

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Raphael Wicky

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started. We'll start with questions.

Q. I feel like I have to ask this every week. Any new fresh injury concerns since the last time we talked? How are Herbers and Elliot Collier coming along? What is Kenneth Kronholm's situation? Saw some photos on Twitter that he looked pretty active in training.

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, hi everyone, first. I hope you're all doing well.

Yeah, we obviously saw that Carlos didn't play last week. He has a knock. He still didn't train with us this week. He will not play with us this weekend. We will see day by day how he can start or progress his recovery. Hopefully he will join back pretty soon. But that's something we have to see day by day.

The other guys, Elliot is walking again without the boot. That progress is well. But we all know these things take a little bit with ligaments and ankle sprains. Fabi is in his rehab, doing well. But, again, we know that it takes a little bit, so it's not worse or better than we expected. They're all in their recovery. Stan obviously had his surgery, which we know that this takes a long time. So we're there.

Kenny is training, not with the team, but he had a good, good progresses. He's training well, training hard, but he's not yet with the team. Again, there we will see how he feels, how he progresses into the next week and the week after, then we will see when the time is to reintegrate him into the team.

Q. I'm sure there was a certain amount of work you wanted to get done and a certain amount of things you wanted to accomplish in Orlando. How far along are you guys on that? Are you happy with the team's progress so far?

RAPHAEL WICKY: We're actually very happy with the

team's progress. I mean, first of all, the mentality and the intensity and the way the team works was really good in those first five weeks. They worked really hard.

We are now at a stage obviously finishing week four in training camp, week five, where the guys are tired. This is to be expected. We're going to be two weeks before our first game. So this is normally a period where you are tired, where we expect the guys to be tired. That's where we are. But they work really hard, they work well.

I think in those three games we saw a good progress in the team, in the synchronization defensively how we want to defend. The opponents didn't really have many, many big chances against us. We were pleased with the way the team defended and the way the team worked. This is going to be a process where we will keep on working every week. With that we were happy.

We saw some good soccer, some good football. We will get sharper with the ball. We have created basically in all these games a good amount of chances, good amount of opportunities either with possession or coming out of a transition moment. So we were happy with that.

I think we are where we expected us to be. Yeah, we're on track.

Q. This might be something of an unusual question. One of the great things about this sport is its popularity worldwide with players from all these different countries, cultures, becoming teammates. Having been around the world yourself as a player and coach, what makes a team successful in terms of how it incorporates so many different cultures without any major clashes?

RAPHAEL WICKY: At the end of the day we want to start building a culture, or the club wanted to build a culture with the owner. That comes down with the sports director, me as a coach. We want to create this team culture, these values we have.

I said it from the first day: there is no way an individual is bigger than the team. It's all about the team. I always promised you guys and the fans you will see a team who works together and works hard. That's sort of part of the culture we want to create and we are creating and we did

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last year as well.

That's a message to all the players who come in from wherever they are, if they're American, European, African, whatever. It's not going to be about you, it's going to be about the team.

With that then in the end of the day the personalities have to fit. We obviously also when we buy players, we always get information about their personality, which is very, very important. I think so far we've done a good job and the club has done a good job.

Then integrating these guys is obviously being open from our side, but also being open from the player side to give something. It's a give-and-take. I think there we're trying to do a good job to integrate these players.

A lot of the players who come here and don't speak the language, they know they need to learn the language, which is not always the easiest, because it's important to communicate with each other.

Yeah, in general, look, my experiences in this sport, it's the game that brings us all together from wherever you are. That's the beauty of this sport. It's worldwide. In the end of the day, they do what they love to do. That's part of the approach which we have here, as well.

Q. I don't know if you've addressed this in previous calls, so sorry. My question is about the new analytics hires you made this year, the staff that's being built up with Kevin Minkus. How did you incorporate that into your model, ways of doing things, maybe we're seeing this trend growing steadily across MLS?

RAPHAEL WICKY: I spoke about it last week. First, I think Kevin is a great guy and a really good person. He fits right into our team. We're very happy to have him.

