

# Major League Soccer Media Conference

Saturday, December 12, 2020

## Stefan Frei

Press Conference



Columbus Crew - 3, Seattle Sounders - 0

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

STEFAN FREI: We'll have to go to questions. Sorry. Whatever you guys want to ask.

THE MODERATOR: First question, please.

**Q. Stefan, if you could just start by telling us a little bit about what you saw, especially early on. It seemed like even though you guys had a fair amount of possession, that the Crew were really the team that were imposing the game on to you guys.**

STEFAN FREI: Yeah, it's one of our worst halves of the season at the worst time for us. I think it took us a long time to find a way into the game. We may have some, may have had some spells of possession, but they were meaningless, really. We weren't really doing much with it. I think our best couple of spells in the first half were actually long balls, a very direct style there. But other than that, definitely a half to forget.

Unfortunately, we already found ourselves down 2-0 at that point. So I think we came out a little better in the second half. Weren't able to find a goal that could have opened up things, but we weren't the better team today and deservedly they won.

**Q. Brian was kind of succinct. He called it a failure. What do you -- I know it's very early -- but how do you kind of maybe sum up this everything from today?**

STEFAN FREI: Yeah, certainly not a success, so I would have to agree with him on that. Again, on one side, it's, you're not sitting here now saying, Oh, you know, we should have won because we definitely shouldn't have won.

On the other side, you know, you wish we would have played up to our potential or at least somewhat close to it because it's a massive opportunity to go back-to-back, which happens very, very rarely. It happens very rarely

that you find yourself in situations to win the big one. So who knows if we'll ever make it back, right? So it's a massive squandered opportunity for us.

And all credit to them. They played a good game. They were hungry. It's been a messed up year for everybody, every team. If one team thinks that it's been hard, like if we say it's been hard for us, it's been hard for them, it's been hard for everybody. I think you got to earn everything. Nothing's for free. And today it just took us way too long to find our way into the game and earn ourselves a win.

**Q. You guys are coming off a big comeback on Monday and there were a lot of guys talking about how there was just a sense within the group that you were always going to find a way to battle back. I was wondering if it felt different tonight than it did against Minnesota, just felt like you guys didn't have maybe quite that same spark, even whenever you were behind against Minnesota.**

STEFAN FREI: I mean, two completely different games. I think against Minnesota we were in control the whole game. If you look at this first half, we were never in control. So it's a completely different game, completely different feeling. Deservedly down 2-0, really. Not, just not a good first half.

With that being said, still an opportunity to maybe find a goal early on in the second half and the game may open up. Like I said, unfortunately, we were never able to do that. And then at some point, when you start moving pieces around and you leave yourself exposed in the back because you're pushing up front, the third one's going to come.

So whether it was 2-0, 3-0, it doesn't really matter in the end. It was just that first half is one to, right now, forget. But maybe in the long-term when we look back at it, one, to figure out why it happened would be a nice thing.

**Q. I'm just curious to see what you saw from your position in terms of the team defensively. It seemed like throughout the playoffs you guys had done a good job at staying organized, staying compact, staying in shape. And tonight, especially in the first half, that didn't seem to be the case, especially in the round of play. So I kind of wanted to get your thoughts on that.**

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STEFAN FREI: Honestly, I don't know. I wish I had the answer. I thought we were -- I don't know, maybe, again, like I said, I don't think we found a way into the game and they kind of over ran us almost a little bit. I think they were hungry in the first half. They were opportunistic. With the first goal, for example, it's an early cross. It's asking questions with crosses. It's asking questions with dangerous runs on the back stick. It's just, it was a daring first half on their end and it paid off.

And we just weren't, for some reason, weren't ready for that. Like I said, I don't have the answer for it. I wish after we dodged a couple of bullets early on, we would have woken up a little bit and would have been able to find our way into the game, but we didn't and we got punished. And it's difficult, obviously, to climb out of a hole at that point. That was the game.

