

# Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Chicago, Illinois, USA



## Ezra Hendrickson Press Conference

**Q. Thanks for making some time for us today. Just wondering, first of all, what's the status of Rafael Czichos? And, also, I know that Carlos Terán had a bit of a knock. How is he doing as well?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: First, Rafa, he is on his way here. There was a holdup with his visa issues, the whole COVID situation has kind of delayed embassy. So it took him a while to get his visa, a little longer than we expected. But he will be here in a couple of hours actually. He'll be in camp. Carlos, yes, he had a bit of a knock in off season. We've been slowly getting him back to training. The past couple days he's been able to do some passing and stuff like that, but not in full contact yet. Hopefully by the start of Austin, when we get to Austin he'll be up fully.

**Q. As a followup to Brian's question on Czichos, how difficult is it to not have a player who figures to be pretty important for you guys available to build familiarity and learn your system?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, it's not easy, but it's circumstances beyond our control. You know, we certainly would have liked to have him here from the start of the preseason, but it is what it is. We have to deal with the situation and make the most of it. But the thing is that he's here now. His visa is cleared, and like I said, he'll be in camp in a couple hours. So we're happy and excited to have him, and he's been waiting to come. So both parties are happy and time to just move on.

**Q. Just wanted to get your thoughts on how the team performed in your eyes against Minnesota this weekend, and just a followup on that. You obviously played a lot of young guys, especially in the second half, but interested in your perception on how Charlie Ostrem played. You started him with what seemed to be more of your first team in the first half. So is he someone that you may consider playing a part on the first team this season?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, Charlie has been doing well

in training, and that's all we can ask of players. You know, whether you're a rookie, whether you're just recently drafted or you're home grown, whatever, we just ask that you perform in training, and based on how you perform in training you'll get the minutes in games. And he's done well enough to earn some minutes, and we thought he did well. The second game, you know, with the better competition, it was a little bit much for him, but his performance throughout training has been fine, and that's why he was on the pitch, and he's someone that we're going to continue to evaluate and see how he does.

**Q. You've had a bit of time now with the squad. How do you find the atmosphere amongst the players and how are you looking to build a winning mentality amongst the group?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Yeah, one of the things that we stress with this team is unity and camaraderie and that off the field togetherness is something that plays a big part once you step on the field, because if you're my teammate and I can't trust you off field and I have no sort of relationship with you off the field, it becomes difficult to just manufacture that once we step on the pitch. So just watching the guys get along with each other and just seeing that bit of unity amongst the team has been very, very revealing to us as a staff. And that's something that we like to see, because sometimes, you know, I can say I've been on teams where we had a lot of very talented, quality players but we just never got the job done because off the field we just weren't a team. So then when it came to play it was like 11 individuals out there. Whereas, I've been on teams with less talented players that have gone onto win trophies and stuff. So having that unity and having that togetherness is a big part of what we stress here, and we've seen a lot of that from the players, and I think that has helped us in the first couple games.

**Q. Hi. I wanted to know as the first game approaches and February begins, how confident, how ready are you in your thought process and what you have planned for the team to execute as slowly as we come to that first game of the season?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, it's a process. You know, it's a new style of play. It's a new philosophy that we're introducing to the players. They've been catching on pretty well, and I think it shows in our first couple games, you



know, just keeping both games at zero. But it's going to take some time. It's easier to destroy than it is to create. So I think defensively we've done well. Now we just have to get better when we have the ball, and that just goes to do with our spacing, our running of the ball, the tempo on the ball, how quickly we move the ball, speed of play. All that stuff needs improvement, but that's something that players as we continue to work, training after training, they'll get more used to and it'll become second nature to them. So it's a work in progress, but we like what we've seen so far, and we know that we need to continue to build, because goals wins games, and we need to be able to create goals and put ourselves in better opportunities to score.

**Q. And, individually, now that you're going through this role week after week, how beneficial, how much do you think of those teachers you've had in Columbus and Seattle, how much has that helped you throughout this process?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, yeah, it's been great for me. I was fortunate to learn my trade under guys like Sigi Schmid and Brian Schmetzer and Caleb Porter, guys who have won in this league, who knows what it takes to win and who knows how to put the team together and build a team. So I have that in my repertoire, so to speak. But at the end of the day I have my own individual style of play, how I want to play, and it's a combination. It's a mixture of all of that. So I have to be able now to put all that together and teach the players exactly how I want the game to be played, exactly how -- what my philosophy is all about and my style of play and what I need them to do. So it's great to have those kind of mentors, those kind of successful coaches that I've worked under, but now, you know, you're on your own, so you have to now find a way to get the players to buy in to what it is you're teaching them.

**Q. Just wondering, if you think back to planning for this first league of preseason camp in Orlando. How have these last couple of weeks gone compared to your expectations for it and what will you be looking to focus on specifically when you arrive in Austin?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: It's gone very well. We knew as a staff coming in that it's a lot of young, inexperienced players. So -- and when have you that, you have some inconsistencies. But for the most part, you know, the progress has been on the up swing, where we want it to be. You expect sometimes it will be up and down, and there are times when you see a little bit of that, but the majority of times we see improvement from a day-to-day basis. The key thing for us is that what we're trying to teach and how we're trying to play, the players love that and they've bought into it. So they're willing to do the work.