He is available for everyone, for my staff, but also for the club, for multiple informations. So we're using him. We're having questions. He's giving us answers with datas, which can help us prepare for teams, getting information about players, about multiple different things.

But first and foremost he's a good person. He's here with us, available every day, sitting in our coaching room with us. We all started working with him down here in Florida and getting to know him. It works well. I think we're lucky to have him. He will help us to get really important and good datas for multiple different things.

Q. Obviously last year was the strangest year ever. Kind of speaking to that point you made a moment ago

about culture, have you really gotten to meet the Chicago fan base? What is it going to mean to you this year to get to play in front of them for the first time and really be entrenched and start to build that culture out across the city?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, that's a good question. And no, I haven't. We didn't have a home game. We had our pre-season games where most of them, I think all of them were in California and down in Florida. Then we had the two first games that were away. Fans were there. In Boston there were a few Chicago Fire fans. I don't know if they lived in Boston or flew over from Chicago to support us.

Haven't actually had a chance to have home games with fans. I'm really excited, my staff, all the players, to welcome fans back.

Yeah, we know that they're very important and they help us to be better in these home games. They push you. I think that's always what every team wants and needs, the support of their fans.

But I'm really excited to have home games with fans and to meet our supporters.

Q. (Translated from Spanish) You probably didn't imagine because of all of the home games, due to the long period of rest that was almost four months, you'd have all of these injuries. Now you see the injuries that have happened. For the home games that you'll have at home in Chicago, will you be able to use Calvo and Penida? Are you worried about any more injuries?

RAPHAEL WICKY: (Translated from Spanish) That's a difficult question. I don't know if we can say that the injuries were because of the long period of not having played. The injuries were during a game. They were strong encounters, clashes, that happened during a game. Really that's football. That's what happens. We were a little bit unlucky.

And, yes, Calvo and Mauricio are back. They're going to be training with us. We expect them to have minutes and to be playing during those upcoming games at home, the friendly games at home.

Look, while we can't stop training because we have some injuries, it happens. We have to keep preparing ourselves, keep moving forward and prepare for the long season ahead of us. We can't really stop because we have some injuries.

Q. On Teran, what is the injury? What is the level of concern with him? Also, we're going to be talking to Gaston in a few minutes. He and Medran were very, very good together last season. What made them so good together? Was it that they're two really good players or was there something else with the chemistry and how their games interacted with each other?

RAPHAEL WICKY: To your first question, Carlos had a knock, a problem with his quad, with his leg. Again, we'll see how this develops over the next days, how it is when we're back in Chicago. We hope that he will join the group again. But I cannot give you an exact answer when he will be back.

To your second question, I mean, first of all, they're two really, really good players. I think they understood each other pretty quickly on the field. They understood how to work together as a double pivot on the field. They have amazing quality.

But I think they can do much better. I expect them to do much better. Last year was a difficult year with always start and stop, with a lot of breaks where you couldn't really find the rhythm. Then once they had the rhythm, in a period of time, I think it was in September when we became really, really strong, Gaston had to leave for the national team. He was, again, gone for about three weeks because he had to come back and quarantine 10 days, 10 days training in quarantine. He again lost a little bit of rhythm.

Hopefully those things will be better this year. Hopefully the players can really find a rhythm from the beginning and do even better because they have really, really good quality.

But especially for those players, it is a question of rhythm. They are players who need minutes, they are players who need the real pre-season, not always these big breaks like we had them unfortunately, every team, last year. Hopefully this season will be a normal season with hopefully not all these breaks, then those players can become even stronger.

Q. Kind of a non-Fire question for you. As a former U.S. youth coach with the U17 squad, with the United States failing to qualify for the Olympics for the third straight cycle, why does this keep happening to the men's program in the United States? Is it continuing to lag behind other countries? If it's not lagging behind, is it a case of underachievement when it comes to tournaments? How do you view that situation?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Look, for this specific case it's difficult for me. I wasn't in there. I'm not in that pool. First of all, I think the future is bright. There is so much talent in this country, so much talent in national pools. Look at the men's team, how young they are. Greg Berhalter's team, how many young players. Really young. We're talking about 17-year-olds, 18-year-olds, 19-year-olds, a lot of them. There is a lot of potential there for the future.

