

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Raphael Wicky

Press Conference



Connor or Bobby starting in his absence.

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, so Kenny unfortunately torn his ACL in training, I think it was last week -- yeah, it was last week. So he will have surgery on the upcoming Tuesday, and he will be obviously out with an ACL for the rest of the season.

And our hierarchy right now is quite clear. Bobby is our No. 1, Connor is No. 2, and Gabriel is No. 3, and I'm very happy with all three goalkeepers. I trust them fully, and then we go from there.

Q. I know you've talked a lot about focusing on what you guys can control, and obviously there's a little bit more certainty with the schedule the way it is now, but I just kind of wanted to get your thoughts on the decision by the league to still have three markets potentially having fans in the stands while the other 23 teams will not.

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah. So what's the question?

Q. So you had the bubble in Orlando. That was all very successful. Teams now go back to play in their own markets, and now only a few teams are going to be allowed to have fans in the stands. I think we'd all like to know your thoughts on the decision to still maybe having fans in the stands, and as you prepare your team to go potentially into these environments, what your thoughts are on that situation.

RAPHAEL WICKY: Well, first of all, we have great fans, and we would love to play in front of our fans, but because we love our fans, we decided with the club and those decisions were made from our leaders of the club; that we decided not to play in front of fans.

What the other clubs decide is out of my control. That is experts in this country who say you're okay to play with fans or you're not okay to play with fans. We decided not to do it, and I'm fully supportive of that. If we go to another game with fans, we trust the experts that's safe and we'll play in front of fans. Again, that's not my domain to give a big opinion or to tell something about other clubs' decision.

Q. With regards to travel, it sounds like most teams will be traveling the day of the game, play the game,

Q. One of the initial reactions I got from the phase one of return to play is it seems like a lot of games in a short amount of time. What steps are you taking to prevent injuries?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, it's going to be a lot of games in a short amount of time, but we were expecting that. It is similar to when you went down to Florida where you know you have at least three games in a short amount of time, and you're going to need -- again, you're going to need your roster.

Unfortunately, obviously, we came back from Florida with a few injuries, and so our roster is a little bit shorter right now, but again, it means that we need all the players. Everyone needs to be ready, and if you only have like sometimes three days, sometimes five days in between games, you may have to do some rotations.

But these things, obviously I can only say; once we are in the games and once I see where the team actually stands.

Q. Thanks for making some time today. I guess just first of all, how nice is it to finally have some sort of certainty that you know when you're going to be playing your next six games? Seems like that's been a theme of a lot of our conversations recently; that you guys are trying to deal with what you can control, but now you actually know when you're going to be playing again.

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, it's exciting. We're all happy that we have a schedule now, and again, we have a certain date to work towards, and we have obviously now six games we know in which days they should be played, so that's exciting, very excited about that.

And now it's, again, getting ready for these games, but very excited about it.

Q. I wondered if you could update us on the status of Kenneth Kronholm's injury, and if you think it will be



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and then return home within a few hours after the game all within the same day. What is that going to be like for just preparation and players being rested in time for games?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, that is true. Normally every team normally will travel -- will fly in and fly out the same day. That's what we were told.

It's for everyone the same. Obviously you will fly at a certain time in the morning. The flights shouldn't be longer than I think about two hours; that's what they try to do. I'm not sure if every -- if that's perfectly doable in this country.

Every team normally when we land, we will have a hotel where we can go to have food and a few hours of rest. The players should be rested and should be fine to play in the evening, and then after that, obviously as soon as possible we fly back to our home state.

Q. What's the message going to be to players about safety moving forward? Obviously in the bubble, it was one thing, but now back amongst people in society again. So what's the message going to be about being careful and being cautious in terms of the virus?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, exactly what you said. I mean, that's a very, very important message we give the players, and we have always given and we still give the players.

