

Major League Soccer Media Conference

Wednesday, December 9, 2020

Orlando, Florida, USA

Gyasi Zardes

Press Conference



GYASI ZARDES: Thank you for having me. Obviously my name is Gyasi Zardes, and I'm really excited about this weekend, hosting the MLS cup and I really look forward to it.

Q. Just coming right out of the gate here, you guys have a really tough Seattle team that you're playing against, obviously the story is this is their fourth final in the last five years. Just what are you hoping to do in this game, aside from win, of course, and how do you face off against such a tough team like this?

GYASI ZARDES: Like you said, obviously the main goal is to win MLS Cup, but more importantly, we have to start off strong. We're the home team. We're going to be playing in front of our stadium, our fans, and I think it's extremely important to get the Seattle Sounders team -- to start off on the right foot, because a team like that, obviously they have a lot of experience, especially in big games like this.

So for us to get going early will put us in a great position to win the Cup.

Q. We've talked so often about Lucas's ability on the field this year, but really haven't asked kind of what he's like as a person. So what have you just seen from him in the locker room at the training facility, and how have you seen him kind of integrate himself into the team throughout the year?

GYASI ZARDES: Yeah, so Lucas is an incredible person, as well, as well as a player. He always has a smile on his face, which is amazing. I try to speak Spanish to him every now and then and he speaks English. His English has gotten a lot better, as well, since his time here with the club.

But he's a great locker room guy. A lot of the guys actually connect with him, as well. You can see his bond obviously with Milton is extremely strong and I love just cracking jokes with him and with the guys and I love him as a teammate because that chemistry off the field helps us on

the field when we are going through tough times because both of us are always pressing together, we just easily get each other and communicate with each other.

Q. You guys played Seattle, I think the second game of the season out there. I know it feels like forever ago after everything that's gone on, but can you reflect on that game from getting ready to play them and how much is similar or different for this game?

GYASI ZARDES: Yeah, so I would say for starters, it's a home game for us. When we play Seattle at the beginning of the year, it was a crazy day of travel the day before. We stopped and -- was it Montana? I forget where, but we stopped in two locations just to make it to Seattle, which is pretty crazy. Obviously the virus had a toll on that, but you know, during that game, I know we had a couple opportunities.

In the first half I actually scored right before halftime if I can remember. And then in the second half, we had a couple plays, as well but also they had a PK which Eloy blocked, and next thing you know, they call the PK back and they had to take another one.

That game was a battle because I saw numerous, numerous things in that game that we've gotten better at, and I'm sure Seattle has gotten better at things in that game, as well. It was a hard-fought battle, and I'm looking forward to having another opportunity to play against a strong team like that.

Q. As one of the guys on the team who has been in this position before, what are you sort of telling the guys that are playing in their first final and enjoying the experience, but also it's game time, trying to win this game, final game of the year?

GYASI ZARDES: Yeah, you know, like you said, I'm constantly talking to these guys. It's not just me that has the championship experience. There's a couple of guys on the team that's won championships and finals.

But I'm just trying to stay as positive as possible. You know, this is the last game of a tiring year. We've been through so much this year, and it all comes down to this final game. We've achieved every single goal that we've set this year and we just have one left. It's just the last



game of the year, so we have to give it all we have.

But at the same time, we can't let emotion drive this game. We have to have the right balance and we have to do what we do best. We have to make sure we play our game, our style and we don't get carried away in the way Seattle likes to play. I think it's going to be a great opportunity for us just to fight for a Cup.

Q. Congratulations to getting to the final in the MLS Cup. I was talking to Lucas about the fans and support for your team, but do you think playing at Mapfre Stadium will give your team some advantage against Seattle?

GYASI ZARDES: Yeah, any time we have an opportunity to play in front of our fans is remarkable. Because they have sacrificed so much time, at least the three years I've been here, I've watched these fans sit in snow, sit in rain. Even like the lightning delays, I've watched them stay until the kickoff. So I think it's going to be very special to play MLS Cup in front of them, but more importantly trying to win MLS Cup in front the city and in front of the fans, it's going to be amazing.

Q. You were obviously here with the last coaching staff, so a couple questions here for you. One, if you can reflect on this year, how any kind of small ways or significant ways that Caleb has worked on some things and you've improved it? And this season has had its own challenges, but he said last season was one of the most difficult in his career. What have you learned about him that's led to success this year?

GYASI ZARDES: Yeah, one thing I always praise Caleb about is the psychology aspect of the game. You know, having the right mentality. And sure enough this year, this season at the beginning of the year, we've had the right mentality. We've set goals early on in the beginning of this year and we've looked to achieve them and accomplish them, and as crazy as this year has been, he's kept us focused and just really kept us -- kept us honest as far as trying to achieve those goals.

Q. I know what a focus it is for you on the pressing and defensive side, which isn't always a striker's first focus. Take us into what you guys have done well these last couple of games that have allowed you to get back to getting shutouts and whatnot, specifically you and Lucas and the guys up top that started the defense.

GYASI ZARDES: Yeah, so obviously me and Lucas, we try to communicate as much as possible when we are defending up top, because we are initially the first line of

defense. We just try to make it easier for our teammates, whether we're shifting the ball to one side and making sure they can't play back out the other side, making the game more predictable.

We just try to obviously try to do as much as we can to help our teammates and in return, the guys behind us are constantly communicating to us, "left," "right," "man behind you." Little communication like that goes a long way when you're trying to close down the opponent and make the space smaller so they can't break lines and play through tight areas.

Me and Lucas, we're constantly trying to work hard and just constantly trying to do as much as we can on the defensive side of it; so when we do get the ball, we can do what we do best on the attacking side of the ball.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Lucas, how do you see him, his adaptation process, because you know he has been with you like less than a year, so how do you see him?

GYASI ZARDES: Yeah, so he's a fantastic player. You know, the ball is glued to his foot. When he gets the ball, I know he's always looking up and looking for me, and if he can't find me, he's constantly trying to look for other players that are in threatening positions. So him as a player, he's even better at set pieces, as well, striking the ball.

So I love watching his evolution since he's been with the club, but also as far as me and him and the chemistry, I'm excited just to train with him and play games with him just to gain more chemistry as we play more games because if we can get things right, we can be an important threat for our team.

So I just have to keep working with him and keep improving.

Q. Obviously you're playing against some of your national teammates, as well. What is it like to be able to share the field with guys like Cristian and Jordan Morris?

GYASI ZARDES: Yeah, it's great. It's great being able to play against those guys, because when you think about the national team, it's literally the best players, I would say out of the best Americans, so just be able to step on the field and play against those guys for MLS Cup, it's a great feeling because obviously we both sacrificed a lot.

I would say all of us sacrificed a lot just to get to this moment, and here it is. It's right in front of us, and we have the likes of playing against each other just to get it. I'm

excited to step on the field.

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