medal, so thank you for that. Pia Sundhage, you created the best environment for any team I've played on and led us to my second Olympic gold medal. And then, of course, Jill Ellis, our current coach, who gave me the chance to hoist a World Cup trophy. What a ride it's been, and all of my head coaches, you've made a huge impact and difference in my life.

It's not just about the head coaches. There's a ton of other people, support staff, that I've had help me throughout my journey. I've had countless doctors, assistant coaches, trainers, strength coaches, conditioning coaches, which I'm not going to be too sad to say goodbye to. They've just helped me, Omi, Slater, Cody, Gigi, Dawn, Greg,

Rick, Kristin, Ann, Sue, Bruce, Boyan, Doc Powell, Damon, Walshie, Tony, Paul, Billy, Tracy. I know this sounds ridiculous, but they'll be really excited that I've said their name. Vic, Lexie, Haif, Dan, and one of my best friends, Kara. You all kept me healthy and able to do anything when I needed to. And whether it was fixing my broken toe or helping me write speeches, everybody had their part and played their part and gave me the chance to be the very best I could be when I needed to be it. You guys are my unsung heroes, and I couldn't thank you any more.

So this one's going to be harder for me because I think that not many people realize how important my teammates are. In anything you do, whether it's work or team, you have people around you that help you. And my teammates are that for me. You know, I think Lauren Holiday said it the best the other day when she said that we only really know how to live life with each other, probably maybe more than with our own family members or our own partners. And I think that all of my teammates have made my career what it is. I would never have done anything that I've done on the field if it weren't for all of you. No goal, no assist, no record, no championship if I didn't have any of you guys by my side. Whether I played one time with you or 200 times with you, you all made a difference in some way.

The early days with Mia, Julie, Brandy, Lil, to the original gangsters in Piercey, Shannon, Heio, Pino, Sid, Alex, Ash, thanks for being here today. I really appreciate it. They didn't actually ask, they just told me that they were going to come, which just shows you kind of how amazing my teammates are. I can't even get rid of them, it's actually the truth. And everybody that I've ever had a chance and the privilege of donning the field with. You guys are all loved and special and important on so many levels. So, thank you guys for being here and supporting me on this great, amazing day.

I want to thank Dan Levy, my agent. I never remember to thank him, ever. It's like one of the things like every time I do a big speech I'm like, "Oh, I forgot, that's bad." So I want to thank you. It's been over ten years that we've worked together and you keep me on schedule. You make sure that I know what I'm doing and you do it in a way that not only is professional, but makes me less stressed about knowing what my schedule is over the next year to two years, to five years, whatever it is. I love you Dan, very much, and I really appreciate all the support that you've given me throughout the years.

My friends and family, these are the people who shaped me, the people who supported my dreams, the people that saw something in me from when I was a little girl just dreaming of something that wasn't even a possibility. I guess that's when you know you love somebody; when you support somebody in a dream that you don't even know can become a reality. So, I urge everyone out there that knows someone that has a gift and a passion and support them in their dreams. I love you all for believing in me and showing me I could be whatever I wanted to be. I dared to dream because of all of you.

Mom, Dad, all my brothers and sisters, I've got a ton of them. My in-laws as well, Sarah, there's no way that I would have been able to play for as long as I've been able to play if it weren't for the support of these people. And what's so hard is not many people

understand how often we are gone and how important it is that I have people that can help with not just paying the bills and keeping the house in order, I miss a lot of birthdays, I've missed a lot of weddings, I've missed a lot of my family's life and it's because of this one dream and this one belief and passion that I've had. So, what I want to say to my family is that I'm coming home now and be patient with me because it's going to be an interesting transition. I'm not going to be perfect, but you know that I will give it everything that I've got and do everything that I can to try to transition into hopefully what is a normal-ish life.

And if you know me, you know that I would not be that brief. I can talk for days. They gave me a time limit, I don't know if I've gone over that yet. But what I really want to talk about is not just about my career, because I really can't stand talking about myself. I want to talk about where we can go and where we're headed. I want to talk about moving the ball forward.