We were so far, knock-on-wood, we never had a positive test in our team and in our club. So we're very -- I think we were very disciplined, but it's very important that we keep doing that. Especially now, everyone's back home. Everyone, it's summer, everyone has a life, but we tell the players, look, you've got to be very careful and you've got to follow the rules, wearing masks, social distancing.

Yeah, that's the message we do, and so far the players have done great, and also the staff, so we just have to keep following that. That's something we have to keep doing.

Q. I wondered if since you guys got back from Orlando if anyone has stood out in training to you as being really strong, and perhaps separately, I think a lot of people are surprised with Miguel Navarro making such a big leap after getting here. I wonder if you can talk about what he's given to the team this year.

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, so in general, since we are back, obviously we gave the team a few days off, three, four days off. We had to give them in general, five days off, five and a half, because we had to come back and get

tested again, and everything was quite short notice.

So it took us a while, but which was fine, as well. After being down there for almost a month, every day together, the players had a few days off with their families.

Ever since we took to training -- we knew a little bit that we were talking about August 20th, August 22nd. We had some information, nothing confirmed, so we knew it's about, again, three and a half to four weeks where we basically have again a little bit of a preseason. Unfortunately -- and that's for everyone, it makes it hard with no friendly games again.

But we actually tried to work them very, very hard in these times, and the team actually trains well. The I see guys getting sharper. Jimenez, I see him getting better and better, getting sharper.

It's just important that they -- that they keep training hard and keep training intense. The most important things, which we don't have, but again, we can't change that is games. We don't have games, and you have seen it in the tournament down there, teams who have games and games, players getting better and better; you're getting into a rhythm.

My players, when I spoke to them, they also saw it: The first game, and we won the first game against Seattle, but they felt not so good. It was a 9:00 A.M. game. It was very, very hot. But in the second game, they felt better running-wise; in the third game, they even felt better. Then unfortunately, obviously we were out and we had now again a period of no games, but we are trying to train them very hard.

And then yes, Miguel is a very, very interesting player. I think he brings the modern profile of a full back: Very athletic, fast, dynamic, and for his age, I have to say, he's a very mature, mature kid with understanding the game, analyzing the game and when you talk with him as a person and as a player, he's quite a mature 21-year-old, I have to say.

We are very, very happy to have him here. I think there is a bright future ahead of him. He works hard, and the good thing, as well, he has a guy in his position with Jonny B., who has a lot of experience, who speaks his language, as well, who can teach him, who can talk him through things. So that's -- we feel that's a great combination to have, a very young guy, hungry kid and a guy with a lot of experience who is a great person, leader and still top fit. That's the situation.

Q. We saw at MLS is back that Cincinnati and



Columbus, relative to their own expectations, both teams performed very well, and you play them twice in these first six games back. So what did you see from the two Ohio clubs in Orlando, and how are you looking to prepare for them, especially given the fact you're going to play each of them twice in only a couple weeks.

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, I think first of all, what we have seen and what we have learned and I think what you guys already know is this league is very tight. Everyone can beat everyone. Again the tournament shows it.

That's something we've learned. We beat the champion. We beat Seattle. So that means when we are -- when we are ready and focused and everything goes well, I believe that we can beat every team, but it's also a very fine line and the league shows all the time that if you are relaxing ten percent or if there is a little something missing, that you can lose in this league against almost every opponent and I think everyone has seen that. So that's a little bit the starting point. You need to be aware of that. You need to know that.

And then about those two teams, yeah, Columbus is obviously a team who is already, I would say is an a team already. They have continuation in what they do. This is the second year of their head coach who added a few pieces, a few talented pieces, so we can see that they are deep, and they know what they are doing. They are a good team.

Then Cincinnati is a little bit of a newer team and now with a new head coach and you see development in the way they have played. I think they didn't really have a good game in the first game and then they changed their shape, their formation and their approach to the game in a more defensive approach in a 5-3-2. They are very well organized, and then out of that got some results, and results gives you confidence. That's what we know and we will prepare for that.

