

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Frank Klopas

Press Conference

Q. What are the emotions around the end of the season? Is there a sense of relief that a long, difficult season is over and that you guys can get to the business of rebuilding this thing, or is there a sense of just being sad and wistfulness, that another season of soccer is coming to an end?

FRANK KLOPAS: I mean, for me, I think it's never a good feeling when the season ends, especially when obviously you put so much into it and there's nothing more to play for. You set goals in the beginning and to fall short of that, obviously it's never a good feeling in the end.

So yeah, I think there's a part where you look at it and you say everything is coming to the end, and you know, there's going to be a lot of free time left without soccer, so that's never easy on one hand.

On the other hand, again I think about all the players on the team and the guys that have been together, some of them now for two years, that any way you look at it, this group will never be the same again going forward.

So there's emotions towards that, and you know, I've been here every day, and I've seen the effort and the work that's been put forth from the players since the beginning, and so there's emotions towards that, knowing that the season's coming to an end, not reaching our goals, but also knowing that there's players and some of the guys will go separate ways. That's always kind of a sad feeling, also, thinking about that.

But in the end, I think that the sport unites us and brings people together from around the world, and like I said, I think for most of us, that maybe our playing careers and our ability to work together will come to an end but the friendships we build will last a lifetime, and I've told the guys that they will be part of the Fire family forever. But yeah, there's a lot of different emotions, obviously.

Q. Curious how everybody is doing from an injury standpoint heading into this final game.

FRANK KLOPAS: Yeah, look, at this point you're not going to get everyone feeling 100 percent. Everyone is dealing with little things here and there. But in the end of the day, I think that every day, for me at least, the training has been sharp with the guys. Mentality has been really good. I think that's the most important thing.

Yeah, I think there's bruises and bumps, coming off a long season and come Sunday, we'll be ready to go.

Q. I guess similar to Brian's question, what is the main takeaway for the Chicago Fire's 2021 season, and what needs to be done in the off-season to kind of get the club back to what you experienced as a player, for example?

FRANK KLOPAS: I think right now I'm still focusing on the next game. I think that's the most important thing and I think that there has to be a reflection part where all of us have to take a hard look and evaluate and obviously make decisions obviously on players that need to be made, and there's going to be some tough conversations there and some tough decisions.

And then it's about getting it right. But I think the most important thing for me is also looking at it and taking a whole part. You can't just take -- think about how we ended the four or five games in the end where I felt that the guys, the attitude and the mentality has been great. You know, finishing that last game at home with the energy and putting a good performance, I think that's important.

But you have to evaluate from start to end, and you can't let emotions be a part of it. And I never do that. I think as a coach, not as a fan, and you have to make those decisions and evaluate the whole season and evaluate those players and make those tough decisions about moving forward. And then really saying, you know, the additions that you make, and those players, who are they, what kind of -- who do we want to be, what kind of team do we want to put on the field and what's the identity and who are the guys that are going to bring it here and they are going to represent the Fire and this badge the right way.

Those are the tough conversations you have to have, and make the right decisions. Make the right decisions on the coach who is going to come in here and make the right

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decisions on players.

I think you don't want to be again in the same situation, you know, I feel next year. I think this club is heading in the right direction. It's a big club in a big market, and we need to be next year in a position where we're competing for something and now we're competing for something, we're competing for championships.

Q. What has stood out to you about Gabriel Slonina the way he's carried himself both on and off the field, coming in at such a young age and making such a big contribution to the club right away?

FRANK KLOPAS: Yeah, it's been amazing. He's a very mature young man. He's 17 but he's mature beyond his years, I would say. That's been very impressive to me. I have no doubt about his quality. That's never been a doubt. You see him in training every day, and you make saves, and you have to look again because the things that he does, sometimes you kind of shake your head and then he does the stuff almost every day.

But just his maturity level, the way he carries himself, his work ethic, he's got a good head on his shoulders and a good support system. The young man, the future is so bright for him but he has to understand that he has to continue and work and stuff like that and now he's come in a situation where there really isn't much pressure and it's been great to give him the games that he needs and to give him the confidence.

But it's going to be a whole different role for him next year if he's competing and he's the No. 1 guy going into it. The expectations will be very high. But I kind of feel that he's very mature and he can handle that kind of pressure. For a young man, for me, it's something that's really stood out for him because in the position that he plays, you get one opportunity. If you get it wrong at times, everyone looks at you. When you're a player in the field, you might get ten wrong, and then the next one you put the ball in the back of the net or you make a great play and everyone is clapping. So his ability to handle his emotions in that kind of pressure has been really impressive, and the future is really bright for him.