And when I look around, especially going through this victory tour and I look in the crowd and I see the fans and you see a Twitter post from 15 years ago to this year and what our fan draw was from then until now, and there was literally like 800 people in the stands 15 years ago and then you fast forward to 35, 40 thousand people coming to our games right now during this victory tour. I know that we've made huge strides, I know that we've made serious change happen. But I also know there's so much more we can do.

And it's going to take a lot of effort. It's going to take people reaching into their pockets and investing in women. And it's not about investing in me, it's about investing in the next generation of studs. It's about making sure you feel like it's not like the good-- like I said before, the feel good thing to do. It's actually smart to invest in women's sports. Ask Fox. This last summer, they killed it, they killed it. And the reason why they killed it because they believed in it and they saw the potential of growth that this game could have, that women in this game could have.

Now, I really want to transition my career from inspiring kids to play and do something that they never thought possible into maybe doing something beyond that, something bigger than that. I keep getting these questions asked, "Well, what are you going to do next?" And I am not kidding you, I wholeheartedly believe that I want to be part of changing the world. And I think that the first part of my career definitely has been-- I've been able to do that. I've been able to change the landscape of women's soccer as we know it.

It would be my, and it will be, my life's mission to make sure that off the field that women are given all the opportunities that they can and deserve, that we can talk about equal opportunities for everybody. And it's not just about women. Everybody deserves the chance to do whatever they want, to follow their dreams, to follow their passions.

My life has kind of evolved organically. I was a naturally gifted athlete. I'm an extrovert, so I don't mind speaking in front of people. I'm doing so much better, I'm a

much better talker than reader, obviously. And I really do believe that I was put on this planet to play sports and to be involved in sport. And I do believe that sport can transcend and can give people confidence and can change the world and make it actually a better place. As cliché as that may sound, it's possible. And I've been a part of it. My teammates have been a part of it, my family has seen it happen.

And so I just want people to know, and remember, it's not about me. It's not about necessarily our team, it's about the next generation. And that's what I want to do, is I want to be a part of positively effecting change for the next generation of kids out there who may not know what they want to do, may not know who they are, but they can look at our team, they can look at me and they can say, "I'm going to be authentically who I need to be in this moment," because that's all you need to be, is yourself.

I'm so happy to have been able to sit here and talk to you guys a little bit about my journey, thank all the people that I had to thank. And really, I can't implore enough that our World Cup isn't as successful as it was if it weren't for the media, if it weren't for the people writing the stories, pitching the ideas to put it on television. Take a chance. Don't be late to the party. You're going to be kicking yourself if you do. And I think that you will see in the coming months, in the coming years, that it's not just about women's sports, but it's beyond. It's women in the business world, it's women having equal opportunity. Thank you guys very much for having me. I really appreciate it. (Applause)

**MR. HUGHES:** Thank you so much, Abby. So you're not quite done, come on back up. Talked about wanting to continue to change the world. There are so many different avenues you could pursue as you carry out that goal. Do you have any thoughts on which types of ways you would like to move forward in bringing about that change?

**MS. WAMBACH:** I think it's a good question, and I think that that's something that will eventually evolve. But to answer it in a really quick way, I want to change the world in every way. I want to change the world not just on the soccer field, but off of it; in the locker room, in the boardroom. We need to get women making decisions on how to allocate funds. We need to get more women in FIFA, on the executive board making decisions that will help not just my team, but that next generation, like I said.

Truthfully, I am open to any idea. I just want to be part of anything I possibly can that will positively influence women in sports and beyond.

**MR. HUGHES:** You also mentioned you expect to have a little bit more time, and certainly time for your family. But now that you've announced your retirement, what is the first non-soccer related thing that you're going to do or enjoy doing?

**MS. WAMBACH:** Hmm. That is a really good question. I do not know. What am I doing tomorrow? I'm flying home tonight, which is going to be nice. And I think that I've been working out for 30 years, so I'm going to take a minute, as it pertains to that. I'm not going to lift a weight for probably a month or something. I don't know. I

don't know what I'm going to do non-soccer related. I think I'm just going to spend time at my house for three days and then I have to leave again.

**MR. HUGHES:** President Obama was pretty direct yesterday when talking about the level of play in women's sports. Yet, he's right about attention and money. How best to address these disparities?

