

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Chicago, Illinois, USA

Raphael Wicky

Press Conference



Q. Looking forward to Saturday night a lot.

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, us too.

Q. On the injury front, I'm going to name the players by name and see if they are available on Saturday. Navarro, Nacho, Herbers, Collier and Teran, what's their status and will any of them be available Saturday night?

RAPHAEL WICKY: They are progressing well but it's day-to-day. Herbers is not going to be there. Collier is not going to be there.

The others is day-by-day. I cannot give a full answer to that now but they are doing -- they are doing better, so we'll see how -- how every day goes.

Q. And then I saw that it was report that had Navarro felt something in the warmup Saturday and then played and then of course left early. Why was he allowed to play even if he felt something in warmups?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, so he hurt I think his ankle in the warmup. He came in, the doctors checked him and there was nothing, major concerns. There was nothing like Achilles or ligaments or anything, which was concerning.

So the doctors gave green light to try and Miguel wanted to try, but obviously very, very -- it's not possible so he came out. If there had been any concern, we wouldn't have let him try.

Q. Obviously five wins wasn't good enough last season for anybody. What do you think the biggest difference is we're going to see in this team in 2021 versus 2020 and how are you going to make that jump to become a playoff contender?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Well, the biggest thing is that we convert these games, these good moments, these good games into victories; that we don't get these games out of

hand; that we don't bring teams back into the game with easy mistakes.

So that's something we want to work on. We have to work on. That's probably also why last Saturday was a good lesson for us just one week before the opener.

And then the other biggest thing which we wanted to create which I'm pretty sure we'll have once the guys are back, as well, the injured guys are back, is a lot of competition on the team and a lot of depth on roster and a lot of quality in there, which gives me then a lot of choices and possibilities as well for rotations and especially in the league games and when we travel a lot.

That is something which we all wanted and when these guys are going to be back, we'll have that; I'm pretty sure about that.

Q. Heading into the season, most analysts are predicting you guys to finish at best eighth in the East, while most say you'll probably finish 10, 11, 12, somewhere around according to the MLSsoccer.com website. What's your take on predictions that the team hasn't improved enough and what gives you the confidence that you guys are better than that perception?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Well, I cannot control what other people think of us or write about us. I mean, obviously it should give us a little stimulus to prove them wrong. I think that's how I see it.

But everyone has the right of free speech and say and write what they think, so that doesn't really concern me. I know -- I know and we know that when we have a roster complete and we have our guys back, that we have a very good roster and I told that -- I told you guys that three or four weeks ago that I'm very happy with this roster and I think there's a lot of quality there and there's a lot of competition there, and competition will push each other; will make the players better.

So with that, I believe that we have a better team than last year. We have to the continuity, with not starting from zero again, I think that will make us a better team. So that's how we think about our team and all the rest, we cannot control. But obviously we want to prove everyone wrong;



that we are -- that we are better than they think, but it's not something we talk about with our staff or our players, I mean, that's not.

Q. The last friendly, was that the starting lineup? Is that what we can expect to see on Saturday and during preseason, were you able to see all of the new players that you have signed on in the different positions that you want them to play?

RAPHAEL WICKY: A week before the season starts, that's the team that's out on the field is one of our options. It's not completely confirmed. It's an option of the team that could be out there. There could still be changes, so that's the options that we have for us.

And yeah I've seen most of our guys playing well. I haven't seen Stanislav because he was injured probably around two weeks in but I've seen all of our guys and I'm happy with them and I think that with the players that we have, we are going to have a good squad.

Q. A couple Chicago sports teams recently have announced COVID vaccinations, the White Sox announced on Sunday that virtually their entire traveling party got the Johnson & Johnson vaccine and today the Hawks said that players were offered an optional vaccine, as well. Where are the Fire currently on that, and what kind of conversations are you having with players and the rest of your staff and frankly everyone who is part of the traveling party about getting vaccinated?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, that's a good question. The club is in talks with the city and the medicine and the doctors are always in talks with us and there will be soon the option for us to get the vaccination as well. We are obviously not forcing anyone to take the vaccination. I think we don't have the right to do that. It's optional for players and for staff members, and we have to respect everyone's decision.

