

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Raphael Wicky

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Quick thanks to everyone for joining us for the first video conference from Orlando. Friendly reminder that the team has joined Group B and will play their first game against the Seattle Sounders FC on to us at 8:00 A.M. Central time.

Q. I guess we'll start with, I guess, where we started the last couple weeks with these. You said before the club trusts the league, and the health and safety protocol system it has in place, but since the last time we had one of these, two teams have been forced to drop out of the tournament and a few other teams have had players test positive from within the bubble. Do you still have that trust in the league's protocols, and if so, why?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yes, I do. I do. I feel safe down here. We are tested every other day. We have been tested so often before coming here, we have been tested so often here, and we will be tested every other day in the future. We have our own floor. Our team is in our floor. You are rarely in touch with anyone else. If you know -- if you don't go over to talk to a former teammate or a former coach, a person you know, you really are not often in touch, in physical contact, with anyone.

We are wearing our masks at all times besides when we are in training, when the players train, and obviously when we eat. Yes, if we do our part and we are disciplined, and the league is doing their part and we are tested and tests are accurate, then yes, I can say we feel safe.

Yeah, there have been cases -- there have been cases since we are here, but I believe these cases were brought in. They were not from here. And as long as that is the case, we feel safe, yes.

Q. I guess just sort of following up, have you thought at all about how you would react and what you would tell the team if there was a positive test that came from inside the bubble, as opposed to having been brought from outside? Have you thought about what you

would tell the team and how -- how you would want them to react to that?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Look, that is -- if that really happens, hopefully that moment doesn't happen. But if that happens, then we would be told that the case is from inside the bubble, I'm sure that then there will be other discussions, and now then we may have to look into it and see what makes sense.

But on how many days you have to be here to know that the case you have is from here, I have been told certain numbers, but it doesn't really make sense that I start explaining this.

I can just repeat what I said: We are tested so much before. We are tested so often in here now. Knock-on-wood, we have never had a case. There is teams that have cases but they are not here long enough, we know that those cases come not from here. That's where we are today.

Should the other case happen -- again, like we trust the league, and the league repeated that to us, the head coaches and also the players: The most important thing is the safety of the players.

Should -- should the league and their specialists know that this is not safe, I know that then we will have different discussions, yes.

Q. How has it been managing the players through this? You're dealing with the football side of, this but also the player's feelings, fears, anxiety. CJ Sapong had a Tweet four or five days ago that seemed to indicate things weren't going well, but I've heard Johnny B. say things are fine. How has it been for you as a manager, managing everyone's collective feelings about what's going on?

RAPHAEL WICKY: So yeah, it's about listening, if anyone has something, and it's about talking to them. And obviously like I said, they are tested, so our group so far is fine. We didn't have a positive test, and hopefully we are not going to have.

When that -- I am not that big on social media and I am not reading all these things but obviously I was told that, and I

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had a little sit down with CJ and George Heitz and we spoke about it. We obviously also have regular talks with the league because they also ask us, what could they do different or where can we improve.

So we have a sit-down, and I think it's important that there is an open communication, and that is the case. The league had a long call with the players, and should the league -- I know the league sat down, as well, with CJ to hear his opinions, to hear his concerns, and I think that's what we have to do whenever someone has a concern; that we talk about it.

I have to say so far here down here, it has been really good. The organization has been really well. The fields are really good. The food is good. Yes, it's often the same, but the food is good. When we are tested, we have never have to wait. The bus transportation, everything is very well organized.

Yes, there was, or there was the FC Dallas, which obviously the beginning when you come, there were a lot of rumors and there were maybe not in the beginning the best communication, but after a while, when the league communicated what's actually a fact, things are good down here. That's where we are.

And like I said, we had a sit-down with CJ and CJ has been good, and he has been heard. He was able to listen what they say, they listen what he says, and I think that's how it's supposed to be.

Q. With your group schedule changes and so much of this being unprecedented, it seems as though there's a challenge for the psychology of keeping your team focused and performing on the field. Can you speak about how you face that and how you keep everyone pulling in the same direction in such a unique situation?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, that's something we start in the beginning. We said let's focus on what we can control and let's focus on the work we put in and on the discipline we put in with being social distance with not getting positive and wearing masks and all that, and let's focus on the training. That's what we do.

That was also the case in these last eight days in which we were not sure which group are we going to be and what day are we going to play, because there was a lot of uncertainty. But there was a lot of uncertainty in the last two and a half, three months, so we kind of were used to it.

No one really knew what would happen, and it was a little bit the same here. We spoke to the guys and said, look,

guys, it's not ideal, but it's not easy as well for the league to deal. They tried their best. Let's focus on what we can control. Wherever we play, whenever we play, let's be ready. Let's be ready and we are. We are. The team is doing well. The team works well. The spirit is good. They are all focused.

Are we happy about every single thing with changing the group and now we have to prepare differently? No, but it doesn't make sense to lose too much energy on that. Again, we are going to be ready. We are ready. They want to play. That's why we are here.

And now we are going to play. Okay; we have got to be flexible. Now we play in another group. It is what is it. Honestly that's how we talk about it. Everything else I think is a loss of energy and things we can't control.

The league is not doing that on purpose. They are not changing our group because they just feel like, "Oh, this morning, I'm getting up, let's change them." There is reasons behind that, and that's how it is right now. And from our side, we show flexibility and we are going to be there. That's what we can do.

Q. You talk about the unknown of switching groups. How as a coach and when you're talking to the guys about now having to prepare for different teams, given the first game is against Seattle, is this a blessing in that the short turnaround doesn't require new prep because you've seen them this year? In your discussions with the players over the last 24 hours, what's been your message to them about now having to think about different opponents than you did previously?

