

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Raphael Wicky

Press Conference



RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, right now we are staying the way we are. No replacement.

Q. And why is that?

RAPHAEL WICKY: There is no specific reason. Right now we are with the staff we have. We have Ludovic Taillandier who is the second team coach who whenever he is ready to come with us; he was with us in preseason, but he is waiting for being fully vaccinated and we have a close relationship as well with him and with the second team then, so he's obviously up to helping us, as well, if we need him. But otherwise, we have enough people on the staff right now.

Q. I know Victor Bezerra and Jackson Ragan are with you right now. How are they looking and how are they fitting in with the team?

RAPHAEL WICKY: That's correct. Yeah. Well, Victor was here the first day today. He trained with us the first day. So I cannot give you a judgment or anything after one training. Obviously I have seen a lot of his goals. I know that he is a very clean finisher. He knows where the goalie scores a lot and has a good shot. Has a good eye also for the last pass but that's something that he obviously from the videos -- but I'm happy to have him here now and hopefully over the next weeks, he will get into a good training rhythm because he was also two weeks off now.

And Jackson is here since I think Monday. So he trained with us already three or four times. He's there. He's a good passer, calm and good with the ball and has a good presence, but even here I will give him some time. He was also off for quite a bit and he didn't train with the team for quite a few weeks. So I just have to give them time to get back into full team training.

But they are looking good, at least in Jackson I have seen four or five times now and he's looking good. Victor, like I said, I cannot give you an update now or judgment about a player after one training. But I'm happy that they are here.

Q. Obviously a bitterly disappointing loss last time against Montréal, given you out-performed them I thought the entire match. Curious how you made sure the squad kept that right mentality and focus and motivation after a tough loss like that, especially with

Q. Thanks for making some time for us this afternoon. We do appreciate it. Hope all is well with you. Is there any update on Kenneth Kronholm and Stanislav? I know Ivanov is not due back until next month but wondering how these two guys are doing on their rehab right now.

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, Stani is doing well. He's progressing slowly. I think he's on time. I saw him a little bit on the field doing some little things, but it's obviously still quite a bit away.

And Kenny just needed another little break a few days, his knee had a little reaction on training on the field. So we give him a little bit of a break and, yeah, day-by-day, you have to see how his knee always reacts. Right now he's not in full team training.

Q. Are you anticipating Kronholm playing this season?

RAPHAEL WICKY: I mean Kenny not even training right now. So I cannot give you an answer to that. I think he hasn't trained with the team since the incident happened last August, I think, I'm not sure if it was end of July or beginning of August.

So, look, I'm going to be happy when he's back in full team training and then we have to see how he is, and then -- then we'll reassess. But right now, it's not a question for me right now.

Q. That's the same knee he injured last year; is that correct?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yes, that's correct.

Q. And is there any kind of an update on a search for another assistant coach for you or are you going to proceed with just you and Frank and the rest of the guys?



added difficulty of some of the players leaving for international duty and being separated from the guys?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, so first, we obviously gave them a few days off after the Montréal game. I think we all obviously knew that there is a three-week break, so we gave them a few days off. I think it was important to have a few days off and being with family or friends or just not thinking about football much.

We also obviously knew that in this break, this break for us comes in a good moment. So we then said we are going to use this break to train hard with the guys who are here, to reflect, to reflect about the time since I have been coaching this team, and that's what we are doing.

I think the guys who are here train hard, train well, and prepare well for the next game, and that's what we are doing, preparing for that very, very intensive period which will come from the Columbus game where we have 27 games left till the end of the season, which going to be a lot of games in a short amount of time.

The reality is, as well, we are right now missing two guys who are in Europe for green card appointments, plus Calvo, Gastón and Frankie are not there, so those are five important players who are not training with the team right now. And then after the Montréal game we had the first week a few guys who need a little bit of a break because of a few knocks and a few little things.

So yeah, with the guys we have, we are working hard, preparing them, and we also for the first time since COVID hit, we were able to have academy players training with us because a lot of them are now also vaccinated. So we took advantage of that to reintegrate some of those guys giving them the feeling of training with the first team, obviously also for us to have a bigger number to play 11-11 in training. So we have done these things.

But right now, we are missing quite a few prayers, but that's just how it is. If the other guys were here, we are playing and working hard.

Q. Frankie will probably be out the longest, and given how far the Polish team advances, even more. He's been a key person in your attack this season. Can you speak to how much of a miss he'll be for you guys over the next few weeks?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, you're right, Frankie is an important player for us. Gastón will also be gone because he is probably going to do the Copa America after the qualifying, so he will also be gone for quite a few games, those two players.

Calvo I expect to be after the game tonight, so he will be back with us and the European guys, I hope they will be back, as well, by the end of the week so they can train next week for the Columbus game.

But to answer your question, of course, of course we miss Frankie. Frankie is an important player, and on the other hand, we didn't have Frankie against Montréal and we still created a good amount of chances, good chances, good moments, we were quite dominant, we had a good performance besides no scoring and not wing that game without him. I always think if a player is not there, it's an opportunity for another player to step in and that's how we have to see it.