**MS. WAMBACH:** Well, I think that we all saw this summer that there was plenty of talent around the world as it pertains to women's soccer. And I think that it is a problem, that there's so much disparity between the women and men and how the money gets allocated. That's something that I want to do and want to work towards to fix and make better. We have-- just seeing the glaring disparity is unnerving and frustrating. And especially because you see women who deserve everything that the men get and women who deserve everything that they've earned.

And I think that that's the most important thing that I want to keep driving home, is women and sport, we showed that we were fun to watch this summer. We were the highest rated soccer game that's ever been aired in the United States of America. That's pretty awesome, men or women. And I think that that's something that companies, corporate sponsors, televisions, channels, they can't ignore anymore. The highest people, the highest. (Applause)

**MR. HUGHES:** You mentioned all of the soccer fans, and there's a lot of soccer fans out there. Are there any actions that soccer fans can take in support of these more equitable playing conditions for female players compared with their male counterparts?

**MS. WAMBACH:** Well, I think that any kind of inequity that we see, you have to support whether it's your local team that-- the Washington Spirits here, they play out at the sportsplex in Germantown. Whether it's going to a WNBA game, whether it's being, you know, in a position to make decisions that will then have a trickle down positive effect for women in sport. Whatever it is, everybody has a chance, you have a choice. And for me, that's something that I want to make more readily available.

Oftentimes, I hear people say, "Well, you're not on television, you know." Well, sometimes it's going to take you to go to an actual event, buy a ticket, go and support your local women's teams. Or, if you do turn on the television and a women's program is on, watch it. Watch how amazing some of these athletes are. The women who are playing now, the younger kids that are coming on the team now that I've watched are far better than I was at their age and it's going to be really awesome to see in ten years where we're even at because the game has gotten so much better. I can't wait to see ten years from now how amazing the game is going to be.

**MR. HUGHES:** FIFA, the governing body of soccer, has been under fire and investigation for corruption. How does this shadow affect the women's game at the international level?



**MS. WAMBACH:** Well, I think that it's been made clear that the corruption at FIFA is, maybe in large part, because there aren't enough women in FIFA. Maybe there's some sort of correlation there? I don't know. But obviously there's so many things that I don't know about FIFA. But what I do know is I'm going to fight to get women more involved not just in the decision-making things that happen within FIFA, but the executive committee getting more women involved, period, will I think make FIFA a much better organization and one that I know my teammates would be proud to play under.

**MR. HUGHES:** Would you ever consider standing as the North American soccer's governing body's representative to FIFA? This is the--

**MS. WAMBACH:** CONCACAF, yeah, that's CONCACAF. Sure, I'll do it.  
(Laughter)

**MR. HUGHES:** You say that you never saw the need to be in the closet as a soccer player. But some sports are a lot less accepting of same sex couples. What will it take for locker rooms, for more men's sports, to widely accept gay players?

**MS. WAMBACH:** I think that for me, it's just going to take time and you have players like Michael Sam who came out and I don't know what it's like to be in a male locker room and I do know what it's like to be in a female's locker room. So, I had an experience that is probably going to be very different than most gay men have, and will have, in terms of coming out. I just want them to know that they're not alone. I support them, as does so many people out there. And that's absolutely something else I want to be able to fight for.

For so many years, I never wanted to be this person who put myself on a mountain and screamed from the mountaintops about my sexuality because it didn't matter to the way I played the game. But it does matter to who I am as a person, and it does matter in terms of where we are at as a culture and being open-minded and giving everybody the respect and equal opportunity.

And for all those kids out there who might be struggling with some sort of identity issue themselves, it's okay to be yourself. It's okay to be authentically who you are, no matter what, period. And that's definitely something that I want to be a promoting person for and advocate for those kids out there who may not know-- who may not feel comfortable in their own skin. I want to advocate for them because if they don't feel comfortable, I'll be the person to tell them you are loved and you are heard.

**MR. HUGHES:** You mentioned in your talk about reconnecting with your family. What about your hometown of Rochester, New York? Do you see yourself using your celebrity status in Rochester in support of any particular civic causes there?

