

# Chicago Fire Media Conference

Wednesday, January 19, 2022  
Chicago, Illinois, USA



## Ezra Hendrickson Press Conference

**Q. As we get started in this press conference, first of all, how are you? How are things going from the team? I know it's very early, and also, how much of a challenge is it to go through training camp knowing that the roster is still incomplete?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, we have ongoing conversations with prospective players and are their prospective clubs and these are situations that we hope to get across the line as quickly as possible, as soon as possible.

So we are being patient, but we are starting with the players that we have in camp right now and it's been a first good couple days, first couple days, so we are looking forward to adding some pieces certainly.

**Q. Obviously you faced the Fire a few times last year and you prepared to face this Fire team. What differences do you think we're going to see in the way the Fire played last season versus what they are going to do under you?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, I think you're going to see a more progressive possession style. I like to have the ball. I like the team to have the ball and when we don't have it, we try to get it back as quickly as possible.

One of the things we've been trying to beat into the players and kind of emphasize with them is possession is king. When we don't have the ball we deny space and when we have it we try to create space. So we want to be the team that have more possession over the ball but not just possession to just keep the ball but possession looking to penetrate, looking to get forward, what I call progressive progression because at the end of the day you win games by scoring goals, so we are looking to create that end product which is crosses and goals.

**Q. Back in your introductory news conference a few months ago, you touched on growing pains that the team will experience kind of starting off with you. But**

**now that you've had a chance to work with the squad a little bit in person, I know it's only been a few days, what's your assessment of the team so far and what kind of strengths and weaknesses are present that need to be addressed?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: We have a lot of good players but they are very young, inexperienced players. So when I talk about growing pains, it's just, you know how it is with young players, sometimes very talented but the curve is up and down. The consistency is not there.

So that's one thing that we are going to have to address is because we have such a young team, we are going to have that energy, we are going to have that drive that we want but the inconsistency is something that we're going to have to get ahold of and make sure that we're seeing a progressive improvement from week-to-week from game-to-game.

**Q. So you, the club invested draft capital and so far a key free agent signing into the back line Rafael Czichos, and the drafting of four defenders, so does that mean that you and Georg are now aiming to focus your free agent strategy and your transfer strategy towards players that can help in more of an attacking role and are there any signings of that calibre close to being completed?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, certainly, because we are a team that we want to have the ball and yes, we want to be a good defensive team.

But like you said, we've stacked up on a lot of defenders and our focus is to now complement that with some attacking players with attacking quality. I think that's, like I said in the pipeline, and hopefully we cross that line with these players that we are looking at shortly.

**Q. Asking about Jhon Jader Duran, what have you seen from him early, and what can be expected from him this season, because I know a lot of people have their eyes on him.**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, he's a very good player, young, energetic player. Very dynamic. I think he's going to score some goals for us this year. We are going to look for him to, you know, put the ball in the back of the net and

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he's very versatile.

So he could possibly play on the wing but he's someone that we are going to look to be many where on the front three either way we play, attacking-wise, you know, maybe at the nine, or sometimes a seven, maybe even at 11. But that versatility that he brings and that dynamic that he brings, the ability to take guys on 1v1 and that finishing ability is something that we are going to look to see from him this year.

**Q. Is there a possibility that on February 26 against Inter that he could be in your opening 11?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Certainly. What we've stressed to these guys is there is no set 11 right now, and how we do -- how you do from now till February 26 will determine whether or not you're in the first 11, it's an open slate, obviously we have some players who, you know, that we are bringing in, like Czichos and guys like that, and starting keeper and some of the positions are unknown. But for a lot of the positions, it's up for grabs and it's going to be based solely on performance. This team is going to be chosen on February 26 based on how guys do from now till then, the week leading up to that game at least.

**Q. Obviously again it's very early on but hows that the dynamic been with the staff, you, Junior, Frank, C.J. and Adin?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: It's been very good. We work collectively. It's a collaborated effort every session that we plan so it's good. I've worked with Junior before he was my assistant in Seattle and we were both assistants with the Galaxy in 2018, so we have that rapport and I know C.J. and Adin and Frank.

So it's been good. I like the staff and I like the way we've started out and how the session has been. They have been very, very helpful as far as making sure that my philosophy and how I want the game to be played transferred to the players during the session. So it's been a pleasure so far.

**Q. Any thought would might be the captain of this squad and is that person currently with you or is that a person that's still maybe to be signed?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: That's up for discussion right now. That's something that we'll decide maybe a week leading up to the first game but it's open right now, there's no set captain at this point. I like to look and see how guys are interacting with each other and who really steps up as the leader for the team, you know, on and off the field.

So that's something that we're going to be patient about naming, but we have some leaders on this team that, you know, whoever it is that we do choose, I think will be fine.

**Q. You mentioned having conversations with some prospective signings. Are a lot of these signings coming from international, other lesion, other teams or is there any talk with MLS clubs to bring in a couple players?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, it's a combination because you know, we want to get the best players that it best fit and whether that be from within the league or from overseas, we are combing the whole globe. We have some targets and we'll see how that goes.

**Q. I wonder if the club itself is taking more precautions about Omicron COVID-19, if everyone in the team is vaccinated, coming to this time of year where there's a lot of contagious everywhere, is there anything that the club itself is doing over there in Orlando?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, yeah, we're making sure, we've said to the players that how we deal with the COVID, yes, the MLS has league-wise protocols and stuff like that that each team has to follow.