**Q. How long does this, do you stay with this, with the loss and how long do you stay here?**

STEFAN FREI: I'm trying to forget about it at some point, but it sucks. Again, it's a squandered opportunity. I've been, I feel like I've, for some weird reason, I've been myself blessed to have so many opportunities to win these trophies. There's players in the world that are 50 million times better than I am and they never get these opportunities to win big trophies.

So it sucks because the stars have to align for anybody to find themselves in a position to achieve something big. We have achieved some stuff here and there. That's great, but you also don't forget the ones that went through your fingers.

So it's going to suck. You know, the thing that right now is the saving grace is we didn't deserve it today. Again, if I would sit here and say that we made one mistake, I made one mistake, and we had a really good game other than that, and we should have won, then it would be even more frustrating. Right now, I'm just, that's all I can say is we did not deserve to win today and that's what happened.

**Q. Is there anything that you feel like you just need to do in the off-season at this point? Is it just putting this aside or do you want this to sting and does it, are you able to use this next year potentially?**

STEFAN FREI: You always want to reflect and try to correct mistakes, whether it is actual situational things that we could have done better or attitude in games or whatever. You want to see if there's something that we could pick up and maybe use to be more successful in the future, for sure.

What do I need personally? I just need some time with my family. It's been a really draining season, and I'm not just talking about the football. Obviously, with the pandemic going on and also other very, very important issues this year, with social justice, it's been very draining. And so it's -- I just need to recharge the batteries a little bit, if possible, and then stay safe.

That's the other thing, too. This is, I find it trivial, almost, and am a bit embarrassed to have to talk about how disappointed I am in not winning a trophy. There's people that lost their lives this year and people that are still fighting. So let's not forget about the first responders, the workers, the people that are out there in hospitals helping everybody. Thank you for your work. Everybody, keep please wearing masks because we're not out of this yet. There's a little light at the end of the tunnel. But that's the other thing, right, you can't just now turn off completely. There's still a pandemic going on, but I just need some time with my family.

**Q. To understand just a little bit, does this kind of -- I mean, because you've been in the finals before and have lost one before too, so does that make it a little bit easier to stomach because of the fact that you believe that you, like you said, you didn't deserve it? Is this one, even though if you sit with it for a little bit, though, you feel like you didn't deserved it, so therefore you might be able to move on a little bit easier?**

STEFAN FREI: I mean, that's what I'm telling myself right now, right? You're looking for ways to get through this, this crappy result, you know? And that's what I'm going to stick with.

But no, it's a squandered opportunity. Four chances and we're 50 percent, that's great and all, but it's still two missed opportunities, you know?

Like I said, our careers are short and this season in particular, it seemed like it was going to be a wash, who knew whether we were going to be able to finish it to begin with. So for us to be able to put together a strong season and then find ourselves in a position to find something positive and reward ourselves with something positive, it's, it was an opportunity.

I think when all is said and done, we're happy that we won a trophy. We're sad that we didn't win the big one.

**Q. You mentioned wanting to kind of look back and figure out what happened tonight. And Schmetz said something similar about just taking lessons and**

**making sure that something like this doesn't happen again. And I was thinking back to in 2017 when you guys kind of loss in similar fashion, what did you take from that initial loss that has maybe propelled you guys forward in a way that maybe you guys can do again?**

STEFAN FREI: Well, I think in 2017 what we learned was how difficult it was to have a season, a good season after winning the whole thing. There's a target, everybody says there's a target on your back. I think over the last few years as a Sounder you get more and more of a target regardless.

But 2017 maybe taught us how to deal with that a little better. I don't know. You still have to come through at the end. If you make it to the final, that's great and all, but nobody's going to remember the finalists, only going to remember the champion.

So I don't know what we will learn from it, hopefully something, because you don't want to repeat the same mistakes. I don't know. It's too early to tell you. I'll get back to you when we figure it out.

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