

Chicago Fire Media Conference

Friday, April 9, 2021
Chicago, Illinois, USA

Mauricio Pineda Press Conference



Q. I'm sure there's obvious disappointment with failing to qualify for the Olympics, but how would you rate your experience in qualification and how do you build on that this coming season?

MAURICIO PINEDA: Yeah, it was overall positive. I think that started since December in the first camp that I went to and January. It was a shorter journey for me compared to some other players, but definitely learned a lot from it and got some games in that I would never take back. Obviously not the result we wanted in the end but definitely a lot to take away from that and hopefully apply going into this year.

Q. You're eight days away from the season. For you, mentally and emotionally, how do you switch gears from the Olympic qualification tournament to jumping straight into what should be a long and challenging MLS season. How do you get your brain around going from one team to another so quickly.

MAURICIO PINEDA: Yeah, I think it's maybe a little difficult but the transition has been good. I think I had a week off after the qualification process, so I had some time to recover and recover mentally, as well, and now I'm back in training with the team this week and I feel good. I think we're all ready to move forward and get the season started.

Q. I'm wondering, what do you think the biggest difference for you personally will be between last year and this year? Is there anything that you've improved? Do you have any goals in particular for this season? Things like that.

MAURICIO PINEDA: Yeah, I think individually there's some stuff that I could work on and improve, and I think that's something that we talked about with the coaching staff -- will stay the same as last year. Obviously having a season under our belt as a team, I think we're ready to hopefully take that next step this year in making the playoffs, and having a good run for the MLS Cup.

Q. Can you talk about the younger players and the guys that signed from different countries and how that's going as a team?

MAURICIO PINEDA: I think it's going really well. A lot of the younger guys get along. They are all coming from different places but I think they are all getting along really well and that's showing on and off the field. So it's an exciting group to be working with, a very motivated group that's ready to show what we are made of, and we are excited to get the season started.

Q. Along the same lines, I was going to ask you your impressions of the home grown kids and other young players on the team and whether the national audience maybe should be looking out for any of them if they are ready to contribute ahead of schedule?

MAURICIO PINEDA: Absolutely. I think all these guys are young, but I think first impressions was that they don't look young at all. There's some really, really physical guys and they are coming here to compete, compete for a starting spot and you can tell from the first session that I had with a team, obviously they have been here for a while now but they are not backing down from anything. They are young but they are eager to play and to get some minutes and they are trying to show that as much as possible every day.

Q. As you look back on last season, what is something you learned about yourself as a player and what's something you feel you need to improve in your second year?

MAURICIO PINEDA: Yeah, I think I learned a lot. I learned that even though the season was probably only half the length of the regular season, we learned it's a long season with lots of ups and downs. I think we need to embrace that as a team and be ready to stick together through those moments.

Individually, I think it was a good year to learn, and there's a lot to take away from last season. So yeah, we are hoping to grow from last year and be ready for this year.

Q. Last year you accomplished a lot but you never played in front of home fans. What will it mean for you to play in front of home fans on April 17, and do you have any family in the stands a week from tomorrow



night?

MAURICIO PINEDA: Yeah, I think we are all really excited for that moment. We were all looking forward to the home opener last year that we were going to have with fans but we never unfortunately got to experience that.

So I think the whole group is excited for fans to be in the stands, and of course my family is from here, so I'm looking forward to have them in the stadiums, too. So that will be really exciting.

Q. What will that mean for you personally? You grew up a Fire fan and grew up in the city, to actually play a Fire game it in front of Fire fans. What will that mean to you personally?

MAURICIO PINEDA: Yeah, that means a lot. There's so many people, local people that I know that grew up with me and supporting me always reaching out through social media.

So I think it's a lot of build-up for that moment and I'm excited to have all of those people that have been supporting me through my entire career and through last year to finally be able to experience that game in person. So yeah, I'm really looking forward to that.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports...