

Major League Soccer Media Conference

Saturday, December 12, 2020

Brian Schmetzer

Press Conference



Columbus Crew - 3, Seattle Sounders - 0

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from coach.

BRIAN SCHMETZER: Well, this is just one, well, maybe two. I'll congratulate Caleb and Columbus. That was a very good performance. And then I'll also say that I'm very proud of the season, not the last game of the season, but the season that my squad put together. They worked hard. They fought until the end, but they came up short tonight. But in the long run in the bigger picture, I think there's certainly a lot of success that follows this franchise and we hope to continue that.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions.

Q. I was wondering how seriously you had considered mixing up the lineup and kind of what your rationale was for staying with this 11 after the last couple games?

BRIAN SCHMETZER: Well, we always assess after each game how the team performed, what they did, what can we do better, what worked, all of that. There was some serious deliberation about certain players, but we decided we could start the game like this and then take what the game gave us and make changes.

Q. You did have a great year. I'm just wondering, the last game might have taken a bit too much out emotionally, physically, and everything, as well as Columbus closing out their stadium at the same time.

BRIAN SCHMETZER: Well, I mean, yeah, maybe the last game was emotional. It was emotional high and you got to get back up again. But it was a Cup final. I mean, I almost felt like in that first half, our soccer wasn't great, and it was almost like they were too wound up, too tight, just couldn't seem to find their rhythm early in the game. Then obviously you go one goal down, okay, that's okay, but going two goals down certainly was a dagger and that was something that you got to give credit to Columbus.

Q. Just wanted to know exactly what did you guys go over at halftime and how well did you feel like your substitutions worked out on the team, the ones you made at halftime, that is?

BRIAN SCHMETZER: They worked out -- look, the team was going to play better coming out of halftime. There's a lot of times you can make adjustments at halftime, and at 2-0 your opponent usually wants to not play as firm or hard and push and whatever. It's just human nature. The team that's down 2-0 is going to come out with some pride and push and try and get an equalizer start, even just to get one. But obviously Gustav came on and did a good job and Brad came on and did a good job. But it was basically just trying to redo what we were trying to do in the first half, which is play between the 4-4-2 play in between lines, and I just didn't think our attacking movements were very sharp tonight.

Q. What did you see that the Crew did well in kind of limiting Nico's opportunities to get on the ball, yet he had a significantly fewer touches tonight than he did in his last two games?

BRIAN SCHMETZER: Yeah, 6 knee could he had a strained calf, which prevented him from being his normal self. I think the Crew did a good job of just sitting with their two holding midfielders and denying some space. I don't think in the first half, I thought JP and Cristian were too deep. One of them needed to be there to draw one of their midfielders. So I think it was a combination of just Columbus doing what they did, you know, Gyasi Zardes, I got to give it to him. He puts a lot of pressure on opponents defensively. And just our inability to play how we wanted to playing is what caused Nico not to have as many touches as he should have.

Q. Kind of extending on that as far as you guys not being able to play, I mean, it seemed like you guys were caught a little bit off guard in the opening half, especially with them pressing as much as they did. Did you kind of see that from y'all?

BRIAN SCHMETZER: Yeah, I saw it from the game. It was what we tried to message them before the game and then again at halftime. We didn't want to always play backwards, play negative. I thought that was not the way to beat how they were pressing higher up the field. So



again, whether it was a little bit of our team not playing up to their potential or you giving Columbus credit, the game just didn't manifest itself the way we wanted.

Q. This is obviously your fourth MLS Cup. You've got, you haven't scored in seven of those halves. How much of a concern is that and how do you go about solving that kind of problem?

BRIAN SCHMETZER: You might stump me with that one. I mean, I don't know. I mean, we got a really good attacking team. I'll have to figure out how important that real statistic is. I mean, we got two wins out of the four, so I don't know how to answer that.

Q. How do you think the players' experienced played a part in tonight's game, the Seattle Sounders players?

BRIAN SCHMETZER: I'm not following you. The experienced players?

Q. The experience that each of the players had in MLS playoffs, playing in tonight's game, like, let's say, Nouhou, Alex, Shane O'Neill?

BRIAN SCHMETZER: Well, look, we took Nouhou off because we needed more attacking movements. He was on there to prevent Diaz, who had a good game for them. Alex is a young player with a good future. Shane has done a great job for us all year. The whole team was flat. I mean, I thought there were some times early in the first half where we were able to get behind them, Jordan was able to get behind them, and we just couldn't finish any plays or Jordan got behind them and then we tried to score too quickly instead of just keeping the ball in their half of the field and trying to take some of the sting out of the game. So whether it was a young player, a medium player, or an experienced player, I just don't think we played up to our potential.

Q. Do you at all second-guess or give any kind of thought to the way that the starting lineup that you chose and not putting in your normal first choice starters?

BRIAN SCHMETZER: Well, those guys were my first choice starters for the last four games, a lot of them. I don't second-guess myself. What I do is I try and learn. You always try and learn with things.

I mean, it's obviously -- I think I said this after the Minnesota game. So after the Minnesota game, you put guys on and you win the game 3-2 in a dramatic fashion and you're the greatest coach ever. And then you make a lineup choice for this game and you end up losing 3-0 in a

Cup final, then everybody's questioning your lineup. That's just part of pro sports. But my intention, our staff's intention, is always just to learn. When you stop learning or you think you know it all, then that's when you fall into the trap of not trying to get better.

So after the Cup final in 2017, we learned some things. Last year we learned some things. I'll learn some things after this, after we kind of reflect on this season and this playoff run and this final, and then we'll try and push the group forward.

Q. Not a lot of Kelvin throughout these playoffs. I was wondering if he had been dealing with an injury or anything or if that was just fully a coach's decision?

BRIAN SCHMETZER: Well, he had the hamstring injury that was, pulled him out of the first game, and then I decided to go with the group that had been winning some games.

Q. Tough loss. You were mentioning that the team was flat and you just lost 3-0. Do you consider this game as a failure or this season?

BRIAN SCHMETZER: I absolutely think that this game was a failure. I think this individual game was not a good performance by our club, not up to the standard that we set for ourselves, that I set for myself. It is my job as a coach to make sure that the players are prepared and that they have the tools to be successful.

So this performance was not a good performance from the Seattle Sounders. So, you know, it's certainly not a good way to end your season. But I would circle back to say that the club, the team, did come back through some adversity and made it into another final back-to-back, which is very hard to do in a league like MLS, with parity, it's very challenging. So that is one good accomplishment that came out of this year.

Q. Not to harp on the lineup choices, but just to be clear on Svensson. Was there anything going on there other than it just staying with the lineup that got you here or was there other thinking that went into that?

BRIAN SCHMETZER: I had conversations with Gustav about how he felt, how fit he was, all of that. We had talked about it. He is a competitive guy. He is a good Seattle Sounder. Those conversations are not easy, but he is a team guy, and when he came on the field he showed that he was motivated to try and help the team win.

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