

# Chicago Fire Media Conference

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## Raphael Wicky

Press Conference



**Q. In Seattle you rolled out a 5-3-2 or a 3-5-2 depending on how you draw it up. How are you preparing for a San Jose side that uses a pretty rare style?**

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, it's an unusual game to prepare. Obviously you don't face that often. But it's more -- it's more unusual when you actually have the ball, not really in your defensive shape.

So it's more to show the players obviously footage from how they defend and obviously that when you have the ball, you will constantly be in a challenge, constantly have a guy behind you who is going to hit you, would be going to try to steal you the ball.

So this is obviously unusual, and you have to be very, very quick up here, and play quicker as normal and be ready for a lot of challenges. That's the unusual thing. Also that players obviously follow other players almost around the whole field, which is unusual.

But then when San Jose has the ball, it's actually not unusual. They are very good with the ball. They are actually the best possession team in the whole league throughout the whole last season. They out-possessed out of 34 games, 32 teams, which normally people don't really talk about, because everyone thinks San Jose is a man-marking team, is a defensive team, but it's actually the contrary. They are very good in possession. But the unusual thing is, like I said, the defensive stuff when you have the ball.

**Q. Ignacio Aliseda has yet to play for the team. What was going on with him and when might we see him play?**

RAPHAEL WICKY: There's nothing going on with him. He's training well. He in the beginning after when we came back from the lockdown or from the stop, he had -- he missed a few trainings because of some tooth issues but nothing big.

There's nothing; we have competition, I'm very happy about that to have a lot of options up front. CJ, Robert, there is Elliot Collier, who had a pretty good preseason who every time delivers when he has to play.

Aliseda is in there. We have a lot of midfielders and that's how it is. That's fine. He's training well. His moment will come. He has to keep working hard and I know that he's an option for us. He's still young. There is still things which obviously he has to learn and do better, but there's nothing specifically going on. It's just that's the game; it's a team with more than just 11 players.

**Q. You seemed a little cautious and defensive at the start of the game against Seattle. So first of all, do you agree with that assessment, and secondly, if so, how much of that was because of the weather?**

RAPHAEL WICKY: Cautious, not really. It was a 5-3-2. We knew where we want to have them and try to steal the ball and press the ball there.

And in the beginning, actually, we had a few really good winning and transition moments even in the first ten minutes where we could have -- should have actually scored a goal if we would have been cleaner going forward.

But after that, it's a little bit of a mix of probably the shape we are in and then also having actually the legs and getting used to that -- to that sharpness and that game rhythm.

It's very, very hot; so to press in that heat all the time and be very sharp wasn't possible for us, where you see a lot of teams actually here sitting, trying to press a bit and then sitting very comfortable in their own half, even in a low block and that's what happened to us, as well.

We were fine with that. The team was comfortable in that. It's not that they had a lot of chances. They had a lot of the ball, but not a lot of chances.

**Q. Coming off that big win in your first game and preparing for the second, how do you capitalize on momentum that you guys got from your opening win?**

RAPHAEL WICKY: It was a big win. It was a great win



and a big win. We were in a similar situation in early March where we were up 1-0, they came back and then we lost a game.

This game, for whatever reason, our team wasn't there mentally and didn't concede in the last minutes and didn't lose the game. We actually won the game.

So it's a big win. It's a champion. It's great to beat the champion and I think it's good to take this feeling into the next game, and I think that for the team it was just very important that they felt they were all working together, fighting together. Every player who came in actually did his work and helped.

The guys would didn't play who were on the bench were cheering, were helping, were talking to them and I think that is what it's about. It's about the team spirit and that everyone actually has the same goal.

But it was one game. It was a start. It was a first step and now it's obviously a reset and start over again, and confirm what we have seen against a completely other team than Seattle was.

**Q. How difficult it is to manage and take decisions when you have two sides of the coin? One is you're building a project. You need people to get minutes and you need some messages to go across and be executed, but at the same time, you're in a tournament, and you need to get points and grow in the tournament. It seems like whatever happens at the beginning of the year is not worth a big percent of it any more because whatever happens now and the conditions that you are, very difficult. What are those strengths that tell you, we are on the right path, but at the same time you need points to get to the final stage of the tournament.**

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, I mean, I think we are on the right path. I see similar cohesion of the team which I saw in March. We are continuing to do what we have done there, working together, trying to create chances and trying to be hard to play against and I think that's what we showed as a team.

We have now more options than we have in March, which gives us more competition in the team which makes it harder for the players to actually be on the field which makes them normally working harder and getting better because competition normally makes you better.

Yeah, like I said, I think we are in a good path in a good way but it's a process. It takes time and we just have to continue. This was a first step. This was nothing else than

a first step, but a very, very good step and a big win for us.

**Q. We've seen several videos come out on social media in the last couple days of how the guys are interacting behind the scenes, post-match celebration, golf outings. You're facing unique challenges to be conscious of health and safety protocols, but for what it's worth, guys seem to be enjoying one another. How would you assess the team chemistry off the field at this point, and how important is that to you?**

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, very good, actually, but not all of these footages were actually after the game. Some stuff was done before the game in the first ten days when we were here, not that you guys think after the game we only played golf and whatever you guys saw.

From the beginning, I always told you guys we have a really good chemistry on the team and we have a really good group of players on the field and also off the field and we see that here, as well.

Obviously winning games help you. Everything is easier and everything is nicer when you win. Even in March when we lost in Seattle our team chemistry was really, really good and we continued to do that and we continue actually to emphasize on that telling how important that is.