Q. You've been with this club in some capacity for a long time and in a coaching capacity this season. Interested in your perspective as you approach the end of the season this weekend. What are some of the things that you've seen throughout this season that have given you hope for the club's future moving forward, and on the flip side, what are some things that you think are necessary to fix in order for this club to succeed long term?

FRANK KLOPAS: Look, like I said, I think in the end of the season, you have to really reflect. I mean, I reflect daily and after every game, but I think there has to be a hard look back and evaluate everything.

I mean, just in my mind, just thinking of it, this could be the same case; I'm sure every team that doesn't make the playoffs, they can look back, and I can tell you there were many games I thought we played well enough to get results. I never felt that there were games where we totally got out-played and stuff like that. So that's the one thing. That's the one thing.

I think the way we finished the season in a positive way, and I mean, for me, that's another thing, which is a positive. Some of the younger players that have stepped up is also a positive.

Looking forward, when I look at the team, how can we be, at both times on the field, defend better as a team and obviously be more dangerous in the final third. That's the one thing. You know, is it guys stepping up and performing and finishing their chances better, having more of a killer mentality? Does now some changes need to be made; the personnel that does come in, how do they impact the team and how do they make a difference in the final third.

So for me, there's exciting things when I look at the season. Obviously there have been some good moments, good moments with some of the younger players going forward, but at the end of the day when you don't make the playoffs, there's disappointment. We didn't reach our goal. So in the end of it, you have to look at everything as a whole and we need to all improve in all aspects.

So you know that's the one thing. I'm a little bit all over the map a little bit but I think there's got to be a hard reflection in the end, and look, how do we improve the team defensively, how do we improve the team in the final third, and then you know, take a hard look at everything. How do we improve everything, everything else around us as a club; how do we maintain high standards all around, and that's the thing.

The only thing I can tell you is that we have a great owner. We have a great owner. This team in the past, you know, when you compare where the club was with other teams, we were here. Now the gap is a lot smaller, but a little piece has to get better, but we have an owner that's very supportive, has done everything that's possible for us to be successful on the field and he's going to continue to do that. We just have to get all those decisions that we make right going forward now.

Q. I know in addition to your duties with the Fire this season, you've been going through the U.S. soccer pro coaching course. What has that been like and what have you learned in that process and has that made you rethink the way you've done things in the past, the way you go about things?

FRANK KLOPAS: Yeah, for sure, when you get older, you think back, and I say, well, I wish I could have done back then -- five years ago, I would have done things differently.

The course, for me, it's always about trying to improve, improve and get better. The course, when they first offered the pro course in 2015, I was going to take it but I wasn't working as a coach. I had just left Montréal and I was back in Chicago. So I wasn't able to do it back then because you needed to be coaching.

So last year they sent me again an invitation, and again, as a coach, as a person, you're always looking to improve. You can never stop. The game is moving forward, there's new trends into the game, and I just felt that I wanted to do that. I wanted to get the highest license in the country that they offered.

So the course has been great. I think the ability to connect with other colleagues, it's a very small group of coaches, it hasn't been easy, obviously in difficult situations with COVID and stuff like that. And thank God with technology and zoom calls and stuff like that.

But it's been really great. I have great mentor from Holland, so it's been great, for him coming here, watching training sessions, spending time. That part has been really excellent.

The best part about it I think is just spending time with different colleagues and speaking to them, and getting insight how they have dealt with different situations, and let's not forget, we started with a certain group of guys in a tough season, some guys, they are no longer coaches and they have been fired. Seeing how they have dealt with those emotions, I think those are all great experiences that you can learn from others.

So it's been great for me, and always in my career, I've always looked to improve, even when I wasn't able to do this pro course. My ability to travel overseas and visit friends who are coaching in different countries and spend time with different coaches and watch different games, I never stop. I love the game, and every opportunity I get to look to improve, you know, to have an opportunity and an option to improve, I take it.

Q. Just wondering, what qualities do you think the

next head coach of this team should have?

FRANK KLOPAS: That's a tough one. I think I need a lot more -- I think we have the right people, the sporting directors, they are looking at some talented people. You know, I have my own views, but I'll just keep it my own views right now, you know. But from the names I've heard, I'm actually excited. You know, I'm excited from all of them, but obviously, I'm not going to give anything away right now. But I think there's some good candidates. I like the fact that they are looking with people I believe that have experience and they know the league, and I think that's the one thing I would say that's important, and I think it's important I would say to me also.

I will leave that up to them. I will keep that info in a different time.

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