

## How Haley Jones Stays Sharp During Transitions

VIS Mentor and WNBA guard Haley Jones and VIS Expert Allison Brager, PhD share how athletes can stay mentally and physically prepared during uncertain athletic transitions.

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For many women athletes, the biggest test doesn't come during the final seconds of a close game. It comes in the quiet moments in between: when you've been cut from a team, sidelined by injury, or stuck in career limbo. In those moments, staying mentally and physically ready becomes both the challenge and the key to long-term success.

Few people understand this better than WNBA guard and VIS Mentor Haley Jones, a former No. 6 overall pick in the 2023 WNBA Draft. Jones spent two seasons with the Atlanta Dream before being waived ahead of the 2025 season. Through it all, she kept showing up, training, and finding ways to stay grounded. She eventually signed with the Dallas Wings on a rest-of-season contract, where she found her footing starting games, playing 30 minutes a night, and contributing meaningfully.

Jones' story, along with insight from VIS Expert Allison Brager, PhD, offers a roadmap for athletes navigating periods of transition. A former DI athlete herself, Brager now works with elite athletes and the US Army.

Together, they helped us form a guide for being in flux—when the next opportunity hasn't yet arrived, but we can't afford to let our readiness slip.

### Practice Visualization

During uncertain times, athletes often worry about losing their edge. Without access to the facilities we're used to, it can be hard to stay motivated. But Brager says that one of the most effective tools in our toolbox—visualization—doesn't require equipment.

When it comes to visualization, we shouldn't focus on the competitions we have down the line. Instead, we should focus on the practice we'll execute to get there.

"You shouldn't be thinking about what you're doing while you're competing. You need to be thinking about it when you practice and leading up to competing," Brager said. "And if you're doing that, that's going to train the muscle memory even without doing the movement."

### Staying Physically Sharp

After Jones was waived from the Dream, she moved back to her hometown in the Bay Area, California. During a regular training day, she would complete a basketball workout on-court in the morning. Then, after a smoothie break and some reading time, she did an hour and a half to two hours of strength and conditioning. During this workout, Jones focused on movements that mirrored what she would do in a basketball game.

“It wasn’t just mindless running—I wasn’t out there running sprints on a football field or doing miles. My goal was to train in a way that mirrored what I’d actually do in a basketball game—short bursts, quick movements, repeatable efforts,” Jones said. “I also tried to get to as many open gyms as I could, since I wasn’t playing five-on-five every day.”

After dinner, Jones would go to her old middle school gym and shoot for 45 minutes. She did the same shooting workout every day.

“Some days I was exhausted, and maybe I skipped that last shooting session—but I’d still do something active,” Jones said. “Maybe I played pickleball with my parents after dinner or went on a long walk. There was always something I could do to stay active, and sometimes that meant doing things outside of basketball so I could still look forward to getting back on the court.”

Jones emphasized that this routine worked for her, but everyone’s process is unique.

“When I finally did get back on the court, I felt like I could keep up and stay with the pace,” Jones said. “It’s different for everyone, but that’s the routine that helped me.”

### **Leaning on Your Support System**

During uncertain periods, Brager encourages us to rely on our support systems, both within and outside of our team environment.

“When you’re in a transition period and your stress is high, if you’re alone, you’re really going to feel alone. But if you’re with a group, it can help you,” Brager said. “We are naturally social creatures. Being around people and feeling connected to people—that’s the whole reason why we fall in love with sport in the first place. It’s better to maintain group-based training or teamwork-based workouts and anything else during those periods of high stress.”

Jones leaned on her family during her transition period. Her parents often accompanied Jones to her after-dinner shooting workout.

“It was actually fun to get back in the gym with my parents again,” Jones said. “They were coaches, so they made it enjoyable.”

### **Maintaining Confidence**

Maintaining confidence during transitions is key. After being waived from the Atlanta Dream, Jones questioned her purpose and future.

“There was a point earlier this year, after I got waived from Atlanta, where I genuinely thought: What now? I’m jobless. Do I still want to play basketball? Is this really the path for me? I started questioning everything,” Jones said. “Only about 1% of collegiate athletes make it pro. So I constantly remind myself: I want to stay in that 1%. What am I doing every day to make sure I’m still in that group?”

Jones had to reframe her mindset. She began asking herself: “What do I bring that no one else does? What do I offer that this team needs? What’s unique about me?”

“It was tough to hold onto that mindset through all the ups and downs, but it’s been so rewarding to find myself in the position I’m in now—starting games, contributing, and hopefully finding a long-term home here in Dallas,” Jones said.

A transition period is also a great time to hone in on your why and develop a balance between internal and external motivation. While we can be fueled by both, we need to make sure that we are playing for ourselves, not getting caught up in what others think.

“So taking a step back to figure out what you really want—what’s truly pushing you to be where you are—is so important,” Jones said. “Otherwise, you risk getting caught in this endless cycle of pushing and grinding without ever celebrating your own wins. And celebrating your wins matters.”

Jones’ story is proof that even in the face of uncertainty, it’s possible to stay ready, stay grounded, and come out stronger. Through consistent training and redefining what confidence looks like, she turned her transition into a foundation for growth. And as Brager reminds us, small techniques like visualization and leaning on your support system can help you stay ready—even when you don’t know when your next gameday is.

For women athletes in transition, the path may not always be clear—but that doesn’t mean it’s not worth walking. Whether you’re training solo in your hometown gym or visualizing your next big moment, every rep, every routine, and every small act of showing up matters.