

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Raphael Wicky

Press Conference



Q. There is news today that Fabian Herbers signed a contract with the fire. Talk about what you see in him and what he means to this team.

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, very, very pleased that Fabian signed a contract. Since I am here, I can only judge since I am here. He had a really good preseason in February, March. Had good games. He has become or he is an important player for our team. He can be multiple offensive positions as an eight, as a ten, he can be wide coming inside. He is a guy you can always count on. That's a very important factor. He's a player who creates a lot through his runs. He works hard for the team. Brings a good intensity into the game, so there's a lot of positives with Fabian and I'm really excited that we are able to keep him here.

Q. Of the re-restart of the season, what does it mean to you and the team to not only resume the season, including things like traveling to opposing stadiums and things like that, but also to finally be able to play a match at home at Soldier Field, even if it will be without fans?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, first of all, we are excited. We are excited that we can play again. I told you guys a few weeks ago that, we think about the 20th, 22nd, we have three and a half, four weeks to train without any friendly games, but we are happy that it starts again.

This is a weird year for everyone. You're not really getting into your rhythm. We spoke about that, but we are just excited that we know what goes on and we know our schedule for at least six games. We know it's going to be game after game, and sometimes you have like four or five days. Sometimes you only have two-and-a-half, three days' recovery. We know it's going to go fast in the next two and a half, three weeks. So we are excited about that and I think the guys are ready. The guys trained hard in the last three weeks. They are ready. They want to play. That's positive.

Q. A difficult spot for your club given you had so many changes in the off-season and in a normal season, you would have had 25 games by now. So how are you approaching the summer? Is it still assessing all the changes in the off-season, or do you have plans and goals to kind of fulfill?

RAPHAEL WICKY: It's more what you said in the beginning. For us, like I said, we have only played five games. We have played with that roster only actually the tournament with three games, the first two games in Seattle and New England was not a full roster, so we already had a lot of changes in winter.

We want to give this team a chance. We want to see how this team plays in the next two, two and a half, three months, how the players develop, how the players fit in. That is our goal. We are obviously always having our eyes open, of course, in the transfer window, but right now, we want to give these players a chance to play and to prove. We couldn't do that unfortunately due to COVID but that's our plan.

Of course, we are always talking about positions, about profiles and our club has the eyes open for signings. But we don't need now again to sign a lot of new players because we -- we are still in a process over the next two months of finding a team, of finding our best team. That's just a reality. That would have been done now in the normal world, but this year is different.

Q. How are they doing in terms of getting preparations, and getting ready to actually play in the stadium at Soldier Field?

RAPHAEL WICKY: The players are fine. Like I said last time, we were all very disappointed to be out of the tournament and not be qualified for the last round and had to come back here, and then you are actually training to an empty space somewhere because you didn't actually know when to continue and with no friendly games.

But besides of that, the team is going well. We have our facility here. We are tested every other day. So things are good. And now we are looking forward to actually have our first game then in Soldier Field. We will normally train there the day before, so we get a feeling of the stadium, and so everyone is excited about that, but let's take it

step-by-step. First, Columbus, and then will be our home game.

Q. Any injuries on the team already? Is anyone training without any injuries right now?

RAPHAEL WICKY: We obviously have our long-term injuries with Stojanovic and Jeremiah Gutjahr and Kenny Kronholm who are long-term injured. Otherwise the team more or less is fine and there is often -- there is always in the team little things, maybe a player may have to rest but so far the last of the three weeks the guys were able to train.

Johan Kappelhof is still not training with the team. He was out already since awhile, so those guys, the long-term injuries, but otherwise, more or less everyone should be available.

Q. The team you're facing on Thursday, one of the best you've faced season. What do you see in them and what do you think the Fire need to get better results or a win?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, that's true. I think the Crew, they are a favorite in this game. We are going in with nothing to lose. They had a good start of the season and they had a good tournament.

