

Ali Krieger Talks Instagram, Tats and Going for Gold

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Editor's note: A few months back we checked in with US Women's National Team star Ali Krieger, who was understandably looking forward to her first Olympics. Tonight at 6/5c, her squad takes on New Zealand as the US seeks to make it four (four!) gold medals in a row. We could think of no better time to revisit this wide-ranging Q&A. U-S-A, U-S-A...

Attitude is what makes an athlete a champion. And by that measure, not to mention numerous on-field honors, US soccer star Ali Krieger makes the grade.

The relentlessly upbeat defender has overcome numerous hurdles—a leg break, multiple blood clots and mini heart attacks, plus a torn ACL and MCL—while rising to the top of her sport. That determination was rewarded last summer in Canada, when Krieger played nearly every minute during Team USA's victorious World Cup run.

The 31-year-old Virginia native is now preparing for the next big stage—her first Olympic Games appearance this summer in Brazil. With 99 days till Rio, we caught up with Krieger at a [ZICO Coconut Water](#) art therapy session to learn the importance of keeping it real, how to sharpen up on the rec field and whether we can expect another title run. (Spoiler alert: We can!)

"It doesn't matter what you're doing, every week you should have one day where you completely recover and get your mind off your career."

You've teamed up with ZICO. Is coconut water a key part of your recovery regimen?

Absolutely, because it has so many electrolytes and it's from not concentrate. And it has no sugar. I drink it every day for the hydration. Plus, we really share the 'believe in yourself,' mentality. It's not like a forced partnership for

me. It's something that was an automatic connection.

We did art therapy today. What else do you do to ease stress and help with mental recovery?

I love to go hiking and just sit by myself, and not have to talk to anybody or think about anything on the field. Or maybe go biking, or walk around the city and go to a coffee shop. It's always something active. It's super important to have that mental break from the sport, or even just from a job in general. It doesn't matter what you're doing, every week you should have one day where you completely recover and get your mind off your career. In my job I really need that: 20 girls on a team... it gets to be a lot!

You have half a million Instagram followers. Besides that million-dollar smile, what's your secret?

Aw, thanks! Just being authentic and being relatable—I think that's super important. For fans, they want to know that you're human, and that you're just like everyone else. They want to feel that connection. And giving back is so important to me—to take those two seconds to not only sign an item but to also say 'Hey, how are you? Did you enjoy the match? I'll see you next game.' I think that is what separates me from a lot of my teammates. I try to find a common ground with our fans and make them feel a part of our family and the team.

So it's safe to say you're writing your own posts?

Yes, I am... exactly!

Your tattoos, especially your Little Prince-inspired side tattoo, are so original and awesome. What advice do you have to anyone thinking of getting inked, so they don't end up with some Asian writing that actually translates to, like, grilled cheese sandwich?

Yeah I know, how embarrassing, right? Wait for something that inspires you. I went through some moments in my life and that's where these tattoos came from—they all represent something. And they don't always have to represent something! If you just like the way something looks, that's OK, but realize it's going to be on your body for the rest of your life. Some people just get whatever, but I think moments or experiences or inspirational quotes are really healthy.



As we saw in the ESPN Body Issue, your legs are legendary. Meanwhile a lot of guys fall victim to chicken leg syndrome. What's your best advice for building powerful legs and a strong lower body? What do you do?

Never skip leg day... that's first and foremost! Because I do see a lot of guys who have big, strong upper bodies and

then they just forget about their legs. And it's so important because you need your legs every single day! I do a lot of plyo training—lunges and jumps and things like that. But I don't necessarily put tons of weight on the bar and do squats. I do more reps, with less weight. I also think just running in general has built my muscles since I was young.

While it was quite some time ago now, what was it like switching from midfield to defense? Were you hesitant about making the change?

It did feel more natural than I thought it would. I played center mid my whole life and then I moved to center back because one of our center backs in college got injured. So I had that experience. And then you know I kind of mixed the two—center mid as an attacking player and center back as a defender. Then I moved to the outside where you can attack and defend. I really love [that]. So it's a perfect spot for me.

What's your number one tip for the millions of recreational soccer players who would love to play better defense?

Oh gosh. Work on your footwork; it's underrated in our sport. You really need to have good footwork to change direction and position on the field. And also connecting passes out of the back is key. Make sure you take a good first touch and then try to connect that first pass. Because if you don't, you're going to get crushed, because you're the last line of defense.

You went to the White House and met Barack Obama after your World Cup win. What did the President say to you?

Oh my gosh, he's so charming. Just that he's so proud and that we had a great tournament and congratulations, and you guys are badasses. And that was just incredible to hear from the President of the United States.



What's your greatest hope and fear about playing in your first Olympics?

I just want to win! It's my first Olympics and I know the girls won the last one, and I just want to win a gold medal. Also, not being successful would be my biggest fear, as well as not getting to the final. We're expected to do that.

Which nations do you see as the biggest threats to a repeat title for the USA?

Probably France, Germany, Sweden, and obviously Brazil because they're in their home country. They're going bring it and be extra motivated because it's in Rio.

So can we count on another gold medal for the USA?

Yes, absolutely, one hundred percent! There's no team that has won a World Cup and the Olympics back-to-back within a year. So we're ready to do that.

By [Amy Schlinger](#)