We encourage players and staff members to take it, but like I said, it's optional and we are in talks and hopefully we have the possibility to do that very soon.

Q. And I guess in that same vein, I feel like I've asked you this question before, but it seems like another Chicago team that did pretty well with COVID last year is the Cubs. No players are confirmed positive now, but you guys did very well last season with COVID and avoiding it. So how often are you still reminding players to be safe and to be mindful of their surroundings when it comes to the pandemic?

RAPHAEL WICKY: This is my and our staff's job right now. Obviously I am telling them from time to time hour meetings, but it's also being a role model and wearing masks and being distanced and just reminding everybody in acting and with words that, guys, we have to be careful. It's there, and I think the league also made it clear that they are not going to -- if I am -- if I am not going to be there, the team still has to play. If players are not going to be there, the team still has to play. So just trying to remind them and that's part of our job, and we do that regularly.

Q. I'm wondering what the timetable was on sending players on loan to Forward Madison, is anyone left and do you have a sense of which players might be going this season?

RAPHAEL WICKY: No, we haven't spoken about that yet because obviously right now we have a few injuries, so we need all those players here for training. So the moment wasn't there to talk about that.

And then, also, we want to obviously see how the restrictions are; can players at one point go there and come back, train here, could they go on the week and play and train with us. These things we still have to talk. We don't have a clear answer about that yet. Right now, they are all here.

Q. I wanted to revisit something you talked about last week, the start of the season and specifically the qualification for the U.S. Open Cup. How big a priority is it for the club considering that the Fire have one of the best histories in the history of the competition, and the club has not won a trophy since 2006, which coincidentally, was the U.S. Open Cup. So how big of a priority do you view this competition?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Well, it's difficult to make it a priority. It's linked to our league, right. The first three games decide if you go in or if you don't go in.

Like I said last week, we are going into those first three games, or in every game, we want to win these games. That's the mentality, every player, every coach has, and with that it's linked if you're going to be qualified or not.

Normally you have two separate -- you have two separate competitions where you can make priorities. This is not the case here. One competition may lead into the other competition. So we are depending of our start of the league if you make it to the U.S. Open Cup or not.

Once we are in there, of course it's a very important competition. Every competition is important and Cup competitions are usually the fastest way to winning a

trophy. That is in every country like that. A league is much more difficult. The league, you have -- depending on which country you are, 36, 34, 38, 40 games. And then here in the States you have the playoffs, even you have a really good regular season you may still not make the title because you may have a bad game in playoffs.

So the Cup competitions or the other competitions are shorter normally, so there is less games to win, to actually make a title.

So if we are in there, it's an important competition and we are going to take this very, very serious.

Q. So it was the first thing you said when you sat down in response to someone's question, you know, we're excited, too, for Saturday. Wondering if you can expand on just what that emotion is like, not just leading up to a season opener, which is always, you know, brings with it some added excitement, but this first time at Soldier Field that there's at least going to be some fire supporter there is after that entire year where you didn't have it.

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, I think it's also all together that feeling. Everyone is just happy that the season starts again. We are now -- we didn't have any like league game since November 9. That's a long time. That's a long time not playing competitive sports, competitive football. So we are just excited about that.

And then obviously we all remember a year ago when we had -- when we prepared for this home opener and we felt the whole excitement and the city and the club. I know that there would have been a lot of people coming to that opening game, so we were all like really excited to that and we obviously couldn't have it.

Now we know, okay, there's going to be some fans there and we are just excited to have them there. There's going to be real fan noise and real people there supporting us, pushing us, so we are just excited about that. We know it's not going to be full because of the restrictions but we are just happy we can start the season again and play games which counts and have our fans there, friends and families there.

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