

Major League Soccer Media Conference

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Brian Schmetzer

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Seattle Sound head coach Brian Schmetzer.

So many trips to the final, four of the last five years, how is this one different or special in comparison, given the unprecedented 2020 season?

BRIAN SCHMETZER: I think they're all special. Any time you can make it to a Cup final, I think it's a proud moment, a great moment, a nice moment for the organization, for the players, all that.

But you mentioned, is it a little different? Yes, it's miles different. Number one, we're not playing Toronto. Number two, obviously the COVID situation in this country certainly has thrown everyday Americans for a loop. A lot of people have lost jobs, lost lives. It's a sad story in a lot of different ways.

For the players on both teams, organizations across MLS and other pro sports, it's been a really challenging year. So obviously the difference of not being able to play in front of a packed MAPFRE Stadium, I'm sure everybody would have been there. I know that our fans, we have a large contingent of traveling fans that always follow us wherever we may go. I think that is going to be missing from the atmosphere. I know they'll be in here, but normally like to be here in all the away games.

It's certainly a different circumstance, a different MLS Cup. But it is MLS Cup. It's special in many ways.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for Q&A.

Q. What is your level of concern given Columbus' COVID outbreak? Is there a chance Jordan Morris doesn't play out of an abundance of caution due to his being diabetic?

BRIAN SCHMETZER: No. I'm fully confident in the protocols that MLS and, more importantly, our club has done over the course of this very challenging time. I'm not a doctor. I don't know all of the details and all of the facts when it relates to COVID transmission. But I personally

feel safe. I know Jordan is anxious to play in the game. I fully expect him to be participating in the match.

Q. What are your plans on if you had to switch up any game plans regarding Darlington and Pedro being out for Columbus? Was it a hard situation for you to regroup the guys or just plain and simple?

BRIAN SCHMETZER: Soccer is a team sport. Those are two super talented players. Caleb is going to put two other talented players on the field in their place. He still has the advantage of being at home.

There is nothing that I would prepare differently because we prepared for a very good opponent, many different ways, how they play, all that sort of stuff.

Again, it's sad that those guys cannot feature in the match. We certainly will try and take advantage of that wherever we can. But it's not like we are going to change drastically what we do.

I mean, we are who we are at this point in the season. I think we've had a very successful run here in the playoffs. Again, we're going to try and dictate tempo, try to do the things we want to do in order to win the game.

Q. Could I get your thoughts on Darlington, the difference he's made in facing him with Columbus, with Portland over the years, what he does on the field that has made it so hard on your teams over the years?

BRIAN SCHMETZER: He's gotten better with age. He was already a tremendous player coming out of Akron. I remember Erza Henderson, a coach here in Columbus, he loved Nagbe when I was coming out of college. We were anxious to try to draft him, get him, somehow get him on our squad many different times.

He's transformed himself into one of the best holding midfielders. They play with two back there like us, 4-2-3-1. His skill set is super technical, hard to get the ball off him. He can dribble forward, be dangerous. He's got good range. He's aggressive when he defends set pieces. There's a lot of good things, a lot of nuances to his game that's made him one of the best players in MLS.



Q. About Nico, clearly one of the top players this season. He's shown that throughout his career in MLS. Has there been any added pressure on him from a personal standpoint just to deliver for this team, to get this team back to the top? In my personal opinion, even though he's playing well, he has been pressing at times in games, but he delivers in the end. What is your take on that?

BRIAN SCHMETZER: I would tell you that Nico, the standard that he sets for himself is very high, the bar he sets. The kid wants to win. He wants to win everything, in training, in games obviously. You might see Felipe pressing.

I'll give you one analogy. What you guys might think is pressing, let's just say he has 10 forward passes. The 10 forward passes, maybe eight of them don't result in a shot on goal or a goal or something that works. To me, and to Nico, that's okay. If you don't try those pass, if you don't try and get Jordan Morris in on goal, then you never know if the goal is going to get scored.

When some people see him pressing, I would say, Okay, yeah, there's times when maybe he makes a bad pass. But everybody does. What I would say is Nico has the right mindset. How do you win? Everybody wants to win, but it's the how, all the details. How do you make your team successful?

