

Chicago Fire Media Conference

Monday, March 1, 2021

Chicago, Illinois, USA

Raphael Wicky

Press Conference



Q. Coming off last season and the results being what they were, what was one of the biggest lessons you learned both coaching in this league and yourself as a coach and manager?

RAPHAËL WICKY: Yeah, I think we spoke about that a few times already. This league is very different than most of the leagues in Europe where you have every team who basically -- anyone can beat anyone. It's not like you don't have a Bayern Munich here, and you don't have a Barcelona. You don't have three, four teams who are clearly better than the other.

I think this is really interesting, it makes it very interesting, but also you know every single game you have a chance to win and also, yeah, little details can decide maybe you're going to lose a game. I'm not saying in Europe that's not the case but clearly you have lots of clubs with different budgets, different rosters and just more quality.

Here, it's very, very even and that is very interesting, but that was new for me to coach in. I knew that it's that way but obviously you have to live it. So that's very interesting and yeah, that -- again, that details -- details decide the games. We can beat anyone. Like I said, we were -- we showed that we can beat big teams, as well, but we also know that we have to manage certain moments of the game better in order to actually then win these games and not draw in the end.

Q. How was the session this morning? And for the home ground guys, you told them all to play like they were going to take somebody's job, somebody's spot. How did they specifically do today and is there a home grown guy that you expect to step up this year, any of them in particular?

RAPHAËL WICKY: Yeah, the session was good. First time back on the field since three and a half months. It was nice to be back. It was nice to have the whole team together and we were all excited.

So, yeah, it was an easy session to get started. I think we know after such a long break, we have to go -- we have to get, how do you say, more intense every single day and just be a little bit careful in the beginning when you come back.

But it was good. Yeah, look, my conversation with the home grown is that you're part of the roster. Come in and fight for a spot. Come in, even if you're young, come in and try to challenge the guy who is playing in your position and then see what happens. When you have minutes in test games, make the best out of it. Give the best. Play for a spot. But I cannot tell you about today's session for one player obviously who stands out. I don't want to do that. I think we have to give them time to again now get into, and now see how they do during preseason and the test games we have.

Obviously Gutjahr (ph) had minutes last year. So hopefully he can have a good preseason and can make the next step because he trained really, really well the whole year and was close. It was just a very difficult year where you couldn't give the guys friendly games. We spoke about that, as well, a few times.

A.J. had a few little minutes. A.J., again, A.J. is a guy who made big progress and a good step last season, but he didn't have games for I think a year and a half almost because if I remember right, the year before I started, he was quite a lot injured. So those guys, they come from a long way, and last year was not an easy year for a young player to keep developing because he only had training. Those guys only had training.

But I'm excited they are here and I'm looking forward to see where they are now.

Q. To shift gears, hitting March is reminding me of everything that kind of started a year ago with the pandemic and all of that, what do you remember about that period starting around March 1 to March 7 when everyone started to realize this thing was going to be a big part of our lives and what are your recollections of that time? And then what have you learned about yourself as a human being dealing with this pandemic that has changed so much of our lives for the past year?

RAPHAËL WICKY: Yeah, that's a good question, I think a year ago, I have to be honest, not many people did expect that this -- at least at the start, we thought, okay, the game in Orlando is postponed and we're going to come back on Monday for training and then things are going to go and we are going to keep playing. That was what we thought in the beginning when we got the message we had to stop training.

I think at that time a year ago, no one really expected it to become a three-month break where you're actually at home and can't go and train. So that was obviously a big issue or a big problem, became a big problem then.

Look, this was a very difficult year for everyone, not only for us in the sport, and I think you had to deal with -- at one point, you had to say, okay, right now, I'm not a coach anymore. I'm more -- I have to see how are my -- how is my family doing; how are my players doing not on the field because they were here, alone with families, some of the guys just moved here. So I think it was important to get the human connection with the players and first to look after the human and then after the athlete, actually.

Q. Obviously the main objective this year was to get to the playoffs but what do you want to see your team improve upon, what do you want to see them do better this season?

RAPHAËL WICKY: The goal of reaching playoffs is something everybody wants and we have the same objective as all the other teams. But we played really well. Last season we built on some really good things and some really good foundation. Obviously there were moments where we had to improve. There were some times where maybe we let by 2-1 or a 1-0 or something like that, you know, 20 minutes left in the game.

So we have to work on those things, tighten up in the back so that there are less moments on corner kicks or set pieces where there's a little bit of a missed concentration, but we laid a good foundation last year and now with that foundation we are able to build upon it this year and get started to reach our goal for this season.

Q. What areas are you most optimistic about heading into preseason camp and where do you feel like the most work needs to be done the next few weeks?

RAPHAËL WICKY: Yeah, look, we are very excited that we have the big core of the group back. We said that we believe in continuity. We believe in this group. That's also why we didn't change too many players. I'm excited we are not starting like a year ago from scratch. Most of the players know what we want, how we operate, how we are

as human beings and also as coaches and then the other way, as well. We know we the players better. We know the strength and the weaknesses of the players better.

I don't think we start from scratch, which is really nice. So we are going to keep working on things we have started working last year. We are going to keep improving on those things, and that is for sure the thing we are the most excited.

