

Chicago Fire Media Conference

Thursday, September 10, 2020
Chicago, Illinois, USA



Raphael Wicky

Press Conference

Q. Saturday is the last game for you guys of the first phase of the restart. What have you been told about scheduling for the second phase?

RAPHAEL WICKY: We won't have anything about the schedule until later today. I'm not 100 percent sure about what the schedule looks like, but we will have everything I think shortly after this call here.

Q. After the game against New England you said that you keep having to say the same things about playing well but getting burned badly by costly mistakes. What steps are you guys taking to sort of rectify that, to prevent that from happening again on a consistent basis?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, look, I feel like we're talking every time the same, and it's true. Look, the only steps we can do is showing videos, talking to the players. It's trying to improve where we make mistakes. To be honest, against New England, the team had not done many mistakes, but just it was 1-0 where Francisco needs to clear that ball. There is moments where a defender needs to be just a defender and clear a ball. That is things we talk with them about, and then over the rest period of the game I have to say it's not that -- as weird as it sounds, it's not that they had many shots or chances. They had their third chance, big chance in the 92nd minute, I think, on a counterattack or on something, otherwise they didn't have much.

It's like talking to them and say, guys, we have to get better at this in these moments, showing video and talking, and especially, as well, telling them when things are good. Guys, we have to keep working, we have to keep believing. Ideas are there. For me that's the only way that -- moving forward, looking forward and moving on and keep doing what we do, trying to get better in these crucial moments, of course. But that's the only way we can do.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Michael Azira. He launched his foundation's online presence this week and has received a lot of support from his teammates

so far in doing so. I wonder what your relationship has been like with Mike in your time together so far and the kind of person he is off the field.

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, Mike is a great guy. I speak with him often, not only about football; we speak about experiences, we speak about life a little bit. You can feel that he's a guy who wants to give something back. Yeah, it shows the personality he is that he obviously was able to probably, I would say, live his dream making a living out of what he really loved to do when he was a kid, and now wants to give something back to other kids, to other people, and that is really nice.

He's obviously a guy who is a very intelligent person, as well, and thinks more than just football, which is also nice.

Q. How would you evaluate your own performance so far this year? I know that there's been some extenuating circumstances around that, but how do you think you've done personally so far this year?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Look, I'm always a guy who questions -- who obviously looks at myself first, and of course everyone in hindsight maybe we do mistakes, we don't do everything right. I think overall we're trying to build a team, we're trying to build an identity, we're trying to build a style. I think we're doing everything there, but have we done everything right? I think probably not, of course not.

I don't really like to talk about myself a lot. The reality is the table doesn't speak for me or for us, for what we do, but I believe in this team. I believe in these players. I believe in what we do, that we will turn this around. I don't know when, but I believe that if we keep working on the things we are doing not so good and doing these things better, and the team is doing a lot of things better, for example, than four weeks ago or three weeks ago, and if we keep working on creating on the playing style, I'm pretty sure we will turn this thing around. But I don't like talking about myself and giving myself credit or non-credit.

Q. Obviously you were asked a moment ago about Michael Azira. Do you have any update for us on the status of Michael or Johan Kappelhof, and what are you looking forward to those guys bringing into the team when they are good to go?

ASAP sports . . . when all is said, we're done.®

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, I mean, look, Stojanovic is obviously injured, and Johan Kappelhof is not training with the team yet. Those are the guys -- CJ Sapong is back in training today for the first time with our team, so that's really nice to have him back. He was training in isolation for the last 10 days, two weeks, so he was obviously working a lot of physical stuff, so happy to have him back in the team, and we will see how he reacts to the team training from today, how he reacts tomorrow, how his body reacts to that and see if he's an option for the bench.

Q. Unrelated to the immediate concerns you have with the First Team, with your background I was hoping to get a perspective from you on this week's launch of the new MLS Next youth league and how you're using it, the Fire Academy and what you're doing with the First Team and what you see the future there.

RAPHAEL WICKY: I have to be very honest; I didn't go deeply into the new platform, so I cannot really give you an opinion on that. I will probably have talks in the next upcoming weeks with our academy director. I was really focused on our team here. But like I said in the beginning, the academy is important for us. We have started this season with a lot of very, very young players on our roster, and the academy will be a big focus for us in the future, as well. But to be honest, I haven't had time or I haven't taken the time to look deeply into that new model.

Q. From what you've seen so far at this phase of the season from those young players, are you satisfied with the preparation and the model as you laid it out at the beginning of the year?

RAPHAEL WICKY: I'm satisfied with the young kids. I mean, we have Alex Monis and Allan Rodriguez in Madison, they are getting USL minutes, which is, I think, very important for them, with Chris Brady, as well, the goalkeeper, and then we've having Guti, Javy and Gaga here with us. Guti is a young kid of 17 years who I gave some minutes, and I didn't give him minutes because he's young, I gave him minutes because he trained really well. Obviously those were difficult moments to come in.

Ideally you would like to put a young kid in at one point when you win or when the team is in a flow and you have three, four, five good results and you can then put a young kid in maybe a little bit more, so we put him in, we gave him minutes to experience the MLS in quite difficult moments, but I'm very happy with him. He has to keep improving, keep training, and I'm pretty sure that Guti if he keeps progressing like he did in the last six, seven months, he has a bright future ahead of him.

With Javy, Javy is training well, he's with us, but the

problem is with Javy, AJ and Nick Slonina, they need games, and right now due to the pandemic we cannot give them games. We can only give them trainings with a high level against adults, against the pros, with the pros, which is really good, but at the end of the day they need games, and Nick Slonina hasn't played games since a year and a half besides a few friendly games in January and preseason. AJ Reynolds didn't have games, also, I think, for a long, long time.

That's the next step for these guys, that they need games, and that's obviously not in my control right now because of the pandemic. If you send a guy somewhere he has to go 10 days in quarantine. If you want to have him back he has to go another 10 days in quarantine, so it's basically impossible to do.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, appreciate your time this afternoon.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