So we are enjoying our time here. We came here to play. We are all excited to be here to train again together and play, but we also try to do the most out of it when we have a little bit of time off.

Right now, it's obviously finding the right balance between games and recovery and not just being in your room for 12 hours a day; so that they have some activities out here but also finding the right balance there because obviously not being out there five, six hours a day in that heat because it is very, very hot here. The team is doing well.

**Q. Obviously so far in the group, results even outside of the win against Seattle have kind of gone your guys way, and you find yourself having played only one game, on top of the group even ahead of teams who have played two. What's your message to the guys and to the team about how to keep their focus on just what they have to do rather than paying too much attention to what goes on in other matches, especially when it's good news for you guys like it's been so far?**

RAPHAEL WICKY: I have to be honest, we haven't actually talked about that. I mean, we have spoken to them and said, guys, congratulations, this is a big win and we can be happy about that, and we have now a few days where the guys could relax a little bit and recover and

enjoy.

Now it's back in what we can control. It's our next game and prepare to that. We actually don't talk about the other results together. Maybe the players in between they do, but me as a coach and with my coaching staff, we don't really bring the other things up because right now it's -- yeah, it doesn't make sense.

So that's actually what we do, focus on what we do.

**Q. I have two questions for you. One, Mauricio Pineda, his normal position to play in the back defense, but it was a choice for you to put in that position that you have prepared him to play in that position? And the second one is if you want to make at least two or three changes of players for your next game.**

RAPHAEL WICKY: So your first question, since January even, I trained -- when I took over and I trained Mauricio, for me it was clear he could play in both center positions as a center midfielder, defensive midfielder or center defender.

And so yeah, it was a choice for me having now obviously Gastón, having Djordje, having Fabi, having Álvaro, and having Luka Stojanovic, a lot of midfielders, plus BB, plus other players who can play there. It was my choice to put him in a central defense and he actually had a really, really good game, and I know that he can play there.

And the second question is -- we will see. I can't tell you now. We are going to go to train this afternoon and see how the guys feel today and tomorrow. It was very, very hot. The guys were very, very tired after that game. It was the first game after four months.

The morning games are very, very tough to play. I don't know if you have spoken to other teams who played the morning games; they are very, very tough.

So we have to see how everyone feels. I'm not planning on doing five, six changes but it's possible that there will be a few changes.

**Q. Frankowski played as opening back against Seattle. What was your assessment of his performance and is that a position you anticipate him playing more in the future?**

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, I was very happy with Frankie. Frankie is obviously a threat going forward, very fast, can always go behind the defensive line and he actually does a really disciplined, really good job defensively.

He obviously likes his position. Obviously I speak to my players before putting them in a new position, and he like that is very much. He has played that in the past, as well, he told me. I was very happy, yeah. This is a position where we can see him in the future, as well, yes.

**Q. You guys have been there now for, it looks like 17 days. I wondered how the team was doing mentally, that much time in quarantine and then physically, as well, are there any injuries to report?**

RAPHAEL WICKY: So far mentally, fine. Like I said obviously winning a game helps, but even before that, the guys were fine and with all the changes we have had and waiting, which group are we going to be, they did amazing. They really did amazing.

And again, and I told that you last time, we didn't really focus too much on what we cannot control. We did not talk about the eventualities and possibilities. We just said, okay, guys, we're here. Let's do what we love to do. Let's train and prepare, and everything else, we will do what the league tells us to do. We can't control that. But the guys are doing really well from that side.

What was your next question? I forgot.

**Q. Physically, are there any injuries that you're dealing with right now?**

RAPHAEL WICKY: No, actually, we're lucky, we have no injuries so far besides of Michael Azira, Jerry and Johan Kappelhof who are not here. Everyone else is healthy and they are ready to play.

**Q. We're going to be talking to Álvaro Medrán in a few minutes. How is he doing so far?**

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, Álvaro is coming back. You know a little bit the history of Álvaro. 2019 in May, playing his last game and then coming to Chicago in October, not really playing and then starting the preseason with us in January 18 having his first real game again against Philadelphia 45 minutes in February, in Tampa -- I think it was February, yes. So he comes a long way.

He was injured in between. He didn't play; so May to early June to February is a long time, and he came back really, really well. He had two really good games against Seattle and New England, and then there was the break again, which for Álvaro is not good to have that break because if you already had such a long break, it's important to have a rhythm.

So he is coming back again. He is a very important player for us. He has a lot of talent and a good mentality. Right now he's not where he will be. He's not where he was -- where he was in March, but yeah, we are working with him. He's working hard to get there and he's important for us.

**Q. Wanted to get your thoughts on Beric. He settled in pretty quickly. With so many changes, players and new staff, he seems low maintenance where you can put him up top and he's getting his chances, scoring his goals. How is he settling in the team and how can he be a difference-maker in this league?**

RAPHAEL WICKY: He's amazing. He's a DP but he -- yeah, he comes from Europe. Has played in France and scored in one of the top five league's goals. He's just a good guy. He's a very good player, but a good guy who hangs out with everyone, who -- yeah, who wants to work and play for the team. This is really, really good.

Like you say, he's not a high maintenance guy and I'm very happy about that. I'm very happy about how he integrated in the team on and off the field. This is very important. As well, this is one of the points from the beginning we said; it's all about the team. It's not about a single player, and he is the perfect example on how he does it on and off the field.

Obviously on the field, he has big quality. I said it in I think in my first press conference he's a typical No. 9. In and around the box, he is clinical. He is clean. He is a clean finisher. But he works a lot for the team, he works a lot for the team, and that is really, really nice, really good.

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