

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Georg Heitz

Press Conference



Q. This is year two for the project for you and Rafa how important is this season for the success of the project that you guys have built, at least for the on-field portion?

GEORG HEITZ: Very important, as every season, you know, the moment championship starts, you want to perform. Doesn't matter whether it's the first year or the second year or the third year. And so we always try to do our -- our best to be competitive and we are pretty confident that we will do better this year than we did last year.

Q. Can you tell us, I think there's a few players that aren't with you guys right now, it looks like Robert did get in maybe yesterday or today from what I can tell on Instagram, but can you tell us what's going on with Medrán and Navarro, how close are they to getting back?

GEORG HEITZ: So Medrán and Navarro are waiting for their passports. They got cleared regarding their green card but testify to get physically back their passports in their countries, which also means that we most probably will fly them directly to Florida and quarantine them there so that -- as soon as possible they can join; they can participate in team training.

Q. Last year at the etched the season and when we spoke in the off-season, as well, you talk about seeing progress throughout the season, throughout last season. What's a good example, a tangible, identifiable example, of something that the team did toward the end of 2020 that it wasn't doing in 2019 or at the beginning of 2020?

GEORG HEITZ: It's difficult to quantify. You know, I cannot come up with metrics. We always had by the way very good metrics regarding the miles the boys ran during the games, and there we were always in the top clubs of the league after each round I think. And so metrics is one thing.

No, it was simply also the impression that they left during the games, you know, the number of chances that we created grew in my opinion, increased throughout the season. So I think overall, it was really fact that we were better in the second half, but we have to admit we were not good enough to make the playoffs.

Q. How did the squad improve from last year to this year, and did you fill your biggest goals this winter?

GEORG HEITZ: First of all we had a clear planning and also I would like to take the opportunity to give credits to the league, because the league really gives us now enough time I think to prepare for this season. This is crucial after such a long break.

From what we've seen yesterday in the physicals, the boys have been working hard. We can track them by GPS, also, when they were back home, so they really did their homework. They seem to be in an even better shape than a year ago, and so we are pretty confident that we won't start below zero. But it has been a long break. So it will take a couple of weeks until the players will be ready to play.

Q. Someone with a background in youth development like yours, what are you hoping to see progression-wise in year two?

GEORG HEITZ: Look, for young players, it's always difficult to play as long as the team is not playing successful. Last year there, were ups and downs and we were always on the brink of making the playoffs or not and this makes it much more complicated for young players to perform. Because it's a bit of pressure, you know, and it's easier to play in a team that has, I'd say, three, four wins in a row. This makes things much easier also during games. When it's always very tight, it's difficult for coaches to bring in young players. Hopefully we will do better this year. Hopefully we will have a run of three or four games, three or four wins in a row, which could make things easier for the home-growners.

Q. In the relationship you guys have with Forward Madison you have sent players there and now they have sent you Michael Vang. What qualities do you see in him, what do you like about him, and what are

the chances you think he actually makes your team this year?

GEORG HEITZ: I mean, he was, in our opinion -- and we saw I think all the matches, he was an outstanding player there. He can play several positions. He can play in the center but also could play as a winger, which he also did in Forward Madison.

He'll have his chance now. Difficult to predict. It's not easy to make it. There is competition in this team. In my opinion there is more competition than last year, but he will have his chance. He also did pretty well in the physicals yesterday, so hopefully he can prove that he's really worth to take a deep dive looking at his skills.

Q. Rafa Wicky, his contract runs through 2021 with a team option for 2022. When are you planning on making a decision on that option and what will be some of the criteria that you use to decide whether to pick up that option?

GEORG HEITZ: Look, basically I prefer to have these talks internally and first speak with the people who are concerned. But it is clear we want to make more progress this season. And it's professional sports, so it always also has to do with results in games. This is clear.

We will not rush because we haven't even started the season yet, and it will take a couple of weeks until we start the season. So we will not rush but we always try to treat people also in a fair way so that we inform them early enough whether or not we will continue the cooperation.

Q. Commissioner Don Garber said a couple weeks ago that he said he doesn't envision the league requiring players to get the COVID-19 vaccine when it becomes available, but from a club perspective in Chicago, do you want your players to be vaccinated when it's possible to be?

GEORG HEITZ: We'd strongly recommend, of course, and it could make things much easier for us. This is clear.

But one thing is also clear: I'm also absolutely against having privileges for players. They should wait as everybody else until it's their turn. But yeah, it could make things easier, obviously safer.

Q. Your plan has been long term to build for the future and also to win now. Having been in the league now for a year-plus, do you think is it easier or harder than you thought to do that? And then speaking of over a year now, COVID has been with us for over a year now. What are your recollections of this period a year ago

when it became apparent that COVID was going to really interrupt our lives for a while. I know those are two very different questions.

GEORG HEITZ: It was as difficult as I expected it to be. We should bear in mind, we really, really didn't have much time last year to build a team, to hire a coaching staff. So this was really -- we had a couple of weeks to be honest, and so we should also be careful judging players or coaches on this first year, and it was a special year. As everybody, initially we didn't -- probably we didn't want to realize what it really means, COVID, but it affects everybody's life a lot. That's very clear. It affected our season. It was difficult for, especially, the young players because I think younger people are more affected than people like I who are a bit older. I mean, everybody who is young wants to go out, wants to go in parks, wants to go in restaurants; all this is not possible.

For some of our players, it was especially difficult, extremely difficult, because they changed -- for example, Nacho Aliseda, he changed continent. He came from South America, trained a couple of times and afterwards he was locked in his apartment for 12 weeks. This was difficult.

Q. Speaking of Aliseda and the new look attack with a couple new additions with Offor and Ivanov, what are your expectations for the attack, and in particular, the new players integrating into that group?

GEORG HEITZ: We wanted to have more competition. This was one goal that we had. I think we got this; they all have speed. They are really, really speedy players. They should really give us depth in the roster and so this is what we expect from these players. But not only, you know, putting pressure on the guys who have already been here but really competing for minutes.

Q. You said last November that you wanted continuity despite only winning five games last season, and you mentioned having a very specific strategy for off-season additions. How prepared as a team to show improvement, considering there were only three or four off-season signings?

GEORG HEITZ: Hopefully prepared. But I mean, it's difficult for me to say. We had one team training today. This looked great. I could tell you now that we are ready.

I don't know. I cannot predict. I just can tell you that I'm really confident. We knew early what we wanted position-wise and we knew early who we wanted. We had established the scouting department early last year, was in the summer when we established the scouting department.

And so the new recruitments are also -- this is also a result of establishing a scouting department.

Q. Year two, obviously you missed the playoffs last year, what has Joe Mansueto told you about his expectations for the 2021 season?

GEORG HEITZ: His expectations are the same as mine, and this is clearly that we make the playoffs this time. This must be the ambition. That's very clear. Otherwise we would not even have to start training. This is clear.

He is someone who, you know, is really, really -- he does not need a lot of time to analyze things. He absolutely understands soccer, also, in my opinion. He also understands that this is professional sports and that you also from time to time need a bit of luck. But on the other hand, hard work will pay off.

So he's as confident as we are. It is very inspiring working with him, and I say "working with him." It's not only working for him. It's really working with him. We discuss so many things, and it's -- really, really I still can learn a lot from him. This is year.

But he's not the kind of person who puts pressure now on anybody here. He has his expectations and he's absolutely -- it's his right to have expectations, because he also invests a lot of time and money.

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