Yeah, they are very well -- a possession-orientated team and some good players in the build up. We have to make it hard for them. We have to make it hard for them as well, and more than everything else, we have to play our game. We are a good team, as well. We have good players. We have to play our game so that they have to chase us more.

So I think that's important. We know what we will expect. There's a few new pieces in comparison to last year, but overall, the way the Crew plays, was in those last five games similar to what we have seen last year with the same head coach. So we know what we will expect, but I think it's very important that we actually play our game. We make it hard for them when they have the ball, but we play our game. That's very important.

Q. You mentioned the travel within the same day, so you travel the day of the game, you play, you travel back. So how confident are you guys in your plan for making sure players are well rested enough between travel and game time?

RAPHAEL WICKY: I'm very confident. I mean, actually the players like that idea, or like that. I think last season, I know that they had this in the U.S. Open Cup in Atlanta, they had a good experience in that, the guys who were

here.

But overall, look, it's not that we have a four-hour flight. We are getting up in the morning. We are flying charter. It's a 45-minute to 60-minute flight, you arrive in the hotel, you eat, and you have like two and a half or three hours in your room where you can rest.

Normally, it's more the days before, as well. Your game preparation is not only on game day. It's all the days before and making sure that they have to sleep well, recover well, train well, but also recover well. So it's more the whole package.

But I think the player actually likes that. He flies out in the morning, he sleeps the night before the game at home, he flies out in the morning, everything is pretty quick and then you play and then after that, you fly back home. I think that is good.

Should we have a three-and-a-half, four-hour flight, that's obviously maybe a little bit different. But for these, an hour, hour and a half, two hours max, we should be able to deal with that.

Q. Have any players stood out that impressed you over these last four weeks of training or whatever since you guys got back from Orlando?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, like I said, we felt the team trained really hard. We trained really hard and they trained well. I have to say that I'm very, very pleased with the Guti, the young home grown, Gutierrez who is 17. Not only the last three weeks, he trained very well in the last six, seven weeks and he has progressed a lot since January, February.

In general the team trained well. It's like I said before going to Orlando, it's still a blind date. You go now to this game, and you haven't made for four weeks, so it's always a little bit of a blind date. We trained well.

Guti makes big progress. I'm very happy with him. I hope he can continue like that. And like I always said, if a player deserves minutes, then the age doesn't really matter. So I'm not going to tell you now and promise you that the young guy will get minutes, but I'm really happy with what I saw and it's important for him to keep training like that, keep improving and then he's in a good way to actually earn some MLS minutes in the next weeks.

Q. With Frankie called up to play for Poland, him leaving Chicago and traveling overseas, any concerns with that?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, that's a good question. That's a question I ask myself, as well, how all of that will go. I'm always happy when a player is called up for national team. I was lucky to play a lot of time for Switzerland, and you're always proud to play for your country; so I'm happy for the player.

I don't know what the league is intending to do. I don't know how the rules are in Europe, when he flies from USA into Poland, or wherever they meet, I don't know exactly in which country they meet. Sometimes you already meet in the country where you play.

But coming back, I don't know what's going to be the procedure. Those are questions we are asking, and we need answers. Because if the players come back and has to go into a ten to 14-day quarantine, yeah, that means you lose the player for three weeks. Then we are middle of September or even late September, and then they train or play a week and there is another window in October where the FIFA again has national team games. If the player is called off again, he goes again, same procedure. If he's there for eight, nine days, and he flies back, has to go again ten to 14 days in quarantine, then that player will not play a lot for us, so I don't have the answer there. But those are the concerns probably everyone has. Yeah, we hope that we will get answers to that.

Q. Are we going to be seeing the same thing that you were using in Orlando, or any adjustments in the defense?

RAPHAEL WICKY: What do you mean in terms of what?

Q. Are we going to be seeing the same team that played in Orlando, or any adjustments in the defense?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Look, I hope you understand that I cannot give you now here who is going to play and how we are going to play in this media conference. I'm very open to speak about a lot of things, but we will work with the same principles as we have, but I cannot tell you now if you see the same players or the same information or whatever. That's something, yeah, I cannot share here. I hope you understand that.