**MS. WAMBACH:** I'm a huge believer that you have to always remember where you came from in order to move forward in life, especially in a successful way. So I've

always remembered my childhood and being from Rochester and how amazing Rochester has been throughout my entire career. I would gladly be able, and love, to be a part of getting and attaching myself to any civic causes because Rochester made me who I am, and I would love nothing more than to give back to the city that raised me and that loved me and showed me nothing but love and respect throughout my entire career.

**MR. HUGHES:** Besides athletic talent, what is the most essentially characteristic you would say that's vital to success on the field?

**MS. WAMBACH:** I would say mentality is probably one of the most important things that has given me the success that I've had. At this stage and this level, everybody's good. Everybody can run fast, everybody's strong, everybody can run forever. But it's your mentality and the confidence in which you bring to the team, to yourself. It's that moment where you maybe have missed an open goal and the next play do you want the ball again, or are you the one that shies away? For me, I've always wanted to put myself in an environment where I keep challenging myself and keep-- whether I missed ten shots in a row, I want the 11<sup>th</sup>, I want the 12<sup>th</sup> shot. And I think that made the career that I have had what it was. Mentality, for sure, and the confidence no matter what happens that you can do it. You just got to keep trying.

**MR. HUGHES:** How do you balance the individual recognition and glory and yet still keep together as a team?

**MS. WAMBACH:** I think this is one of the most fascinating questions ever. Because as I've grown up and gotten older on this team and become a leader and taken on more of a leadership role, I had to start considering how to manage some of the spirits and egos, so to speak, on the same team. And we're all type A competitive women. We all want to be the best, we all want to be the one that scores the goal, and how do you manage all of these people and put them in a position to move in the same direction?

And I think that you have to, as a leader, you have to be able to have the selflessness about the way in which you connect with people. You have to be able to individually connect. And I know that this kind of goes even beyond the soccer field as it pertains to the millennial generation. You have to make sure that in order for any championship team to happen, in order for any success to happen with the collective, everybody has to buy into the same ideals. And for us, it was winning, literally winning at all cost.

And I think that we were all committed to that one goal. And no matter how we kind of worked our way towards it, everybody was committed and it took every single person's 100 percent commitment in order to win.

**MR. HUGHES:** Who on the team do you think you have had the biggest impact on, and who will be in the position to take your leadership position forward now on the team?

**MS. WAMBACH:** I definitely had the biggest impact on Syd, she's right there. (Laughter) And she's had one of the biggest impacts on me, too. I mean, look at how I'm dressed. She's my stylist, so to speak. What's your Twitter handle thing, @SydneyLerouxwire, whatever? (Laughter) But in all seriousness, I think that I have had the opportunity of playing with so many people and I hope that I've impacted them on positive levels. You would have to ask all of them if it was good or not. But I love the fact that I tried to connect with everybody on an individual level. And I really try to be honest and authentic and real. There's so much when you get to a certain level of fame that can become daunting and unreal and almost surreal in moments. And I think that that's something that I've always tried to do, is make sure people know that I'm honest and I'll tell you what I think, how I feel at all times.

And so as it pertains to who the next leader on the team is, I guess that will have to be seen. We have Christie Rampone who's been my captain for so many years and it'll be fun to watch. That's why I get to retire, so that it will be fun to see what happens, see how it goes.

**MR. HUGHES:** This question specifically says what advice would you give promising teen athletes who lack drive on their academics but there are many young people here, soccer players clearly. What advice would you give to these young people who want to keep playing the game and be successful going forward? How can they accomplish that?

**MS. WAMBACH:** Well, I think everybody knows that in order to be a successful person, you have to have a well balanced life. And in order for me, and every player on the national team to get a scholarship to college, you obviously had to do some homework and you had to do well in school, enough so that the NCAA would give you a scholarship. And that's one thing that I always try to implore on the kids out there, is it could be the very first and best gift that you ever give your parents, a college scholarship.

My parents had seven children. I was the youngest, and they paid for all of my brothers and sisters to go to college which-- I mean, by all intents and purposes, that's a blessing in and of itself. So when I got to college, I was really happy to be able to give them the gift. I think my dad was really happy, too. (Laughter) But the reality is you have to be a well balanced person in order to achieve any level of success, whether it's on the national team or whether it's wanting to become an author or chef or a musician. You have to have that balance in order to be successful. So listen to your teachers and your parents; go to school and do your homework.