But if we can go beyond that and be more strict and more vigilant on how we deal with this thing, it could become a competitive advantage, you know. We want to be one of the teams that have the least amount of COVID situations going into a game because if you are losing players, especially key players for games due to this thing it becomes a competitive disadvantage for you.

We are doing our best. All the players are vaccinated and making sure we're testing and we're going beyond the baseline MLS protocols to make sure this thing doesn't affect us too much. Like you said, it's very contagious and it's just something that we have to deal with. The world has changed because of this thing.

And it has not changed as far as the dynamics for the team. It's very difficult if you're losing guys based on COVID outbreak or whatever within the team. So we are doing our best to make sure that it doesn't affect us too much.

**Q. Wanted to talk about Rafael Czichos, an experienced defender, he's won a lot where he's been. Was he someone that you've had your eyes on for a while and when did you become aware of the possibility of signing him? And also, I'm just curious as to how he's fit in with the team how he's fit in with**

**the team so far?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Sebastian Pelzer and Georg Heitz, they are the ones along with Eddie Rock who finds these guys. But once they found him and I was able to look at him, look at some games, look at some of his highlights and stuff, I wanted to speak to the player because it's one thing, you have a player that's technically good, he looks like he can fit into your system tactically, but you want to peek to that player.

So I was able to have a long conversation with him via the phone and we talked, and he really blew me away as far as his leadership qualities and talking to him, I knew that, okay, this is a guy, yes, I like what I saw, tactically, technically. But I think after speaking to him, I knew that he was a guy that will be good for us and he'll be a leader on this team and so we're just happy that he's decided to join our team.

**Q. What's the status of the talks between you guys and Philadelphia over Kacper Przybylko?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, that's, you know, Przybylko is contracted to the Union, the Philadelphia Union at this point. He's a Philadelphia Union player. Beyond that I can't really speak much on that situation.

But like I said we are constantly looking for players that we think can come into the team and help us be successful. But as far as going into details of anything like that, I really can't speak about a player that belongs to another club at this point.

**Q. And then just to follow up on one of my esteemed counterparts questions, would you prefer that the Fire bring in some MLS experience that knows the league, that doesn't have to learn some of its quirks and oddities on the fly?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: My preference is that we bring in the best player available that fits our system and how we want to play. Now, whether that's from in the league or overseas, it doesn't matter to us.

We just want the best fit for what we need. We have targets in mind. We know what it is that we need, what roles, what holes we need to fill on this team, and we're working tirelessly to fill those positions. As far as where they come from, like I said, it's just the best fit. Just the best fit that we obviously can afford, we will bring in.

**Q. So the club just hired Evan Woodfield in a new role on the corporate side of things but you've also hired C.J. Brown to your staff and you retained Frank Klopas**

**as well, so three men who are former players from days when this club was more successful on the pitch. Is that a design strategy that you and Georg, and maybe even Joe, have spoke between being important moving forward? And if so, can you speak -- sort of speak to the importance of bringing in people who understand the history of the club and what this club is all about?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, yes, you know, it's good to have former players being involved with the organization, be it on the coaching staff or be it on the corporate level in the front office. It's good, and like you said, these guys were a part of the club when it was very successful, and it's good to have people who knows about the quest and knows what it means to wear that bath.

So having these guys on board, it's going to help, and we hope to continue to, you know, to bring in more former players, people who knows what the organization is about, knows what being a Chicago Fire is about to help us get this club back to where it was in the League.

So very, very important that we continue to look for guys who bleeds for the team, so to speak.

**Q. Of being a part of a million training sessions as a player and assistant coach for all these years, did it feel any different walking out in Orlando for the first one in the group as the head man in charge in did you reflect on that at all yet?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Yeah, for me it was just a lot of excitement. I was really excited to get started because I was hired back in November.

And so now there's a two-month wait and now we've started and walking on to that pitch was excitement and just being able to teach these guys and talk to them about what this session was going to be about and seeing them, going out and performing and executing. During the session, for me, it was just excitement and I'm happy to be a part of this organization, be with this team, help these young players develop and help this organization become successful.

**Q. I saw at least according to Twitter that you donated a sizable amount to the Fire Food Drive that's run by fans and supporters. Why did you do that, and just what does it mean for you to build a relationship with supporters of this club?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, I'm a person that came from very humble beginnings and I remember growing up in the Caribbean there were times where I came up from school

and maybe didn't have food or anything to healthy.

So things like this are close to my heart so any time I can help a family eat or help, or an organization to help other families, I'm all for that, and I think as a club, as an organization, being involved in the community and helping fans or people who may not even be fans but just helping someone who might not have the ability to provide food on their table, I think that's very awesome and that's something that, like I said, is very dear to my heart and something that I'll always want to help out ask, different charities.

It doesn't have to be just food drives. It can be a lot of organizations, organizations that the club is involved with and connected with. I'll be sure throughout the year to be involved in some things and help out. You know, going into the inner cities, speaking to people, whatever it takes to just make sure that this club is seen in this community as a big part of the community, and that our fans appreciate what it is that we're trying to do with our community, with our fans. That's something that we are going to be doing with this organization, continue to go doing.

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