Q. With no fans in the stands, you could have continued to play in Bridgeview where you are already practicing and it might have been easier. Why does the team want to play at Soldier Field? What's the draw there?

RAPHAEL WICKY: I think the answer is quite easy. Look, everyone is talking about Soldier Field since last -- when was it -- October, November, when that was announced,

so everyone was talking about that.

Since I took over, all those changes were made. All the marketing was done for that. Everyone was talking about Soldier Field and excited about Soldier Field, and that is still the case. We have to call now Soldier Field our home, and that's why we want to play there.

We would love to play there with fans. We were really excited about the opening game which would have been a lot of fans in there. Now we play there without fans, but we are just excited to be in that stadium and we want to call that our home and that's why -- that's why the players want to be there.

Q. How has Djordje he responded to the conversation you guys have?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, Djordje has a problem -- well, it was very important that we had this conversation with him or I had this conversation with him. During the tournament we spoke a lot but then also in the end and turned the page and we both said, let's restart, let's forget about that. I'm not a person if you do something or something that happened, I will not hold that against you for the whole time.

For me it was important to see a reaction. And I see that. I see that in training, and that's a positive because like I always say, Djordje is a good player. He can become an important player for this club. He wants to be an important player for this club and that's why I ask for a reaction and he gave me that, or he gives me that, and now we have to keep doing that.

Q. The goal is to get three points in the upcoming match. Other than that, what would you like to see improved the most?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, we always want to go to win. We always want to go in every game to win. Like I said many times, I think this league is so tight. This league, like you can win against a lot of teams, but it's also tight; you can also lose against a lot of teams.

It's a very interesting league which you never really have like in big leagues in Europe where you know exactly when Bayern Munich plays against someone in Germany, nine times they win the game.

We are going there to win. We are going into every game to win and make points but I want to keep see progress from the team. Like I said before, as well, for us, as well, we are still figuring out these players. We are trying to still find the best way to play, where these new players who we

have seen some of them two, three times in Orlando, some of them once, we had no friendlies to test other things.

So we want to see what's the best position, what's the best way to play with them. So I want to see an improvement from that side and I want to see a continuation of what we have done. Again, I said it, as well --s to analyze about the Orlando tournament, we do a lot of things well but we have to be better defensively in those crucial moments. We didn't give up a lot of chances in Orlando on target at all. Get we gave up six shots on target, and we conceded five goals in the whole tournament.

So if you talk about three games giving up six shots on target, it's not a lot. Our goalie basically in the whole tournament didn't have to make a big save. Everyone was talking about Blake and all those either goalkeepers who made a lot of big saves. We didn't have that. Our goalie didn't -- wasn't many chances, but the chances were there were big chances, and we have to be better in those crucial moments to defend those moments.

On the other hand, we had our moments offensively. We create the chances. We had shots but not enough clinical, not enough on target and we have to become better in both ends, offensively, and in the most important, defensively and I want to see that; that we keep working on that.

In the end of the day, the other important point, and I saw this in every game that we were a team since January, February, I saw a team working together offensively, defensively, everyone runs in a structure; I want to keep seeing that. I'm 100 percent sure if we keep doing that and improve in the final third, getting sharper there, our results will come. I'm 100 percent convinced of that.

Q. How is the team doing now for the test to know if the players are negative or positive or if there's any symptomatic player on the team?

RAPHAEL WICKY: How the players are preparing?

Q. How taking care of themselves.

RAPHAEL WICKY: Probably similar than we did before going to Orlando because we never had so far, knock-on-wood, we never had a positive test in our team so far, and we were tested a lot.

Yeah, I think the players know that they are responsible for their own and for others and they have to -- they want to live a normal life but they also know they are athletes and they want to play, so certain things, they have to follow the rules. They have to avoid going into big crowds. They have to have social distancing and the masks and like I

say, so far, we never had a positive tests, so I think the team is doing well. But we have to keep doing that. We have to follow all the rules and be respectful of all that.

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