The team around Nico helps him. If I go back to the various teams, Ozzie was a big influence back in 2016. Ozzie was able to kind of help Nico control tempo when he first got here. This year it's J.P. J.P. has come here and tried to help and give us a little bit more possession in the middle part of the field. It's not just a one-man show.

Nico is certainly a very driven individual. A lot of stuff about why he was left off a top-25 list, other things, among other accolades he probably would just push to the side and say, You know what, I want to win, I want to win so badly because of my teammates, because of the players I play with. That's his true motivation.

Q. You mentioned Joao Paulo, some of the influences he's had, the way that Nico plays. How would you articulate Joao Paulo's influence on the team? What kind of things has he allowed you to do differently?

BRIAN SCHMETZER: He's a connector that allows Nico to stay higher up the field. I think to the previous point, Felipe, if Nico would get frustrated, he would drop back to find the ball more. Now he doesn't have to do that as often just because J.P. is a good provider. J.P. is kind of the connection between the back four, Nico, Raul. That has

helped us in how we play.

Q. Obviously you've talked about Darlington and Pedro. There's no one who would say the Crew are better off without them. It's tough to overcome the loss of good players like that. Looking back at 2016, that's something that you had to do. How did you manage that? It wasn't for one game. How did you manage that? Now that you're on the other side of it, how do you manage knowing they're going to be able to use that as motivation?

BRIAN SCHMETZER: You're talking about in 2016 when Clint went down?

Q. Yes.

BRIAN SCHMETZER: I mean, look, that's why soccer is a team sport. That's why teams can still have success when they lose certain key players. It's a bummer, for sure, for Columbus. I get it.

Again, our message is going to be, Let's not let complacency, Darlington Nagbe is not going to play, this is going to be an easy game. That doesn't come into any of our messaging or our mentality of that group out there. We're too smart for that. We understand that.

This is a one-off Cup final. I think we all know what's at stake. The only preparation that we are going to do, game's tomorrow, is just today to have our last training session of the year, much like we do on a normal match day minus one, just get the guys prepared for whoever Columbus puts out on the field.

Look, maybe Darlington was available for the game, then he pulled up lame with an injury. What are you going to do then? That's just part of the sport. We'll try and minimize that. I know it's a big news story out in the press.

Again, Caleb is a good coach. He has a good team. He'll have his team ready.

Q. How is Xavier for this game? It's the second final with the team for him.

BRIAN SCHMETZER: Xavier is in Seattle awaiting the birth of his child. He will not be here unless his baby is born healthy and everything and we can get him here somehow by a miracle before the game. But he is expecting his first child. It's a wonderful event when you have children.

We let him stay there with his wife. When players come to this country, they're by themselves, I know has some help

there in the Seattle, but it's a challenging thing sometimes.

We are very pleased for Xavier. He's an important member of our team. I know he will be with us in spirit.

Q. How have you seen the performance of Raul Ruidiaz in the last game, not only the last game, but in all this season?

BRIAN SCHMETZER: Thank you for the last, easy question. I love talking about Raul.

He is a tremendous goal-scorer. Everybody can see the statistics and see how many goals he scored in the playoffs, all the important goals he scored in the playoffs.

But what always amazes me, why all of the players on the team love Raul is because he's a good guy, nice guy, he laughs, is friendly, gets along with everyone. He does some of the small things, some of the small details, that help the team win not just scoring goals. His possession, his movement, his initial defending. He's the first guy when we defend, he's here. He has a very important role on how we start our defending tactics.

He does all of that with the enthusiasm. Even though there's sometimes goal-scorers that don't like to defend, Raul knows and understands his role. So I am very blessed to have a guy who is willing to help the team do the little things to help the team win.

He's also just such a tremendous goal-scorer. I mean, the goal the other night, it was perfect. I mean, he knows exactly where to float. Ball comes to him, and he's going to make sure that he scores that goal that helps us win a very challenging game against Minnesota.

THE MODERATOR: With that we thank you for today's time. Good luck tomorrow.

BRIAN SCHMETZER: Thank you, everyone.

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