

# Major League Soccer Media Conference

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Orlando, Florida, USA

## Cristian Roldan Press Conference



### Q. What are your thoughts on Saturday's final?

CRISTIAN ROLDAN: Yeah, excited, obviously, another final to be played, another final to be one and hopefully we can have a good result against a tough Columbus side who deserves to be there.

### Q. This league, we talk so much about the parity that tends to reign when great teams come along and can drop off very quickly. I'm sure you've been asked this question before, but are there any overlooked aspects of what's happened in Seattle to keep you guys so consistently good even when there's squad turnover and so many challenges like you had this season?

CRISTIAN ROLDAN: Yeah, that's a great question. I think a lot of it has to do with the front office. The front office has made big decisions on certain players, bringing in, letting them go, making really good business decisions at times with players, and really, it translates, right, to the coaching staff and then to the players, right. We have a winning mentality and we see it in the decisions that they make firsthand. You really come from top to bottom and the players being at the bottom, right, and having that winning culture we have a deep squad that can, you know, really play a part in the game like we saw against Minnesota and really players on the bench that can be starters. Really, from top to bottom, including the fans, it's just a well-run organization.

### Q. Wanted to ask about Raúl and Nico and Jordan. Why is it that they are able to work really well in finishing? I know it takes a team but it seems like they have really good chemistry, too. Can you share any insight on that?

CRISTIAN ROLDAN: Yeah, I think they understand their games extremely well, Jordan being off and running, Raúl being almost like another ten, and Nico being the energetic bunny that he is. Let's not kid ourselves, Nico is all over the pitch and he does his thing as well as Raúl filling in the spots that he needs to do. But their movements are all

chemistry-related. They understand their games extremely well and it's the reason why they are so successful, and obviously being on a really good team that does everything in their power to get them the ball because we got to play to their strengths. I think that's what we've been doing all year and hopefully we see that more on Saturday.

### Q. What are your thoughts on that match up that you're going to have in the midfield against Nagbe and Arthur, and with the issues that the team had on set pieces, was that a point of emphasis this week?

CRISTIAN ROLDAN: Yeah, their midfield three reminds me a lot of our three. We don't have a true six. They don't have a true six. And we have guys that just want the ball at their feet, right, and guys that will cover ground but aren't complete destroyers. It's going to be tough. It's going to be a battle. I think that's where the game is going to be won, and so it's going to be extremely important for the guys that play in the middle to do their part.

The second question was -- can you repeat that?

### Q. With a couple of issues the team had on set pieces with Minnesota, was that an emphasis during training this week?

CRISTIAN ROLDAN: Yes, certainly. Obviously we didn't do a good enough job, No. 1, being free kicks, avoiding set pieces. They can't score on us if they don't have those opportunities. That's extremely important. That was a big emphasis. And secondly is marking better. We were very poor. I thought on corner kicks, we were okay, but on the free kicks, that's where it gets tricky and I think that's where we struggled all year. So we have to take that extremely serious and be diligent about our marking.

### Q. The first 20 minutes of any soccer game are important; given that, how important is it for adaptability and to make in-game adjustments in a final?

CRISTIAN ROLDAN: Well, it's difficult. You know, understanding the game at an instant. Understanding how they are pressing, if they changed anything, if they have the ability to get Nagbe on the ball, how we're going to do it. I think it comes down to having a team that has been here before, has dealt with these things, being down 2-0



against Minnesota with 20 minutes left is something this team has dealt with, right. And then obviously having a good coach in Schmetzer and being able to put in, substitute players that impact the game. So seeing it on the field is certainly important from all players, but also having a good support staff to help translate that message is just as important.

**Q. Now this being your fourth final, can you take me through what each of those have sort of felt like and in what ways this one is entirely unique from those other three experiences you've had?**

CRISTIAN ROLDAN: Well, we're not playing Toronto for one. That is a bit strange. The first final was I think the cherry on top of that year, being in last place, and being able to win when I don't think anybody really counted us on it.

