

Star

on

the

Rise

FIBA WOMEN'S BASKETBALL WORLD CUP SPECIAL EDITION



Walter Baker top; Elan pants; Nike sneakers; Amanda Pearl earrings

Opposite: Walter Baker top; Amanda Pearl earrings



She's already lighting up the world basketball court, but Ezi Magbegor is only just getting started. As she shares with us, it's all about the long game and going at your own pace

By Alex Davies

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T There's a video of Eziyoda - Ezi - Magbegor learning that she'd been drafted to one of the top basketball leagues in the world. On hearing that she'd been picked by the WNBA's Seattle Storm in 2019, she breaks out into the biggest smile. It's a snapshot of total joy.

Origami Crane jacket; Nike sports bra; Carbon38 leggings; Amanda Pearl earrings; Nike sneakers



Zara top; Nike sports bra; Melrose and Market cap; Ezi's own earrings

Second to representing Australia at the Olympics, which she did with the Opals last year in Tokyo, playing in the WNBA was always a goal for the now-23-year-old athlete. "I'm so grateful to have come to such a great organisation and to learn from the people, the coaches, the players. I couldn't have written it any better," says Ezi, who started playing basketball with a mixed under-eights team in Melbourne

("I was just running up and down the court, not really knowing what I was doing") and is now considered among the most exciting rising stars of the game.

After four years with the Melbourne Boomers - including a WNBL Championship win this year - she's ready to embark on a new chapter with Sopron Basket in Hungary, where she'll play between WNBA seasons. Yep, it's a jam-

packed schedule. Ezi credits her parents, who moved to Australia from New Zealand when she was six, for her work ethic. "I'm very, very grateful for their support," she says, recalling her mum and dad driving their four sporty kids everywhere for games and practices. "They're super hard working. They migrated from Nigeria to New Zealand when they were really young - Dad was 19 when he moved away from home. I think [my] hard work and dedication and independence definitely came from my parents."

Her family are about to watch Ezi play on the world stage a lot closer to home. From September 22, the Opals will battle it out against the world's top teams in the FIBA Women's Basketball World Cup in Sydney. At the 2018 tournament in Spain, the Aussies came home with a silver medal - and this time Ezi has her sights set firmly on gold. *WH* catches up with our 1.93cm cover star during her WNBA season in Seattle, to talk sporting legacies, big life decisions and the power of a home crowd.

WH: It's 8am for you. What would you usually be doing now?

EM: "I get into practice at around 9.20am and we have individual workouts, then we lift after that and have a team practice at 11am. So, normally at this time, I'm making sure I'm ready for practices, games, whatever it is. It just depends on our schedule. Then when I get back - probably at around 1.30pm, 2pm - that's when I have my downtime."

WH: Can you share some of the types of training that you do?

EM: "One of the biggest things I've learned playing in the WNBA is everyone has their own routine. It's catered to you. Lifting is pretty important - especially when we play every other day, you need to keep up that body maintenance. It's [about] working on the things you need. Sometimes my back needs a



Robin Piccone top;
Rundholz pants;
Nike trainers; Vince
Camuto hat; Ezi's
own earrings

bit of maintenance, so when I'm in the gym, I try and focus on my core and get a heavy lift in when I can ... to maintain that strength. Playing in the WNBA is very physical, so I do need a bit more muscle mass. Some teammates do Pilates. It's whatever works for you, which I really love."

WH: Do you enjoy Pilates, too?

EM: "Yeah, I do - I haven't been doing it as much, but when I do have back soreness, especially when we travel a lot, a session is a really good way to just get my body back to feeling good. I think Pilates is great for anyone, [whether you're an] athlete or just want to wind down."

WH: Where does recovery come in?

EM: "Everyone has their own needs. We have massage therapists and an athletic trainer, so depending on the schedule, I get a massage after practices, after games. And that really helps me. We have NormaTec compression boots. We do have ice baths - I'm not the biggest fan! I know they work for some people, but for me it's more just massage and compression for my recovery."

WH: How do you look after your mental wellbeing?

EM: "Playing year-round, the mental side of your game is really important. On and off the court, just

in everyday life. It's important to take time to yourself when you can, which looks different for everyone - [for me] it's reading or just being in my apartment. I really want to get into meditating. I've done it a few times but not consistently; I've heard great things."

WH: What's your headspace like going into a game?