There is phases of the game where we have to become better, where we have to manage certain moments better and we will keep working on that. I think we conceded too many easy goals; is that from easy individual mistakes or is that in from set pieces in moments where we shouldn't concede set pieces. Yeah, different moments and we have analyzed them and we will start working on these little common problems with the team, so yeah.

But overall we are just going to continue working on our philosophy and our way to play with the ball, without the ball and the good thing is that we are not starting from zero.

Q. You have a few players missing, all for good reasons, Mauri down in México with the national team, and Alvaro and Navarro waiting for their green cards. But when you get the group together, is it hard not having key players like that here to do what you want to do or are you able to move on without them knowing they are gone for good reasons?

RAPHAËL WICKY: Yeah, look, these are things we all cannot control. Everyone tries to do their best and the club did a great job of having most of the players here and have the transfers done. We can't control how long it takes to get a passport back from Miguel and Alvaro, and Robert just arrived yesterday and will join us in Orlando after the quarantine. Those are things we can't control.

Overall, I'm really happy that most of the players are here and we can just start working, so I'm trying not to -- not to focus. I'm pretty sure that most of the clubs in this league right now have one or two players missing because of these circumstances. That's just the world we live in right now. Certain things are COVID-related, you can't control that and other things are government-related, as well. You can't control that.

I'm excited to have the guys here. I know the other guy also join pretty season, and then we will be together, and same with the national team players. We know there is an international FIFA in the middle of preseason. Is that ideal? No, it's not ideal for all the coaches but we just have to deal with it.

Q. Just wanted to ask if the three games that were to be announced for Orlando had already been announced, if the opponents were set, and also asking about Mauricio being called up to the Under 23 Men's National Team and what it means for him and his development.

RAPHAËL WICKY: Our games in Orlando are more or less set. We have four opponents lined up and now we are just talking to the team to see if we are playing two 45-minute halves, or sometimes when you're trying to get the preseason games and you want to play a few more minutes and get that underway, but the games are being organized and they are pretty much already set.

And as far as Mauricio is concerned, we are very, very happy for him. It's always an honor to be called up to your national team to represent your country, and if you're able to qualify and play in the Olympic Games, it's an honor. It's the thing that every athlete wants. So yes, we are very happy for him.

Q. Your contract has a club option for 2022. How much do you think of that part of your job and the job security, or how do you keep that out of your mind? What do you think you will need to do to have that option picked up by the team for next season?

RAPHAËL WICKY: Honestly I'm not thinking too much about the length of my contract. I obviously know I signed a two-year deal with an option and we had a very special, different last season. So I'm going into the season very excited. I'm going into this happy to be the coach of this team and excited to work with these players.

We all know it's a result-driven business. Of course we want to qualify for the playoffs. Like I said in the beginning, that's the objective of every single team in this league and it's possible for every single team to do this. So it will be very interesting. That's for sure something we want to achieve.

Is it going to be dependent only on that? That's not something I can give the answer to. But I'm not thinking about that every single day. I'm coming here, happy and proud to be the coach every single day, giving the best version of myself, trying to continue on building our team, our style of play.

Obviously having more wins, making results for a team, for the club, for the fans, and helping the players to develop individually, integrate the young players even more in the first team. So all of those things are things I'm working on and I'm excited about.

But I'm too long in this business; there isn't -- you cannot control all the things. You cannot always control the outcome of games and the result. I know that there is pressure of results everywhere I am; that was in Basel the way that is here; that is going to be if one day if I have another job somewhere, that's going to be the same. But that's not something as a coach you cannot think of all the time, because otherwise you will not sleep much at one time in the season.

So I'm just trying to do the best I can and be myself with the team and work on these things, and then we see what comes. But yeah, the pressure is always there.

Q. Were there any major injuries to open camp? And with Kenny still recovering from a knee injury, does that mean Gabriel Slonina or Chris Brady have a shot at being No. 2 until Kenny is back?

RAPHAËL WICKY: Yeah, that's our plan. That's our plan. We are very happy with the goalkeepers we have with Bobby and Kenny, and then the two young guys from the academy we believe in. And we knew when we decided to go with those goalkeepers that if Kenny is not back at 100 percent, we will go with Bobby, Gaga and Brady; and they are young and they will have their test games. Yeah, if the season should start that way, then we are confident. We believe in them. We trust them.

Kenny is on the field. He's working. He's looking good. He's not yet with the team in full team training, so we will see how long that takes but we are very confident with the goalie we have.

Q. Was Luka back in training today? And also I wanted to ask about Michael Vang, obviously way too soon to make any decisions on him, but what did you see from him so far and what do you like about his game?

RAPHAËL WICKY: Yeah, so Luka back in full team training. Johan Kappelhof is back in full team training. Let's hope that it all stays like that. They obviously come a long way. They didn't get many minutes last season, but we are very happy to have them back.

Michael Vang is an interesting player. He can be an offensive player who plays on the wing by coming inside on the knees. But I've just trained him one training session, so I don't really want to give a judgment here. It's good for him to be with us. We are happy to have him here. He's coming to Orlando. He's making preseason, he's getting the smell of the professional MLS teams, how we work, and then we will see where this goes.

But it wouldn't be correct right now after one training session to give a judgment.

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