And the second year, I think we may have expected to be there, and I think that hurt us in the long run. We didn't feel, or at least I didn't think we were as hungry.

And then that third, you know, year in the final against Toronto at home was probably the most special I think because we were able to play it at home, and we felt really confident about our chances after our performance against LAFC.

Now this fourth I think is very similar to last year's because we came off a big result against Minnesota after being down 2-0. We were down 1-0 against LAFC in the conference finals at L.A. and I think that was a big result. So making sure we don't disappoint that result with a loss is extremely important. I think the guys are ready and eager to get going.

**Q. I wanted to go back to Raúl. I was curious when he first came in when you first realized that he might be a special player for you guys, and then I was also curious as to whether you had a favorite story about him, either on or off the field that kind of shows how special he is for you guys.**

CRISTIAN ROLDAN: Well, No. 1, I always thought he was going to be special by the way he kicked the ball. He didn't care who was in the goal. He would always just try to smack it as hard as he could and place it wherever he wanted. He kicked the ball rather weird. I've never seen anybody kick the ball the way he does. So that was, for me, like the first moment I thought that he was going to be a good player for us. Now, I didn't really think too far ahead and think the impact that he would have in the playoffs as much as he has had. I mean, the success in the playoffs for him is crazy.

The second story his personality, that same trip he came to Atlanta, I roomed with him and he was shocked by the way the MLS worked and how much liberty players would get, right. So he asked me when was the next time we needed to go eat, and it was like 7:30. He's like, "So you're saying, that I can leave the hotel to go say "hi" to a friend, and then comeback and eat at 7:30 with the team?"

And I said, "Yeah, no problem. This is America. This is the United States. Like you're free to do what you're like." He was blown by this conversation that he had with me. And I think from then on he absolutely loved the MLS because he's such a nice, social guy that just wants to have all these relationships with people and he always has a smile on his face. That was pretty neat, and being able to share that experience together.

Also we got into fight in México which was really funny because we had talked about that occasion and him being like my first roommate, and we made up really fast, and we never wanted to see each other Matt each other. So it was a good moment for us and a growing moment for my relationship with him.

**Q. I was wondering how do you feel about having your brother, Alex, on the same team, and what have you learned about him on the team?**

CRISTIAN ROLDAN: Well, I haven't learned too much about him just because I grew up with him. I played alongside him. I knew his tendencies. I still know his tendencies. I think what shocked a lot of people was them understanding who he is as a person and as a player. He's not fazed by any moment and he is one of the best passers of the ball on the team. I don't think people appreciate like what he is as a player and who he is as a player and so for me, I'm not surprised. I was very shocked initially that he wasn't going to come back to the team, and he proved himself in preseason.

But it's a great, great feeling being able to play alongside him and seeing all his success, and I think he has a really bright future in that right back position because it allows him to use all his strengths as a player. I'm excited for him and I know my family is extremely proud to see him once again on the field alongside me.

**Q. You've been to MLS Cup now four times. Does it ever get easier? Does it get mentally -- is it mentally the same? How do you compare that in terms of like the mindset of going to this whole thing where you have these availabilities before and there's distractions and whatnot?**

CRISTIAN ROLDAN: I think it certainly gets easier. I think I was overwhelmed my first year in 2016. I think I know what to expect at this point and I know that it's going to be a difficult game. And the reality is, there's so many distractions in the world right now with COVID, with injustices, with social distancing, and now playing in a final and doing this press conference via Zoom.

We have to understand that things are going to change and things are difficult. So being able to know what to expect is so important, and knowing that, the first 20 minutes are going to be extremely important against Columbus. Especially for them being able to play at home, I've been on both sides of it, and I'd rather be at home, right, but the reality is, it's going to be difficult.

It's great to be at my fourth MLS Cup but the reality is we have to win. No one remembers a finalist, so that's our mind-set going into it.

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