RAPHAEL WICKY: So the first thing I have to say, when you know the group, and we knew Nashville, Inter Miami, New York City, of course as a coaching staff, we start prepare, but it's not that we started talking to our team about Inter Miami and New York City already ten days ago.

We go game by game. So we start with obviously analyzing within the coaching staff those teams, but our immediate preparation has not started -- didn't start explicitly at that moment, when we knew there is rumors the game may be postponed.

Now we know we have a new group and now it's the same. Now we prepare for Seattle. Within the coaching staff, of course, we prepare Seattle. We prepare San Jose and we work on Vancouver. But the team are not already going to talk about Vancouver. It is, we have to change Nashville; we now prepare Seattle, and so that's how we do it. Then only after Seattle we go into San Jose then.

We've already played them, some of the analysis we've done in February, we probably can use them, but as well again, and I said it multiple times on our calls: How much from March is still the same now in these teams; they also have a three months' break. Some of the players who were there in March, may not play now, and maybe now some who were not there in March may play now -- (audio freeze) -- another centerback.

We will see tonight what team they put on the field, but I just think in general, you have to be flexible and prepare game by game, and that's what we do, and that's also the way we spoke to the team. We said, "Let's focus now on Seattle, and then go to the next game." That's how we do it.

Q. Wanted to ask about the schedule, you've got two morning games. The two 8:00 PM games seem like sapping conditions. How difficult will it get the team adjusted from going to morning, to late and then back to morning again?

RAPHAEL WICKY: That is, in fact, a challenge which we knew before. We had obviously our 9:00 A.M. game against Inter Miami and then we would have had an 8:00 P.M. game later on, as well. We had these thoughts and talks already before. Right now the only thing that changes is we have two morning games.

Being here now since eight days, it is quite -- it is quite a difference if you are in the morning under the sun. I think it's way hotter than if you are in the evening at 8:00 or even when the sun is not there, but it's still warm and very humid.

So we are training in the morning. Most of our training times in Chicago are always in the morning. We are training now, most of our trainings have been in the morning and now will be in the morning. We try to adjust to that.

But yeah, both teams are in the same. It's not that we are the only team playing at that time in the morning. So it's -- again, we cannot control that. This is how it is for both teams.

Yeah, it is hot. It is hot. So we've got to be smart how we play and the way we approach the game in our preparation, not only on game day but all these days with recovery, with food, with sleep. All of that is very important obviously because the conditions are challenging here, yes.

Q. You guys had a rainout, a very short friendly

against Minnesota United during the week. What takeaways did you have from such a shortened game, and did that help ultimately in the preparation for Seattle?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, it did. Yeah, we were happy to have this game. It was a very short change of our schedule and we were very happy to find Minnesota to play against. Unfortunately we were only able to do 45, but with the 45 minutes, we were happy. The team looked good. Looked very organized and disciplined, and we take that away. I think they did a good job.

Unfortunately there were a lot of players normally getting minutes in the second half; they didn't get these minutes. But again, we have to be quite flexible in everything we do here right now, and so we had to then have a bigger training session with the players yesterday and get them some sort of minutes in there.

Yeah, I think it was good for us to have at least 45 minutes against a real opponent, even before we already had in-house scrimmages and we played against each other, but it's not the same when you have really another MLS opponent. Those 45 minutes were helpful, yes.

Q. Going back to the start times of the matches, you have the two morning matches, the night match, the morning match and the night match. How do you get guys' body clocks and sleep right for that? There's a lot of study in sports now about the importance of sleep and optimizing sleep. How are you managing that when they have different start times over the course of a week?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, so today was a day off, and now we have three training sessions, Saturday, Sunday, Monday. We will train twice at 10:30 A.M. and once at -- on Monday we train at 8:00 A.M., which is an early session, and so obviously with having morning sessions, okay, 10:30 is a little bit later than 9:00, but you obviously get them into a rhythm where they have to get up at a certain time and have breakfast and train in the morning. Train, also in these conditions, because usually it's quite sunny and warm in the morning. If you're lucky, it gets a little bit of clouds and a little bit of rain.

Then obviously, again, talking to the players and tell, okay, now try to go to bed earlier so that you have enough sleep because you have -- not get up quite early in the morning, so actually it's these days now, trying to use already a little bit of that pattern.

In terms of nutrition, which is obviously very interesting and I have to be honest, I don't think I have ever played as a

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professional player a 9:00 A.M. competition game. But usually try to eat about three hours, three and a half hours before the game, which we know we are not going to do at 5:30. They are going to probably eat between 6:00 and 6:15, three hours, 2:45 before the game. You have to see as well, normally when you get up at that time, you don't eat normally the same amount of food as you would as if you prepare for an afternoon game or an evening game. They have to get used to that, and we train with that over the next couple of days with the morning sessions.

Q. So last time I asked you who had been shining, who had been standing out in training, and you mentioned Mauricio Pineda, and he paid you back by scoring that ridiculous goal against Minnesota. How has he been, and take me through what your -- what you were feeling when you saw him score that monster goal.

RAPHAEL WICKY: He scored -- that goal was beautiful. I hope he can replicate that during the season again because it was beautiful.

He already scored a really beautiful goal in an in-house scrimmage I think it was ten days ago or two weeks ago. Yeah, he's in a good shape. He's continuing doing what he has done before the pandemic, before the stop of the season, and I'm happy with him.

But again, he has to keep working. He had as to keep improving. He has to keep performing every single day in training. We have competition in this team. There is -- we have the new players here now. There is more competition than before, and that is challenging for everyone, and no one can be 100 percent sure that their spot is every time a guarantee and I think that is good, because competition in the team makes you normally getting better.

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