EM: "I try not to get too low or high, just to remain steady. I obviously think about the game tactics, but... going forward I [want to find] a word or phrase that helps me to remain steady in those moments. Games can be very intense, so I think if you've got a word or phrase to come back to, it's going to help you in the long run. Something simple that you can keep with you."

WH: Can you tell me about your move to play in Europe?

EM: "Europe is something I've always wanted to do. As a female athlete, you have to play all year round, so in the WNBA off-season, people tend to go to Europe to play. The money is better there... and it grows people's game because you're playing a lot, you're practising twice a day. The competition is different. So, that was just the next step that I needed to take in my career. Winning the championship with the Boomers was something I've wanted to achieve... and then it was like, 'it's time to spread your wings.' It was a hard decision. Playing in Australia, I'm home, I'm with my family, around my friends - [but] it was time to embark on my new journey. It's pretty exciting."

WH: How do you approach big decisions like that?

EM: "In the past, I relied on other people's opinions too much. I sourced elsewhere. Which I still do now but I've reduced that sample size. So, I ask a few people close to me and get their opinions, but at the end of the day, it's important that the decision is mine. I'm all about weighing up the pros and cons, and for this, the pros outweigh the cons."

Farm Rio
top; Ezi's
own earrings;
Amanda Pearl
necklace



OVERTIME WITH EZI

GO-TO ENERGY SNACK

"A banana."

TOP WORKOUT TRACK

"Anything by Tems or Burna Boy."

DREAM DAY OFF

"I like sleeping in. Maybe going for a walk or sitting in a cafe reading or writing. Just spending time with myself."

LATEST READS

"It Ends With Us, which is great, and The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo."

BRUNCH ORDER

"A chilli scramble. There's a really good one from [the cafe] A Thousand Blessings in Richmond. And a hot chocolate."



Free People jumpsuit; Universal Standard tunic; Ezi's own earrings; Amanda Pearl necklace; Nike sneakers



Farm Rio top; Ramy Brook pants; David and Young visor; Amanda Pearl necklace

When I made the decision, I just felt really at peace. I definitely take time with my decisions [and] my career. I'm going at my own pace."

WH: Let's talk about the World Cup. What are you excited for?

EM: "Putting on the green and gold again, and playing and practising with a great team. We get to play in front of our family and friends - the last time we were able to do that was the [2018] Commonwealth Games in the Gold Coast. A home World Cup isn't something everyone is able to experience, so to have the crowd on your side is going to be amazing. I'm excited for that; to represent the country and to compete for a gold medal."

WH: Lauren Jackson has made a comeback. How has her legacy and career impacted you?

EM: "Honestly, I think Lauren is the greatest basketballer - female or male - to come out of Australia. She's done amazing things for female sports, for Australian basketball. I didn't think I'd get the chance to play with her again. And here we are, which is super exciting."

WH: Who else inspires you?

EM: "What Cathy Freeman did was incredible and her legacy still carries on now. More recently, Ash Barty. I think her story and what she accomplished - and retiring and just knowing herself and knowing her body - was inspiring. They're paving the way for females of the future. That's important as an athlete, whether you want that or not. I think that's something I've learned. You're going to be a person in the media, a person who is highlighted in your sport, so you have to just carry that on your shoulders and be the best person and athlete you can."

WH: As a role model yourself, what encounters have stuck with you?

EM: "With the Boomers, we used to play in [the suburb] Wantirna South and we moved to Parkville, which is more central Melbourne. I saw a lot more young African girls in the crowd, which was amazing. I'd get excited whenever I'd see them. And [with] me, I guess, looking like them and them seeing me play - seeing is believing, as cliché as that sounds. I'm just grateful that we moved and were able to be more accessible to

youth who [couldn't] get all the way to Wantirna South in the past."

WH: How do you want to be remembered in the future?

EM: "As a good person, someone who went about her business on the court, and was always genuine and approachable. Someone who was hard working, did whatever I could for any team that I was on and just represented them the best I could."

WH: If you could leave us with a wellbeing tip, what would it be?

EM: "It's OK to listen to yourself and to your body and put yourself first. The world can be intense and overwhelming, so taking a step back and figuring out what you need is a good thing. It's going to help you. And that helps others around you." **WH**

Ready to cheer on Ezi and the Opals at the World Cup? Visit tickets. womensworldcup.basketball



And tune into our podcast *Uninterrupted by Women's Health Australia* for the full chat with Ezi and other World Cup players.

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