I'm proud and happy for Frankie and for Gastón that I can be part of such big tournaments. I think that's always very, very nice for the players to live something like that and it's good for the players being with international teams, and it opens a spot for another player where another player has to step in and perform, and that's how we are taking this situation. There's no other way for me to deal with that.

Q. I couple weeks ago we talked to Ignacio during a teleconference and he brought up missing his mother and being away from home affected him a little bit. What do you guys as a team do as a team to help some of the younger players to get acclimated and feel more comfortable when they are so far away from home and missing family and they can't really see them right now?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, obviously, look, we cannot replace their family. I have been through that when I was young and left Switzerland for Germany. It's closer, but still I was gone and I missed my family and friends, as well.

As a player, those family situations you have to go through on your own and you have obviously these days you have FaceTime and Skype and all of that, which we didn't have. So that's for him to be in touch with them, it's very important what we can do and what we did from day one and what the club does a really good job is obviously being there for the players. Really helping them when they are coming knew here to integrate into the city and to help them get settled down with apartments and all the little things which are next to the football field.

Then obviously we have a lot of Spanish-speaking players in the team, as well. So it's important that those guys also, not only the Spanish-speaking, but the team obviously have a team chemistry and hang out together a little bit, which was very, very tough last year with COVID because you can't really hang out with other people, with other

players, or even making friends in a city.

So it doesn't surprise me, and it was the same last year, I can feel with the guys. But we are trying to be there for the players. We have a lot of people working for the club to integrate them, to help them, to make life easier. But with the actual emotional, let's call it emotional pain you have, yeah, we can just be there. Yeah, we can talk to them, but you've got to deal with that and obviously use FaceTime and Skype to talk to your family. That's the toughest part for a young player when he leaves his country going abroad and I can feel for Nacho.

But I have to say, on the field, he's back now on the field training with us and he trains really well. He started preseason before his injury really, really well and was actually training and playing really well.

So when he's on the field, I don't think it affects him. It's just as a football error as an athlete in general, you often have a lot of time after training and between trainings, and if then you cannot have your family and friends there, that sometimes hurts a lot, but yeah.

Q. On a COVID note with the city reopening and music festivals returning, how are you reminding the team to be safe even though most of the team is vaccinated?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Yeah, we are reminding them. We are telling them, yeah, we are vaccinated but we have to be very, very careful. It's summer; it's warm; the city is reopening; you are all young; you all want a life; you have a life, but you have to just be careful when you go out in public. Obviously we cannot control them. We are not forbidding them. There are still rules to follow and we are reminding them those rules and also reminding them if you get the virus, because we can still get it, it has a different impact to your career than if just some random other 20-year-old gets it, and, yeah, you are going to miss games, you are going to miss trainings. You're not going to be allowed to play.

We just try to remind them and tell them, guys, be careful. Be careful when you go out of your apartment and when you go in public. I think that's something we do multiple times a week. We have to tell them but obviously it's then about -- it's up to them, as well to be disciplined and to take these things still serious. So far, I think we have done a good job of that.

Q. We are going to be talking to Fabian Herbers in a second. What has it meant to you and the team to have him back and available?

RAPHAEL WICKY: A lot. Fabi is an important player for

us. Fabi gives you something different. We have missed Fabi. We have missed all the injured players. Like again, we have had a lot of injuries. And this is not looking for excuses. I'm not a guy who looks for excuses honestly. I'm responsible for this team. I'm responsible for the results, and I take that.

But having six key guys or very important guys injured hurt us a lot, and the injuries were like six, eight weeks, minimum, up to four months from Ivanov, and those guys hurt us.

So not having Fabi was a player who we missed because Fabi gives you so much energy on the field and so much verticality and he makes runs behind. You really know what you get from Fabi, and I'm happy that he's back. I'm happy that most of the guys are back and will help the team and make this team more competitive.

Q. You said that there are two players in Europe with green card appointments. Who are those two players?

RAPHAEL WICKY: I don't think I can give names right now apparently. Those are two European players from our roster who are in Europe for green cards.

Q. And second, it's been pretty well publicized and reported that the team is looking to build a new fancy state-of-the-art training facility. How much input has the technical staff and maybe even some of the players had in designing this facility which could be a real important game-changer for the franchise?

RAPHAEL WICKY: Well, honestly there is a group of people working on that who are responsible on that, and I think that's how it should be. Obviously I was asked a few things and I gave my opinion on a few things. I think Gilworth (ph) is probably involved very, very much with that. But the technical staff in the beginning, we were asked a few things obviously about football stuff and field things, we gave our input.

But other than that there is a group of people with experts for every field working on that facility, and I mean, look, we are just as excited as you guys -- we are probably more excited than you guys. But this is something amazing what will be built here for Chicago Fire. This is huge for a club. This is huge for the future of the club, for the players, for the academy, for the club to attract players.

To have such a facility will have a big, big impact on this club, I'm 100 percent sure of that. A training facility is your home away from home. That's where you spend, as a coach and as a coaching staff, so much time. Even as a player, if you have all these, how do you call it, all these



like possibilities to use in a training facility, you will spend much more time there and you actually enjoy going to work even more because you have just a perfect facility.

And we are all very, very excited that this will happen and I think again, we are very, very lucky and fortunate to have an owner like Joe Mansueto who is willing to put so much into this club and who cares so much about this club and the future of this club.

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