But we need to improve. Like I said, our ability to break lines and get forward into the front half and put ourselves in good scoring position has to improve. We're doing a very good job of when we lose, winning balls back and keeping teams from getting shots and so that's good. It's always good to be able to stop teams from scoring. But we know we have to on the other end be more creative and create more chances. So that's something we've been working on. But we're happy with the progress that's been made by the players so far.

**Q. Have you talked to Georg Heitz about potential reinforcements and what has been the nature of those conversations, and do you expect any players to come in soon and when?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Yeah. Well, as an organization we're always trying to do what we can to make this team better, to improve. And we know that there are some spots, some areas that we need to improve on. But when you're trying to get new players, it's a negotiation. And it's another party that you're negotiating with, and sometimes it's not as easy as you expect it to be. But we have identified some players that we're interested in, and so those talks are ongoing. But it's just a matter of can we get the other party to agree on our terms. And there's gotta be compromise. We understand that. But we don't want to be too desperate or look too anxious because then now the price of that player increases and now we've priced them out of the budget. So we don't want that to happen. So we're very patient but we know there are some spots that we've identified that we need to improve on. And those talks are on going with several players and hopefully the sooner the better because before you know it, February 26th will be here and we hope to get these players in before then so we can have going into the season a full squad of the players that we think we need.

**Q. How much of a challenge does that make to preparing for the season and going through training camp knowing that there could very well be a couple big please that aren't with the team right now, that will be there maybe sooner than later?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Yeah. Well, it's certainly challenging, but you always prepare for the worst. So the players that we have in camp right now we have to prepare with them as if we're going to start the season with them. And then whatever additions we make, then that becomes a plus for us. So right now, like I said, the players are buying into everything that we're teaching them. And we've been working really hard, trying to implement our style of play and teaching them how we want to play, the way the Chicago Fire are going to play this season and moving forward. So regardless of who's on the pitch,

there's a set where we're playing, and yeah, some guys are going to have more quality than others, but every player, regardless of if he's a superstar DP or if he's a kid just out of college, has a role to play and that role will be clearly identified and they'll know what it is that they have to do on the pitch. And as a staff that's all we can do is prepare with the guys that we have in camp right now, and I think that's been going well for us. But we're certainly trying to add a few pieces to the team.

**Q. Ezra, on a similar front then, should you guys not get the signings you want by the season opener, how reasonable or realistic is it to expect some of the home grown players especially the guys who have been with the team now year and a half, two years, to kind of step in and fill in and do those jobs in those positions that you guys are looking to improve?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, they are the players that we have, and they are here for a reason, because we have identified them as players that we think have the potential or is ready to be on a first team contract. So if they are called upon, we expect them to go out and do the job. Now, it may not be to the extent of a DP player, but I've seen teams in this league with one, sometimes no DP gone onto do really well. So it's not farfetched. It's just a matter of us as coaches, yes, the job becomes a little difficult because maybe you don't have that special quality, that guy that could -- a game changer, so to speak, but as a unit, and that's why I mentioned earlier about being a unified team, how important that is. I think as a team we can really, you know, do what it takes to get some points. But we are definitely trying to get some reinforcements. Definitely.

**Q. Ezra, in your introductory press conference, you spoke of the importance of leadership within your club. I'm wondering if you have had any thoughts or discussions, internally or externally, on who's going to be the captain for your team? Is that something that you'll decide or is that something that the team, that the players themselves will decide, and what stage are you at with that?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: I think that's something that myself, along with the staff, will decide. But as of now, no, we haven't pinpointed anyone yet. That's a process that we, you know, going to have to just wait and see who steps up to be that leader, on the field and off. We need someone that we can rely on to be an extension to the coaching staff. So that's something that we haven't really discussed, but at some point we will. And we will establish that. But that will be something that's not left to the players. It will be up to myself with the coaching staff.

**Q. Just kind of wanted to follow up on that. You've been involved in winning environments as both a player and as a coach. What are the intangible qualities you see in those winning locker rooms are and do you see elements of those in the roster you've got at hand? And is that also kind of something that you're looking at to bring in as part of your recruitment?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Yeah. I think for the teams that I've played on and I've been a part of the coaching staff, it goes beyond just 11 players that start. And so what we are trying to do is make sure that we're, you know, 14, 15 guys deep, that if we have to replace a guy or if we have a 3 and 8, so we play Saturday, Wednesday, Saturday, that we have guys who are capable of coming in in that mid-week game and it's not a big dropoff. So that's something that we're trying to do. It's not that the players we have in right now couldn't start for us, but it's good to have players that, you know, that lifts the bar, so to speak. I don't know if that's the correct way to say that. But players with that special quality, that you see some of these teams around the league have, that within a second could change the outcome of a game. Those are the type of players that we're trying to bring in right now. However, the players that are in camp right now, they are going to have to play games because we can't run out the same 10, 11 guys every game. So what I've noticed is teams that have won has been able to have a deep bench, so to speak, you know, at least four, five, sometimes six guys who when they do step on the field, the dropoff is not massive. So that continuity is still there with the team and the way we play.

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