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## Missouri women's basketball player's funny side not always easy to see

BY TAYLOR VORTHERMS Jan 31, 2013



Missouri guard Liene Priede drives to the basket

Greg Kendall-Ball

COLUMBIA — Her eyes scan the gym before dropping to the floor. With fingers interlocked behind her back, she examines the hardwood looking for the right words.

Surrounding conversations echo through Mizzou Arena, and her sentences get lost in the buzz of media day for the Missouri women's basketball team.

"Once you start joking in English, you start actually understanding it," Tigers guard Liene Priede says.

Priede grew up in Riga, Latvia and moved to the United States with aspirations to learn the language and play basketball. As a senior graduating in May, she also desires an unconventional career.

"To be a comedian — that would be a dream," Priede says.

Right now, though, Priede's shyness with reporters makes the goal seem odd. She shifts on the balls of her feet. Like her gaze, her voice remains distant and soft.

Faint beeps sound in rapid order, and the red lights of recorders click off. Priede's eyes widen and flicker to life. She relaxes her shoulders, and her arms fall to her side.

"That's it?" she asks, skeptically taking steps back towards the exit of Mizzou Arena. "No hard questions?"

She glances at Jenny Dewar, the Tigers' communications director, for permission to flee. Dewar throws up an index finger, directing Priede to a video camera propped up on a tripod.

At the sight, Priede contorts her face into an animated frown and shoots Dewar a glare.

"When I thought I was done, I was like..." Priede swipes her palm across her forehead to dry an imaginary film of sweat. She then thrusts her arms up and looks to the ceiling. "...Halleluia!"

"But now, I'm like..." She swiftly drops to one knee and bows her head. "... 'Please God.'"

Dewar grins in response.

"She's got a realness to her," Missouri coach Robin Pingeton says of Priede. "She's very genuine and authentic, and she's got a funny sense of humor."

Occupying the camera's spotlight is 5-foot-4 point guard Lianna Doty.

Priede sucks in air and stiffly approaches the scene. The reporter manning the camera begins to adjust the stand to accommodate the height discrepancy.

"Doty is a midget," the 5-10 Priede comments. Laughter ripples through the group of spectators as Priede takes her spot in front of the lens for her turn.

"She's hilarious," Doty says. "The other day, we went and watched some stand-up comedy and I was like, 'LP, that should be you.'"

It was through jokes that Priede gained confidence in her English.

"One day, a friend asked, 'Oh, are you funny now?' And I said, 'Yeah, I guess I am,'" Priede says. "So she said, 'Well then, I guess you understand English.'"

Priede says her family does not share her sense of humor.

"They don't understand my jokes," Priede says, her voice trailing off. "A lot of times, they don't understand me."

But her teammates appreciate her charm, and Doty says they often gather around Priede as she imitates their individual mannerisms.

"She can impersonate anyone on the team," Doty says. "She just picks up on things you don't even realize. Like, she makes fun of the way I walk. So she'll always do my walk when she walks by."

The camera's red light begins blinking, and Priede's face appears on the viewfinder. Her eyes are grave, her voice is hushed and her personality fades behind a somber veneer.

"I like to bring joy to people. I like to make them smile and laugh," Priede says. "That just makes me happy — to brighten people's day."

As Doty speaks into the recorders pointed at her face, Priede peeks her head from beyond the lens.

"Hey Doty, give me a shout-out," she calls out in jest.

A smile stretches across Doty's face, and she shakes her head.

"When she's happy and making jokes," Doty says, "it's a good day."

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**Taylor Vortherms**