**MR. HUGHES:** This questioner asks about digital devices. What advice do you have for young boys and girls to get them off the digital devices and go outside and play? I mean, is that a trend that concerns you?

**MS. WAMBACH:** I think that this is probably one of the biggest concerning trends out there. You know, even right now, I can see in the audience some people looking down at their cell phones. And I think that what I want to challenge people to do

is to look up and get some sort of personal connection. Look people in the eyes. You know, I know it sounds stupid, but this, this posture is not good for your body. And we're going to have some serious neck issues and thumb issues that come upon us in the next decade or so.

But the reality is yes, social media can give us and drive some amazing things and positive change. But it also has its tipping point where it becomes absolutely a digression. We need to make sure that our kids are active, are healthy. My parents, there were seven of us and so there were times when I was younger where my mom-- sorry, Mom, for telling this story-- but she would literally lock us out of the house and tell us to go play. You know, and this is back in the day where kids weren't getting abducted and all that stuff. So that was like the norm for us, that we would just be outside for the whole day playing.

And I would love to get back to that. I would love to get back to where kids in the neighborhood are all playing together. You know, my brothers and sisters who all have children, they have found that that kind of lifestyle is just no longer the case. I think that we can recreate that, because that's a good thing. Getting kids out, being active, especially being active in your community. Playing kick they can in your neighborhood, wasn't that the best? It was like the best.

**MR. HUGHES:** What has been your most discouraging moment of gender inequity or discrimination and how did you react and/or overcome that?

**MS. WAMBACH:** I think this is a great question, especially since winning the World Cup. And I'm not going to talk about specific numbers, but I know that for any male that has won the World Cup during my career, none of them would have to have another job after they retire. Now, I'm retiring and I'm telling you, and I have been one of the faces of this team for over ten years now, that I want to change the landscape where women, not just women soccer players, but women athletes don't have to, A, have another job while they're playing their sport. And, B, that they can retire and actually sail off into the sunset and not have to have another job when they're done playing their sport because they didn't make enough money, so to speak. That's a goal that I have and that's something that I'm sure all of my teammates will be excited that I follow through and actually come through with. Hurry up, hurry up. (Laughter)

**MR. HUGHES:** As we've learned more about concussions, how did you and your teammates, the way that you play soccer change, if at all, as you've learned more about concussions? And what else, if anything, do you think should be done to protect soccer players from head injuries?

**MS. WAMBACH:** Well, obviously concussions are a major issue, not just in soccer, but across all sports. I've partnered with a company called Triax that there's this awesome headband, has a little sensor in the back of your head that measures the head impacts that you take. And if it goes above a certain threshold you can watch it real time. Parents can, trainers can, doctors can, on your iPhone or whatever device you have. You

can get real time information to make a good decision on whether or not you should be let back into the game.

For me, I've been lucky, I've only had one concussion. I do know it's definitely a hot topic right now. Number one thing is to make sure that our kids are put in a healthy environment where they're playing a sport that they love and they're not being put in danger. Teaching kids how to properly head the ball, making sure that their body is developed well enough and their neck muscles are developed well enough so they aren't going to do damage to themselves. These are all really big topics, things that I want to keep advancing and keep talking about.

You know, all of these questions, and everything that I've talked about today, for me it's all about keeping a conversation going. Whether you agree with me or not, keep the conversation going because that is what this is all about. That's why we're here. We're here on this planet to survive together and try to evolve as a population and as humanity. So for me, let's just have a conversation. And if we disagree, that's okay. We can disagree and we can do it peacefully. We just have to be able to be willing to do it and put ourselves in positions to have the conversations.

And sometimes they're hard. Sometimes, it is hard to disagree with somebody. But it's those disagreements and still capable of being in the same room, that is the beauty of life. And that's something that I want to keep driving.

**MR. HUGHES:** This questioner wants to know, what is your very earliest soccer memory and how did you get hooked on the game?

**MS. WAMBACH:** I think you said it earlier, but my earliest soccer memory was probably scoring those nine-- 27 goals in the first three games. I think that that speaks for itself. I loved it. (Laughter)

**MR. HUGHES:** What advice do you wish you had been given at the start of your professional career that you would now give to young professionals?

