

2022 MLS Cup: LAFC vs Philadelphia

Saturday, November 5, 2022

Los Angeles, California, USA

Banc of California Stadium

Philadelphia Union

Jim Curtin

Postgame Press Conference



Q. One of the so many story lines of the game is John McCarthy coming in and making saves, a Philadelphia Union product, a guy you've put in for PKs before. Your thoughts on that story line and what he did today.

JIM CURTIN: Obviously you feel for their goalkeeper when he gets stretched off. That's a difficult one for everybody.

Johnny is a great kid, a Philly kid. You know, a guy that did great things here in Philadelphia.

You know, look, soccer gods have a funny way of working. As soon as the injury happened, I started the half-joke with my staff that I can't believe Johnny is going to be in there and this is probably going to go to PKs, or something along those lines when it happened.

Yeah, we didn't have Johnny, and Gareth Bale being the ones that did us in today. Soccer is a funny sport that way. Guys stepped up in the big spot, and we were probably about two or three minutes away from lifting our trophy in the MLS Cup which would have been amazing.

Our guys were tired. They were tired. Down a man. It's chaotic. They are throwing bodies. We had a couple half-chances to clear the ball there, but no subs left and fatigue kind of set in, and we didn't get the job done.

Q. Was it a bit frustrating not to get really productive performances out of Mikael and Julian? Obviously they played a big role for you scoring goals and getting assists but really not connecting in the final third today?

JIM CURTIN: Yeah, I think if you look at the game as a whole, finals are never really what the regular season encapsulates. So I think that a lot of their great attacking players were quiet, and some of our attacking players, you know, weren't on the ball a ton, but they all worked very hard.

It was a game that, you know, a deflection here or there for both teams and goals were going in, it was chaotic, it was end-to-end, a lot of emotion from both teams.

LAFC 3, Philadelphia Union 3

3-0 Penalties

JIM CURTIN: First off, congratulations to LAFC, obviously an amazing game. A big thank you to all of our traveling fans that came out and really pushed us all and made an amazing final.

Obviously we did everything in our power and pushed as hard as we could, but it wasn't meant to be today. We were close. I'm gutted for our players. They obviously give everything for the badge and for the club and for the city, but kind of at a loss for words because this is a heartbreaking loss, no question.

Q. First of all, was this finally a day for Jack Elliott to spend some time in the spotlight that he has not gotten nearly enough in his career? And just in general, what on earth --

JIM CURTIN: Look, a lot of guys had great days for both teams. I thought Jack Elliott, you know, is a guy that maybe flies under the radar. So many others got individual accolades this year. And sometimes they can't choose so many players from one team, and I understand that. So maybe he got overlooked quite a bit.

An incredible final from Jack, a great performance.

Again, I'm proud of our guys, and that locker room, it hurts. It's as silent as it can be in there, and there's not much you can say in a game like that where guys give everything for 130 minutes and penalty kicks.

An incredible season from Jack. Again, an exciting final. Someone has to lose, and unfortunately we came out on the wrong end today.

It was what a final should be. I just feel terrible for our guys. Again, you know, it's one of those ones, I was going to say we'll rewatch it, but I don't know if you rewatch that one. I think I lived it through the 130 minutes and aged probably five or six years.

It's a great game, and unfortunately we came out on the wrong end.

Q. Running into penalties, what was your thinking in putting the lineup together?

JIM CURTIN: Yeah, look, Frank does a great job organizing the group and selecting who is going to take penalties. Obviously you lose a couple attacking pieces when Cory goes out. He's a guy that would normally hit one. When he goes out, Chris goes in, and you have the unique situation where you have to actually pull somebody because they are short a man. So Leon was eliminated from selection there.

PKs are a tough way to end the game. I'm not saying that because we lost. It's the equivalent of playing a basketball game and settling it with a three-point contest. It's dumb; it's not the sport. Once it goes there, anything can happen, and credit to them for getting the result.

We had a list of guys -- some guys had little knocks and maybe changed their mind when it gets to the big moment. Everybody did their best, and unfortunately we didn't win.