But we know that on a good day, on our day when we are all performing well, we can beat everyone. I'm 100 percent sure of that.

Q. You've had some time to reassess all the tournament games. Do you think that the 5-3-2 or 3-5-2 was an effective formation for you guys?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, I'm very happy we did that. I think I told you guys, I want to be flexible. I think we did a good job in a 5-3-2 or 3-5-2. I don't think we won or we lost a game because of a formation or because of a shape. We beat the champion with a 3-5-2 and we lost the two

other games, but has nothing to do with the system.

I'm very happy we trained that and did that. Our team can change from back four into back five in a game, or from one game to the other, which is good to know. So that's a very positive out of that system, out of that change.

Then obviously those three games, as well, gave me a little bit of an input more about the players, about the team, who feels really comfortable in which formation. That's something I took out of that tournament, and this is very important. Like we spoke a few times, normally you have a preseason, you have games where it tests things. Unfortunately this year, everything is different.

So still, I got a lot of things out of that tournament, and as well, out of the system. But we didn't win or lose a game because of the system.

Q. How do you assess the long-term outlook at the goalkeeping position and I hate to ask, but does the injury to Kenneth affect where he fits in long term to your plans at that position?

RAPHAEL WICKY: No, it doesn't affect. Kenny is still under contract. Kenny is a really good goalkeeper with a lot of experience. He will come back. He will come back stronger and that's also the goal he set for himself after actually having the injury on the same day. He told me he was very obviously touched emotionally, but he's going to come back stronger.

We count on Kenny. Now, long-term obviously means two or three years. I mean, in football, to plan that far, two or three years, is very, very difficult. But yeah, right now, our situation is we have Bobby, we have Connor, we have Gabriel and we have obviously Chris Brady who right now is on loan. I think on the goalie position, we are quite well. I feel very confident with those goalies, for now and as well for the future, with our young goalkeepers who are very, very talented.

Q. Have you been keeping tabs on players in Madison, and are there plans to send more players there any time soon?

RAPHAEL WICKY: We follow them. We follow them. The club is in touch with them. We are in touch with people from the club and I think it's good for them. The feedbacks are very positive from the coaching staff, and Alex Monis has already had some minutes. I hope that Allan Rodriguez also gets some, and maybe even goalkeeper. Goalkeeper position is a little bit different. You don't want to change every single game, the goalkeeper. But that's the coach in Madison's job to do. But in general, we are

very happy that they are getting this training.

In regard to sending other players, it's very difficult right now because we have to follow the protocol. If we send a player over there, they have to go into a 10- or 14-day quarantine and then it doesn't make sense. And then if they want to come back here, they have to go into another 10- or 14-day quarantine. That's why right now these things right now don't make sense. Right now we are planning to keep everyone here who is here, and everyone over there who is over there.

Q. You mentioned it was frustrating at the end of those games, not progressing out of the group stage. How has the mood progressed from the initial disappointment coming back from Orlando to how you think the team is feeling now, especially with games to look forward to again?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Look, I think it hurt everyone. Everyone was really hurt, and it's fine. If you wouldn't be hurt when you lose or you're out of a tournament, where you think that you belong into the next group stage, into the next round, then we would be in the wrong job I think. So that's a very positive.

But it hurt a lot in the first few days, and then once we started again after those four or five days off, we started again with training, we said, okay, now we have to bounce back, and we will bounce back, and we have to work harder and we will work hard, and we want to come back.

I think everyone wants to prove, everyone wants to prove that we are better than the results shown down there. I told you guys in the beginning, we are not blaming anyone else. It's only us. We blame us. The Vancouver game was a game we shouldn't have lost because we were dominant, we were better, but in the end in the crucial moments, those five minutes after the break, we slept for five minutes. We were not there, and there's to blame us. That's not to blame the weather break, the referee, whatever. That's just on us.

The team took that, and knows that, and I think everyone is really ready to and wants to prove that; that we are better being out of group stage down there.

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