

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Raphael Wicky

Press Conference



Q. I wanted to ask what you thought about Mauricio on making the U-23 roster?

RAPHAËL WICKY: Very happy for Mauricio, hopefully playing in the Olympics would be I think a unique experience for an athlete. You don't really have that often in your career, so if he has the possibility to do that, but first they need to qualify and hopefully they do and he will be able to play there. I cross fingers and I'm happy for him.

It's also a reward for his performances in the last season where he obviously had a really good rookie season and was called up in multiple national team camps, Under 23 camps. Obviously we miss him and ideally you wish you had all the players all the time here, but those are things which happen, national team call-ups, players normally are very proud. I was very proud when I played, so very happy for Mauricio.

Q. With there being a strong possibility that you'll be able to have fans at Soldier Field this season, how much are you looking forward to being able to coach front of Fire fans at home and how much can that give players a lift?

RAPHAËL WICKY: Well, we would obviously love to play front of our fans. That's why you play professional sports. It was amazing last year to play in a stadium, like I mentioned it, a few times, the stadium is amazing and has history and it's a beautiful stadium.

If there's fans in it, it will be even better and hopefully at one point it will be even full and that will be amazing. I'm pretty sure these fans will push us to get even stronger. I think that's always a big difference when you have home games with your fans behind you and pushing you. We are very excited and hopefully we can have fans.

Q. How are Luka and Kenny doing in training, and are there any other fresh injury concerns since the beginning of camp with any of your players?

RAPHAËL WICKY: Luka is in full team training since day one. He's with us. He looks good. He's very happy to be back with the team and we're very happy to have him. He had a good 11 days of training and we trained intensive and hard, and he looks good. I expect him at one point like always in preseason to be tired. It's a long time he didn't train as a team. He didn't have games. If everything goes well, hopefully he gets 45 minutes this weekend.

Kenny is not yet in the team training. He also looks good. He's happy to be with the good. Obviously he's on the field working separately with our coaches and no pressure on that. That's a big injury. Kenny is an experienced guy who knows his body, who is honest with us when it's about how do you feel and stuff.

So he's now here with us and we're happy to have him in the group. So far, there's no big injuries. There's the normal soreness in preseason, but so far we are lucky, touch wood, that it stays that way.

Q. We just spoke with Robert. How much nice is it to have him back in camp and what are your expectations for him this season?

RAPHAËL WICKY: Yeah, I'm happy he's back. It was hard for him not being available the first week of training. He had to do individual training, but happy to have him back, as well for him. Obviously the guys had a week more, and then Robert came in this Monday and immediately was in the team training. He feels fine. He does well. Obviously tired when you have your first three days, that's for sure.

Look, I expect from him obviously he's one of our leader on this team. He's our goal scorer and of course I expect him to score goals -- well, we all do, and I have no doubt that he will do that.

Other than that, I expect him to be one of the leaders in this group and step up in difficult moments, to step up in the locker room. And yeah, like I said in difficult moments in games to bring his experience and his leadership to this group.

Q. Any surprises so far or have you learned anything about this team in the few days that you've been down in Orlando?

RAPHAËL WICKY: No surprises. Positively, not surprised, but very, very happy with the way the players came back and the shape the players came back after such a long break. And the trainings the last ten days, 11 days, were very good, and the guys looked good and the intensity and the mentality and work ethic was really excellent.

But I didn't expect anything else. If you have a three-and-a-half-month break, if you're not happy to be back on the field and happy to train and happy to work hard, you maybe look for a different job. I'm very happy about that but not surprised about that, no.

I'm good with the group and we know we're going to give them some time now to come back and we'll have this game on Saturday, that's the first time they will be exposed to 45 minutes of football again.

So we'll see how they look there, how they feel after that. I mean, look, I think all the teams are probably in the same boat. I'm seeing how the players react after such a long break and just be happy to be back on the field.

Q. You touched on Robert stepping up and being more of a leader this season. Last season you mentioned you wanted to see Gastón make a bigger step this season as a leader on the team. Has Gastón shown, come in prepared to be more of a leader? He mentioned last week in his availability that being a leader is one of his goals this year, as well. Curious how he started the season, preseason.

RAPHAËL WICKY: Yeah, I expect this from a lot of our players. I mentioned in some interviews we've had that as a group in total, we need more leadership on the field, off the field. We need to come out of our comfort zone in certain times and I expect that not only from Robert or two or three guys, I expect that from anyone that we have leadership during training. If something has to stay, we have to step up and we have to be there.

Gastón came back in a good shape. He's training well and now he knows exactly what I want from him in that side. So we're going to give him time. I don't think it's a language barrier or anything. I mean, we have a lot of players who speak Spanish, but yeah, he's one of the guys who obviously in the center of the field with his experience, and I expect that and I'm pretty sure I will get that.

Q. You have four games preseason. Are you going to use all your players in these four games to see them, how they play, how they react and your command? What do you expect out of these four games coming

up?

RAPHAËL WICKY: Well, we have four games down here. We have in total we have obviously more games.

So yeah, these are preseason games, preparation games. It's to gain game minutes again. It's to get a rhythm again. Like you said, the guys didn't have -- the last game was November 8. That is over four months. So it's a long time not playing any games. So it's about getting back into that 45-, 60-, 75- to 90-minute game rhythm and getting the sensations and all of that back. I'm excited and I think the players are actually excited to have on a regular basis real games again.

So I expect us to work hard. I expect us to continue doing what we did last year, working on our philosophy, on our principles, but the first thing is that the guys take their chance. The guys fight for a spot. Whoever gets minutes, we want competition on this team. I think we have -- when everyone hopefully is back, we have a little bit of more depth on this roster which makes the competition bigger and hopefully the players stay healthy, and I want the guys who play and get a chance to get minutes to take that chance and show me and show the staff that they want to be in the starting unit.

Q. Last year of course Robert had a great season, 12 goals in 23 games, but after that I think your next leading scorer had four. So how confident are you that this year you'll have a little bit more of secondary or supportive scoring for Robert and just how important is that for the team and also to kind of take a load off Robert's shoulders a little bit?

RAPHAËL WICKY: Yeah, that's very, very important. We don't really want to be dependent only on one player. Now saying that, of course we all know that Robert was the guy who most often scored. But yeah, out of all of the midfielders to score goals, I think we hope that we want, we expect from Nacho that there is a next step also coming. We have Frankie who finished the season strong, had a lot of chances during the year but didn't convert them.

So I want him to start where he left off and we brought in Offor, and Elliot who almost in every appearance he had, he created chances but needs to finish them. We have a lot of players who are able to create and score goals and I expect them and that's what we wish that they do so, so that not everything is on Robert.

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