**MS. WAMBACH:** That's a really good question, actually. I think that the advice I would give myself, my younger self, is maybe if I had focused a little bit more attention and put more of my mind and heart into staying fit and getting fit and learning how to be fit at a younger age. Nowadays, there's so much science and so much information about health and nutrition. Back when I was growing up, there really wasn't that. People didn't even tell you to be hydrated. So now with all the hydration techniques, with all the nutrition techniques, with every bit of information and all the technology that we have, I would definitely tell my younger self, use as much information as you can to learn and to be the best athlete that you can be because your athletic career isn't going to be until you're 60. You're going to-- there is a time clock that stops and that's something that I probably would tell myself 30 years ago.

**MR. HUGHES:** If you want to change the world, might you consider running for public office some day?

**MS. WAMBACH:** I don't know. This is actually kind of a funny story. I really love jokes. I love to be funny, I love to laugh. And I realized yesterday after meeting President Obama that no matter what he says, people just laugh at everything he says. And some of the things that he was saying wasn't that funny. Like you just laughed. So I don't know if I could go into public office because people-- I don't know if people would be genuine about laughing at my jokes because I am funny. See? (Laughter)

But in all seriousness, I would definitely be open to any and all possibilities to create and effect positive change to, in fact change the world. If it is public office, then that might be an interesting route. I don't know. But just don't laugh at my jokes because I'm public office, okay? That's all I ask.

**MR. HUGHES:** When should kids specialize in just one sport? When did you stop playing other sports, presuming you did play others, as a kid?

**MS. WAMBACH:** I think this is one of the best questions that I get these days. So often, nowadays, parents are, and kids are, forced to choose one sport at a really young age. And to all the parents out there that think that their kid is going to be the next professional, just be smart. Know your kid, know what your kid is like and what they are into.

For me, I played basketball and soccer. And really, I played all the sports growing up. But I was on organized teams playing basketball and soccer. And I needed basketball as a break to take some of my mind off of playing soccer. After every season I would tell my mom, "I'm quitting. I never want to play soccer again." And two weeks later, I would be out in the back yard playing with the soccer ball sort of thing.

So as a kid, I think our attention spans are so short that you need to create and give them the opportunity to not only play different sports and be happy and enjoy what they're doing, but also develop physically different muscle sets and different skill sets. Because the reality is, not every kid out there is going to make it to become a professional athlete. Oftentimes, I think the clubs, especially in soccer, they're saying you need to play year round. Well, they want your year round money, parents. Know your kids. Know your kids. If they want to play another sport, let them play another sport. I'm not standing here right now if I didn't play basketball, if I didn't learn how to jump, if I didn't learn the trajectory of a ball, if I didn't learn how to time my jump. I'm not standing here having scored however many goals with my head if I didn't play basketball and I didn't have the opportunity of separating myself for at least a little while playing soccer or playing basketball.

So I urge all parents out there to get your kids involved in as many sports as possible because then, of course, it'll give them even more of an opportunity of being a healthy adult because they will have more opportunity and have learned how to play

different sports at a young age so that as they grow up and become adults, maybe you will get involved in a coed league or whatever it is as an adult because you learned those skills as a young kid.

**MR. HUGHES:** What about artificial turf? You've said it's not as good as grass. Do you subscribe to the health concerns about rubber infill turf fields?

**MS. WAMBACH:** Well, I think that we all know my stance on turf. I'm not a huge fan of it at all. Our World Cup was played on turf this last summer and I personally believe that there were many goals not scored because of the turf. Not only is it not as fun to play on, and not as pretty to watch, but it's also a gender equality issue. FIFA never would have made the men play on turf and for their full World Cup. And for that, and not just that reason, I was upset and clearly you could see throughout the tournament that the turf definitely played a role in some ways, and for some teams, positive. And in others, not so positive.

And people can argue, "You won the World Cup," and I'll be the first one to say, "It was not because of the turf. It was because of the players and the athletes on the field that were able to adapt."

And there are some serious health concerns. It's not just about injury, either. What's in those little rubber pellets? I don't know. And I don't want my kids to be the ones that suffer because they're the guinea pigs of some of these big turf companies wanting to make a ton of money. I think it's not okay. I think it's irresponsible, actually. So, that's also something I'm going to get into, get rid of turf everywhere.

