

Chicago Fire Media Conference

Thursday, March 18, 2021

Chicago, Illinois, USA

Raphael Wicky

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions for head coach Raphael Wicky.

Q. First of all, how is Stanislav Ivanov doing? Wasn't in the friendly over the weekend. Are there any new, fresh health concerns since we last spoke?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Stanislav, yeah, he trained with the team again, but he then had again to stop. We are still waiting to see how he feels. He won't be available for the Saturday game, which is something that is for sure now. We still don't know how serious it is. He tried to train again, had to stop. Obviously now we're making a lot of different checks and see what happens.

Otherwise more or less everyone is in. Middle of pre-season, you have the here or there knock, maybe where a player needs half a day off of rest or something. That's just not uncommon. But we hope that for Saturday, no other players will be out.

Frankowski had to go back home for some family reasons, but he should be back with us by tonight, I think. He should be available for the game on Saturday. It's just a matter of how many minutes he will get.

Q. What is the issue with Ivanov? What is the physical issue?

RAPHAEL WICKY: He had some pain on his knee. The exact diagnosis, I'm not a doctor, so we will have to wait.

Q. With guys having such a long layoff in the off-season between the craziness because of COVID, the CBA negotiations, how have the guys looked so far in terms of fitness and sharpness?

RAPHAEL WICKY: We were very happy with how the guys came back after three-and-a-half-months' break. The players were in good shape. So all that is fine. We were happy with that.

It's just that it was a long time without playing football. You can do programs as much as you want, run around, jump around, work at fitness, but it's not the same as then when you go back into full team training with contact, not predictable with what you do with contract. You can run on a treadmill, it's predictable, when you do some strengthening work...

Obviously we're happy, they look good. The guys worked very hard. This is week three, they worked hard. Intensity and mentality was excellent so far.

But you just have to be careful because it was such a long break. Three-and-a-half-months' break for an athlete, that is very rare if it is not an injury. I'll be smart and see how we can control the load.

Q. As we get ready to talk to Alvaro shortly, what do you anticipate from year one to year two? How do you see him developing? How do you see the dynamic with Gaston Gimenez and Alvaro coming together?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, I obviously expect more from Alvaro this year. In terms of last year, when I took over, Alvaro came out of a situation where he didn't have a football game since May 2019. We took over mid January. Then he had to start pre-season. So he didn't play competitive games for about eight or nine months before starting pre-season with us, having his first game in February, I think it was, down in Tampa.

Last year we had to slowly build him back up to gain fitness, then the big break came in the middle of March. Obviously that didn't really help. Then we were very happy that Alvaro was able to play every single game for the second, which in Spain he didn't really have in the years before. We were happy with that.

Now he's back with us, this is his first week. He will get probably some minutes this weekend, but we have to be careful with him because it's only his first week.

But we're trying obviously to get him back into full fitness. Yeah, he knows the team, he knows us, the knows the league. That always helps, of course.

The relationship with Gaston, those two understand each other very, very well. They're two top players. They're also

two players who really need rhythm. Yeah, they just need now to be focused on pre-season and get those minutes, then I'm pretty sure they had will this team tremendously.

Q. (Through translation.) Taking into account the pregames in the beginning of the season, what are you looking for? What are the purposes of the pre-season matches?

RAPHAEL WICKY: (Through translation.) These first pre-season games, the important part of it is finding the rhythm of play. These first games are more like really intense training sessions. Of course we want to win, everyone wants to win, but the important part is finding the rhythm of the game, how you want to play, how you move, getting used to each other again. That's really also showing the team how I want them to be on the field, how I want them to play.

But, yeah, the most part is finding the rhythm.

Q. (Through translation.) From this past weekend, what was missing from the team in that first game? This upcoming weekend, are you going to use the same strategy of using the younger players in the first half and maybe some more experienced players in the second half?

RAPHAEL WICKY: (Through translation.) Yeah, I think for the moment it's important to see who can play. We're going to keep mixing up the team with the different ages, keep using everyone as much as possible. The important part is seeing the players who can play, making sure they get in and get minutes.

Of course, tactics is important, seeing how we move off the ball, seeing how we move around the field. But the important right now is getting minutes and getting everyone together.

Yeah, some people might have more minutes this weekend than last weekend.

Q. One of the bright spots from the last match was that you got minutes for a lot of guys who hadn't had minutes for a year. All these different homegrowns that you have on the team, not so much about their football ability, but their maturity level. A bunch of 16-, 17-year-olds, how are they fitting in with the older veterans on the team?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, they're doing well. They're well integrated. They're not new players, they trained with us all last year. They know all the teammates. The three new guys we brought in, they're all young guys. Ivanov,

Chinonso, Jhon Espinoza, they're 20 to 21 years old. So that fits. Otherwise there's no problem with that. They're integrated in the team. They feel well. Year two with me, year two with this team. They're doing well.

Again, I'm just happy that these guys now can get some minutes. That's why it's so important that they had minutes last weekend, and on Saturday some of the guys, most of the guys, will also get minutes.

Last year was a difficult year for everyone, but especially for young players, homegrowns, all over the country. All over the world. Europe is not different. When you can only train, you don't really have games, I think that is missing. It's a big part. Players like training, but they want to play games.

I'm just happy that they have again. Andre Reynolds' last real game before last Saturday was Cruz Azul in 2019 that is a year and eight or nine months.

Nick Slonina, Javier Casas, all these guys didn't have minutes for almost a year. There were no friendly games, no academy. I'm happy they have this possibility now to train with us, to show, to fight for a spot. But getting back to minutes, that's important.

Q. Looking back to the friendly last week, you played Johan Kappelhof, what was the thought process behind that? You mentioned he could play midfield. Is that where you see him playing there this season? Was there another reason you played him in the midfield?

RAPHAEL WICKY: No, that's definitely a thought process of mine, and of my staff. We think that Johan can help us there. We have obviously right now with Francisco, with Carlos, with (indiscernible), with Nick, with Mauricio, we would have five center backs. We think Johan can bring us a lot when he's in midfield as well.

With him as well, I'm just happy that he's healthy and having games again. But he brings us something different in midfield, so we want to try that, always knowing that I can put him back as a center back. He's not going to forget how to play a center back if he plays for about four, five weeks midfield. It's more the opposite, it's more difficult when you play center back, suddenly you have to go to center midfield, that's a little more difficult because you need a 360 orientation, which you don't really need as a center back.

Now it's good him being in the center of the field. He did well. He brings a lot of bite there. He's a good player. Just praying he stays healthy, then looking forward to that.

Q. We're about a month out from the season now. As it stands, is this roster what fans can expect in terms of the full group? Are there any possible additions en route? Is this really the team you have to work with going into the year?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, this is our roster. This is our roster we are planning to go into the season. A roster I'm very, very happy with. I think when everyone is here, Mauricio coming back, a lot of competition in a lot of positions. I'm very, very happy with that roster.

The intensity is very high in training. The competition is there. Yeah, hopefully everyone stays healthy, then we have a lot of competition there. Of course, the club is always looking for players, is always scouting players. But right now we're not talking about immediate new signings.

You just never know in the game. But right now I'm very happy with this roster.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. Appreciate your time this afternoon.

RAPHAEL WICKY: Thank you. Bye.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports