

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Raphael Wicky

Press Conference



there's a lot of home games, so that's something we can also turn it around and say it's very positive.

At the end of the day it's game-by-game and that's what we're doing.

Q. With injuries to Ivanov and Herbers and Collier, what does that mean for the attack, and does that put an additional burden on guys like Aliseda and Stojanovic to get off to strong starts and fill the void while those guys recover?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, first, obviously we're not happy about that. You never envision injury to a player. Unfortunately it's part of the game, and it happens, and then as a coaching staff you have to try to deal with it the best you can. That's what we're doing. I hope that -- we know that Stanny is going to take a bit, but the other players are back after a few weeks. It's difficult to give an exact time, and again, it's an opportunity for some other players to step in. That's why we have a lot of guys, and that's how we treat it. That's how we now work with it.

Yeah, Aliseda always is a big part, Franky is a big part, Luka is back and is doing well. But there's other guys. They're in preseason, and it's an opportunity, also, for younger players to step in. Guty gets minutes, Monis gets minutes. It's up to them, as well, to show that they're there and that they'll try to catch this opportunity, and that's how we're treating it.

Q. We got a look at the schedule yesterday finally. I'm sure you guys have seen it for quite a while, but one thing everybody noted was the number of road games to close out the year. There's only four home games after mid-August because of the Bears. Is that something that worries you? Is that something that you need to prepare for, or is it just go with the flow?

RAPHAEL WICKY: No, it doesn't worry me. It's go with the flow. It was kind of expected. I knew that we're not going to have many home games towards the end of the season. That was similar last year, but then it obviously all changed because of COVID, but the actual original schedule was also not a lot of home games in the end.

No, look, we're taking it anyway game-by-game. We have a lot of home games in the first I think 19 or 20 games,

Q. We heard the Fabian Herbers update via his podcast. What is the official prognosis for Fabi, and then what's the update on Elliot Collier?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, it's a problem with his knee, Fabi, his MCL. I'm not a doctor and it's very difficult to give an exact number. He will be out a few weeks, but it's difficult to say. Is it three, is it four, five or six. I don't want to give a number. I know he's going to be missing a few weeks, but like with all the injuries, we're hoping that maybe things will go fast or hopefully the recovery goes well and then he will be back sooner than later. But I don't want to give a number.

And with Elliot, it's his ankle, and yeah, we hope that after a few weeks he will be back with the team. That's an injury which is painful, but after a while it's also how can the player tolerate the pain, and we will see how that goes.

They're for sure not going to be able to be with us now in the next two weeks here or 10 days here, and then we will see week-by-week how that treatment goes when we are home.

Q. I wanted to see and hear from you what you saw out of Álvaro from that very first preseason game, and then I wanted your take on -- I'm sure you've been watching Mauricio Pineda with the national team and I wanted to know your thoughts on his performances.

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yes, so Álvaro played last weekend I think 40 minutes, 42 minutes, I'm not exactly sure how many minutes, and that was only after one week of training. He wanted to get some minutes, and he got his minutes, and I think that was fine. That was all that mattered. He came out of that game without injuries, which is good. He's still only in week 2 of his preseason with us, even thought as a team we are in week 4. We're finishing week 4 this weekend. He is finishing week 2, so he's a little bit behind, like Miguel Navarro, as well.

So I'm happy that they are part of the team. I'm happy that

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they got some minutes, but we still are reintegrating them in everything that we do. We hope to give them some minutes again this weekend, but it was just good to have him on the field. You can always see the quality of Álvaro, but it wasn't so much about what can he bring in that game. It's really just more getting minutes again after such a long break.

What was the second part of your question?

Q. I wanted to know what your thoughts were on Mauricio Pineda's performance with the national team?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, I saw both performances from Mauricio. I think he had in my opinion a strong performance yesterday. He looked very comfortable under a lot of pressure from México and was very happy and pleased with that. I'm also not the coach. I don't know what tactical instructions he had, but he looked comfortable and confident yesterday. I think in the first game you could see that he didn't really have games for a long time. Not that he was bad, but it was the first game for I think most of those guys since, again, as well, I think probably four months. A lot of the players are in the MLS and they didn't play since last November or December. It's a long time, and I think it was also just good for him to get these two games, to get back into the rhythm. For me you can see a progression from game 1 to game 2, which is very positive.

Q. Do you hope that that kind of translates into your camp when he comes in, and do you think that there's benefits for the season and for the club?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, definitely. I mean, Mauricio had camps in December, he had camps in January and February, so his off-season was long for not having games, but his off-season obviously was way shorter. He had training, which is really good for him, which he benefits from. So I'm very happy that he had all these camps and these trainings and that his off-season wasn't three and a half months, and now I'm happy that he gets minutes in games, and I think winning games and playing good performances and going to the semifinals and hopefully to the finals, it should also give him confidence.

Q. We are less than one month from the first game of the season. We know the Chicago Fire is suffering from a few injuries. How do you think the roster is ready? Talk about the fitness. Do you plan to sign someone else? How do you feel about your roster with less than a month until the first game?

RAPHAEL WICKY: I mean, the roster, I said that last week. We are very happy with the roster. The roster when everyone is fit, I was very happy and very pleased with it,

and it's big enough. Right now we have these injuries which we're not happy with, and right now this week we also have Mauricio gone and our captain, Calvo, gone. But that's things a lot of teams have to deal with. So right now, no, we are not signing any new players. The club, I mentioned that last week, as well, is always looking for players. That's the work the club has to do, always having the eyes open, but we're not actively looking to sign new players.

But you never know in football what happens in the future, but right now, no, we're not looking actively.

And are we ready for the season? No, of course not. We're not ready yet. We're still three and a half weeks before the season. There's still a way to go. We're still building the team. Like I said, we have to reintegrate players who came late. So I think we're in the same boat as a lot of teams, and no, it would be a little bit weird if we would be ready completely game-ready and season-ready after three and a half weeks of preseason. But I'm happy with what I see. I'm happy with the way the team works, the mentality, the intensity, everything we try to bring on the field. So I'm very happy with that, but we're not ready yet.

Q. The club made a hire for director of football analytics in Kevin Minkus. I'm curious how you implement that data analysis into the coaching and preparing for games and such?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, we're very happy with that hiring. Kevin is here with us. We knew Kevin before already, our coaching staff and me personally, as well, but he's now full time with us and he here in Orlando, as well. First of all, he's a great person, really good to have him with us, and he's obviously really, really good in what he does.

He's available for everyone, so whenever we as a coaching staff have questions or we want to know certain things, we can go to him and he tries to find some stats, some data, some information which can help us then prepare games or prepare opponents, and that's what we're doing. Yeah, we're in a daily exchange with him.

Q. I know one of the things you're looking at now is what to do in defensive midfield if and when Gastón has to leave on international duty. You looked at Johan Kappelhof over the last couple games. I wanted to know what you thought there. Is there a possibility we might see Mauricio play there, or would you rather see him stick with center back for now?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, so right now in my plan he was



a center back, knowing that he can play center mid. I was planning to try Johan there and I'm still planning to try Johan there, and I think he did well in those two games. I think he brings us something different than Luka, than Gastón, than Álvaro. I think he brings a different element there, so I'm happy with what I see. But again, we're still three and a half weeks in, and he missed almost a whole year last year.

About Mauricio I know that he can play midfielder, so we'll see when he's back. We'll see how our team looks like when he's back. As a coach you're always happy when you have players who can actually play two or three different positions. I know that I can count on Mauricio in the back and also I can count on him in the midfield. Also that's a little bit different because you're surrounded by more players, you're attacked by more players in the midfield than in the back, but I know that he can do that. I have full faith in him. Yeah, we're looking in different options. We have quite a few options. I know that Luka Stojanovic is an 8 or a 10 but I know earlier in his career he also played as a defensive midfielder. So he played against Philadelphia I think the last 15, 20 minutes, as well, as a double pivot next to Javy Casas and he did well there. So there is interesting options for us.

Q. With Álvaro, obviously he played a little bit more of a deeper line role last year. With some of the issues you have further up with Ivanov out, Herbers and Collier, would you consider pushing Medrán further up the field? And the playoff format was announced and it's back to seven teams per conference as opposed to 10 for the east last year. How much does that change your mindset and I guess the target for how many points you're going to need to advance to the playoffs this season?

RAPHAEL WICKY: So to your first question, no, Alvaro or Luka or Gastón, they're not players who are players for the wing because Elliot and Stanny, they're players who are wingers, even they come inside, but I'm not planning on putting one of those midfielders out on the wing.

Is it a thought of maybe Álvaro higher up the field with the ball, yes, that's a thought we have, but that's going to be central. That's not going to be out wide. So the players we're missing now are not going to be replaced by Álvaro, Luka or Gastón in these positions. We need to find other solutions there. So we'll see.

Right now, again, it's about getting minutes and training fitness for Álvaro in a double pivot or in a 4-1-4-1 with three central midfielders or sometimes he could be a 10, as well. I think that wouldn't be a problem for him, but not out wide.

About the playoffs, it doesn't really -- I haven't calculated the amount of points you need for seven teams. That would be a question for Kevin Minkus probably, which maybe we will ask him to see how that looks now. But for our mindset it doesn't change much. Look, we were not planning last year in becoming 10s. We want to go into these games and win these games. We want to go as high as we can and make the playoffs. We know that in a normal season with all the games played, it's competitive in this league, so there is not 10 spots for a playoff like there was in the COVID season, so we know that it's competitive. But that's what makes it very interesting.

Our mindset will always be we go into these games to win the games, home or away. I think no coach or no footballer goes into a game and wants a draw. You go in to win. With that you want as many as you can have and go as high as you can in the ranking.

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