**MR. HUGHES:** Will you help David Beckham start a soccer team in Miami?

**MS. WAMBACH:** Yeah, if he wants me. Sure. Love that.

**MR. HUGHES:** And who is your all time favorite soccer player?

**MS. WAMBACH:** That's a good question. I would say my all time favorite soccer player is Sarah Huffman. I have to say that, right?

\_\_\_: Good answer.

**MS. WAMBACH:** No. (Laughter) I met Sarah actually playing for the Washington Freedom and she was one of those people that worked so hard and has always been there for me and supported me in my dreams and my journey. But as it pertains to players, Mia Hamm for sure on the woman's side. She was not only a teammate but somebody I looked up to. I had pictures of her up on my wall and then she was my teammate, so that was a little bit weird. Probably more for her than me. (Laughter)

And on the men's side, I would say I think Messi is one of my favorite players to watch because he's so different than the way I play. He really does play beautiful, beautiful soccer.

**MR. HUGHES:** Before I ask the final questions, I have some housekeeping. The National Press Club is the world's leading professional organization for journalists and we fight for a free press worldwide. To learn more about the Press Club, visit our website, [Press.org](http://Press.org). To donate to our nonprofit Journalism Institute, visit [Press.org/institute](http://Press.org/institute).

I also want to remind you about some upcoming events. Former Congressman Patrick Kennedy will discuss mental illness and addiction at a National Press Club newsmaker on Thursday, November 5<sup>th</sup>. On November 6<sup>th</sup>, Veteran Affairs Secretary Robert McDonald will address a National Press Club luncheon. And on November 10<sup>th</sup>, P. J. O'Rourke, one of America's most celebrated humorists, will discuss his new book, *Thrown Under the Omnibus*.

I would now like to present our speaker with the National Press Club's World Cup, that is our National Press Club mug. (Applause)

So Abby, you said in your speech, you said the words that you're retiring from soccer. And as you think about stepping away, what is the one thing or two things you will miss most about not playing anymore?

**MS. WAMBACH:** I think that the number one thing I will miss the most, absolutely, is the time that I get to spend with some of my teammates. Like I said earlier, some of my teammates know me so well. Some know me better than even some of my family members do because we've spent so much time together. And it's not the time, really, where we're on the field playing, it's usually-- my favorite time is off the field, whether it be staying up late nights talking in bed or watching movies together or sitting around a meal room having discussions on who the next president should be. These are the moments that I cherish and that have kind of created my personality and shaped who I've become as a person.

It's bits and pieces of not just my family, but my teammates. And I think that it's amazing to set goals and to be able to achieve championships and gold medals and what not. But it's always the process in which you get to those championships that make it all the sweeter. That's why my teammates have-- they're like my sisters. There's moments where I get really upset at them and we talk about it. And I've shared some of the most memorable moments that people on the planet can ever have with my teammates. So that will, for sure, be the number one thing that I'm going to miss the most about retiring. And the one thing I will miss least is the running. (Laughter)

**MR. HUGHES:** And finally, we've talked about how we're in a connected world now digitally. So I want to thank a questioner from Twitter for this question just a short



while ago. Why did the U.S. men's team fail to bring home the gold like the women did in the World Cup?

**MS. WAMBACH:** (Laughter) Well, this is a tough question to answer. I think that our men made a fantastic run in their World Cup. But respectfully speaking, our women's team historically has been more successful as it pertains to winning championships. We're very proud of the third star we just won this last summer. And we support the men. We want them to do well. We want them to earn and win their first star from winning a World Cup championship. And hopefully that happens fairly soon. I know Sunil Gulati, our president, would love for that to happen.

**MR. HUGHES:** Could we give a round of applause for our speaker? (Applause)  
Thanks again.

**MS. WAMBACH:** You're very welcome.

**MR. HUGHES:** I would like to thank staff members of the National Press Club and the National Press Club Journalism Institute for their work in preparing for today's event. Again, I want to thank Georgetown University for hosting this special National Press Club event on the road today. And remember, to learn more about the National Press Club, visit our website, that's Press.org. You can also get a copy of today's program by visiting that same website. Thank you very much, we are adjourned. (Sounds gavel.)

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