Here in this case. Look, again I cannot really judge what happened on there. What I know from my personal experience as a player and as a coach is that there isn't many weak national teams any more, at least in Europe it's not. Small teams in the last 10, 12 years have grown as well. They've also gotten way more professional. Their players may play abroad with training and they are getting better as well.

When you have a game like this, it's one game, you win or lose. In one game, any team can beat any team. That's just how it is. If you have a tournament where you will play the same team four or five times, then I think over that period of games the individual quality will win. If it's one day, one game, any team can beat.

Look, I was playing in Champions League with Basel. We played against Man City, Man United, and we beat those teams. If we play them five times, eight times, we probably wouldn't beat them four or five times. If it's one game, you can beat them. That's what happened here.

That's sometimes when it is in this game. You cannot always explain. But it's also the beauty of the game, that not everything is predictable. Not always the stronger side wins. Sometimes you're happy about that and sometimes you're not happy. Here in this case we were not happy about it, of course. But the future is bright, I'm 100% sure.

Q. I wanted to know, this Saturday's game is the only one that's not streamed live to the fans. Does that give you an opportunity to do something that you wouldn't normally do? Are you going to try something that you wouldn't want to show to other opposing coaches, or you don't care about that?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Exactly. That's the way we do it. Look, if anyone wants to find our games or get our games, they will get our games. All the coaches know each other, or they know an assistant coach, or they know someone. All the teams are filming those games. If you want to get the game, you will get this game. That's why I'm not in that mindset to hide things.

We're preparing our team. Pre-season is pre-season.



Every team has a lot of rotation. Teams play young players, even test players. You shouldn't really focus too much about what the other teams do. That's what we do. We're focusing on us, we're trying to get out of these games what we want out of these games.

Of course, we always want to win these games, but we also know the result in these pre-season games is not the most important. You want to get rhythm, minutes. Maybe you want to test different systems. But I'm not trying to hide these things.

Q. I'm curious about the young attackers you brought in the off-season with Jhon, Chinoso. What have you seen from them in camp so far? How big of an impact are you expecting them to make on this season?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Like I said at the beginning of the pre-season, I'm very happy with the signings we've made. They're all young players. Unfortunately Stanislav is injured and out for a long time. They're all young players with big potential. We believe in them. I see that in training. I see this potential.

Now every time a player goes to a new league, there is a little bit of a time, you need time of adaption. It's taking some time. This time we are giving these players.

The most important is we see the potential and the quality we have. And we see that. Then the middle of pre-season, new teammates, a lot of new informations every day, hard training.

So they are where we expected them to be, but we know they can help our team.

Q. You will have to deal this year again with COVID protocols, of course injuries, FIFA dates. Is the depth of your team where you want it to be? You think it's good enough to deal with what you have in front or you consider your roster closed or are you still looking to add some pieces before the beginning of the season?

RAPHAEL WICKY: No, I said it a few weeks ago, that I'm very, very happy with my roster. We were done with our roster. Of course, the club always looks for players, always have the eyes open.

Now unfortunately we have these injuries which you can't plan for. But we know that Stanislav is one that takes longer than the others. Hopefully the others will be back at one point. With all of these players back, I'm very, very happy with the depth of the roster, with the quality of the roster.

Now, again, I think it was three weeks ago those guys were not injured, and I was very, very happy. Right now we have these injuries so it makes you a little bit thinner. There's also the rules here. You cannot go and buy every time new players.

I'm happy with the roster. I hope that these guys come back sooner than later. Then I believe we have a strong roster.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for your time this afternoon, Rafa. Appreciate it.

RAPHAEL WICKY: Thank you. Bye-bye.

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