Q. I asked you about the 3-3 match in 2019 and you talked about how much that meant to you and how amazing that game was. Where does this game stack up relatively speaking? You and LAFC seem to play one another in these matches, alternating goals nonstop. Should we expect more of this in the future?

JIM CURTIN: Yeah, look, I think that the -- you can have a great season. But the season only ends perfect for one team of the 28. That's LAFC this season.

So again, we, you know, think back to that last 3-3 game. This one is an incredible game. I think I've only said I've been proud of a group in a loss maybe two or three times in my career as a coach, and you know, I'm still very proud of the team. We're as close as we could possibly be to our first MLS Cup.

The only other time I said I was proud in a loss was in the penalty kicks against Seattle, which was a really good performance and a tough opponent.

It's hard, man. Right now it's really difficult. I feel terrible for the players because they put so much into the season,

into the game, and they are hurting right now.

And that's natural and normal. We'll try to have a beer or two tonight and have some kind of way to put a smile on each other's face because they did accomplish something pretty amazing this year.

LAFC is another great opponent. I think John Thorington mentioned, it will probably be in a long line of games in history I think we'll see each other again in some big spots because we have two really well run clubs and two really good teams and players that fight to the end.

Q. How big a factor was Alejandro Bedoya's absence today, and second, what were the biggest differences in your team's play from the first half to the second half? Because you seemed more aggressive in the second half in trying to create turnovers and press play.

JIM CURTIN: Yeah, in the first part, if you take the captain off of any team in this league, they get significantly weakened. To have the performance that we did without Alejandro was pretty big.

Second part again, sorry? The second half -- gotcha, gotcha.

The first half, I think all finals start, and it's chaos. The first 15 minutes, there's not a lot of soccer. I thought we did a good job of limiting their star players. And they're going to get on the ball, but we put them on the ball in areas of the field that weren't dangerous, you know, and we conceded off of an unforced error and a mistake and a bad foul, and the deflection goes in. That can happen.

I think the guys grew into the game in the second half, and our fitness I think helped us, and I think we showed that we belonged and we could play with them, and I think our confidence grew and grew.

Almost gave the final haymaker punch there with the goal. But again, it just wasn't meant to be.

Q. Incredible stretch here for the club starting with that U.S. Open Cup final in 2018. As you approach the off-season, the players who are coming back, the players who are departing, what's the next step in the evolution to get past what's been a stalemate to win the title?

JIM CURTIN: I think the most important thing is to keep this group together. And that won't be easy because, when you have success, people want a little bit more, and they are deserving of a little bit more because we have a great

team and great players.

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I hope that we are able to keep this group together again. Maybe sprinkle in a piece or two that can provide some more depth and cover.

But overall, you guys can tell, we are close. We are close, and we can win an MLS Cup. But just today wasn't meant to be.

So to answer your question, I hope this group stays together for many years. I think we can make another run at this thing. But right now, it hurts, and we'll have to regroup and handle the off-season.

Q. On that same topic, there's a couple reports in the days leading up to this game regarding Paxten Aaronson and a potential transfer for him. Is there anything you can speak to or elaborate regarding Paxten's status with the club?

JIM CURTIN: Great player. Great young player. I thought he came into the game and helped us today. Did a good job.

But as far as rumors, I stay out of the contracts. I coach the guys that are here. They all work hard. Love my players. I love working with them.

But yeah, we'll see what the future holds in terms of transfer stuff.

Q. Speaking of Paxten, when you went him into the game today, what did you say to him, both tactically and mentally and encouragement-wise in a moment like that?

JIM CURTIN: At the time we needed a boost in the attack. We just conceded a goal. We decided to take Jack out. Jack played a great game, I thought did a great job for a teenager. And you put in some fresh legs on that side.

I told him to treat it more like a second ten or a wide winger, and get on the ball and dribble and drive at the LAFC team, because I think everybody was tired a little bit at that point because it was a high-intensity game.

So I thought he stepped in and did a really good job and worked as hard as he possibly could. Created some chances.

Proud of all of the guys' performances really. I thought it was a day a lot of guys had good days, and again we just came up a little short.