

In the ultra-competitive, sometimes exhausting world of professional sports, athletes seek something to sustain them.

For **Kayla McBride**, it's

# The FUNDAMENTALS of FAITH



BY MARY SOLBERG

Photo by David Sherman



he 14½-hour flight from Turkey to Los Angeles, California, didn't keep Kayla McBride from leading her WNBA team, the Minnesota Lynx, to victory on May 17.

Such are the long, demanding and exhausting days of a WNBA star.

In her ninth season with the Women's National Basketball Association, the Erie native and graduate of Erie's St. John Grade School and Villa Maria Academy is a dominant force on the court.

At the Lynx vs. Sparks game in Los Angeles, McBride scored a team high of 24 points, including the game-winning 3-point play on a reverse layup with 2.1 seconds remaining in the contest. Only days before, McBride helped Fenerbahçe Saffiport win the Turkish League title.

"Anyone who knows me knows I'm a competitive person," says McBride, who turned 30 in June.

A standout at Villa and later the University of Notre Dame, McBride has brought her skills to two other WNBA teams besides the Lynx: the San Antonio Stars, for which she was a first-round pick in 2014, and the Las Vegas Aces. She's also seen international play with leagues in Russia, Hungary and now Turkey.

Through nearly a decade of professional play, McBride says her faith in God sustains her. It's what keeps her balanced despite a rigorous schedule and the fame and fortune that go along with the international spotlight.

**FAITH EDITOR MARY SOLBERG ENJOYED THE FOLLOWING CONVERSATION WITH KAYLA MCBRIDE, VIA CELLPHONE.**

**KAYLA:**

I've been really fortunate to be grounded in my sports career. And my family is very loving and nurturing. They created that solid ground for me. Having that support system is everything. We are not meant to do everything on our own. [Kayla is the daughter of LaMont and LuAnn McBride of Erie, and the sister of Aaron, Karlee and Jayden, all of whom either attended or are attending Catholic schools in Erie.]



Kayla McBride off-court

**FAITH:**

What's your personal motivation playing basketball at an elite level?

**KAYLA:**

What drives me as a person in basketball is competition. I love winning. I love challenges and basketball brings that every single day. It challenges me on and off the court, and as a person it allows me to grow and be better every day.

**FAITH:**

How do you keep centered with such a busy schedule?

**FAITH:**

How much did your Catholic education influence your life?

**KAYLA:**

The Catholic school system is faith-based. Everything we did was trying to find a way to connect with God. "God first" is my motto; it's something I think about all the time. I know God is everything and the reason I have been blessed with my talents. But I know I cannot do it alone. I love helping people with their faith and belief in themselves. I do that through God.

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**FAITH:**

Villa teachers have said you were always ready and willing to help others.

**KAYLA:**

I love to work with kids, since I'm the oldest of four kids. I've always been that mentoring, nurturing person, especially to my siblings. I help raise money for Big Brothers Big Sisters and even created my own cookie that was sold for the organization at the games in Minneapolis. Big Brothers Big Sisters is very important to me because kids need someone to look out for them. When I was injured in 2015, I didn't play overseas so I helped run a basketball camp for kids in Erie.

**FAITH:**

How are you able to bring your sport life and your faith together?

**KAYLA:**

The fundamentals are really the essence, the core, of everything in sports. Obviously, working on the fundamentals in basketball is the only way you can give at this level. The same goes for your faith. The everyday work you put into your faith is just as essential and is actually the most important thing. It shouldn't be just the moment when you need something. It should be every day. Instead of being taken aback by something that happens or being upset, practicing the daily essentials is really important in our faith.

**FAITH:**

What are those essentials for you?

**KAYLA:**

My faith is at the helm of everything for me. My relationship with God and the gifts he's given me have allowed me to do so much in my career and to travel. I'm grateful to God for that. My prayers and devotionals keep me on the right path ... every day. It's my anchor for all the things I do and for my gifts that I've been given athletically and otherwise. They have allowed me to stay with the WNBA for almost 10 years now.

**FAITH:**

I imagine your schedule can make this difficult.

**KAYLA:**

It's hard to get to church because of the travel and the games. I listen to some podcasts, and I say my prayers and devotionals and do meditation every day. Finding that peace and structure and time for a relationship with God on a daily basis is important for me.

**FAITH:**

Finding that kind of peace has been difficult for everyone during the past couple of years of the pandemic. What was it like for you?



Kayla McBride, a Villa Maria Academy graduate from Erie, is a shooting guard with the WNBA's Minnesota Lynx. She's in her ninth season playing professional basketball.

**KAYLA:**

The world in which we live today, especially with the pandemic, is very anxiety-filled. But you can find peace in the most chaotic moments, even in a world that has flipped upside-down. You don't know what you're going to see on the news every day, so I fall back on just how much God does love me. He wants us to move forward in the midst of chaos. For me, in the middle of chaos, you can't always talk to everyone, but you can talk about it with God. He knows everything.

**FAITH:**

Explain how athletes develop that relationship with God.

**KAYLA:**

The majority of the players I've played with have some spirituality. It's what we talk about more often than not, especially with mental health. As an athlete, something that has really stuck out to me is how much pressure we put on ourselves. I am always driven in knowing that God has given me talents for a reason, and he believes in me. There is no pressure on us with God.

**FAITH:**

You exude positivity.

**KAYLA:**

Positivity starts in our heart and the space we live in every day. That space we choose to live in is solely up to us. Finding peace is really hard. There are good games and bad; there are good moments and bad, but when you have that relationship with God, nothing will bother you. It's not to say things don't bother you, but you at least can see the light at the end of the tunnel. Everyone has their own route in finding God in their life. For me, openly being willing to hear what God has to say is the first step. †



Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Lynx.