

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Ezra Hendrickson Press Conference



Q. Do you have an idea where you're going to use him? Is he going to be a 10, a winger, free roll? What are your early plans for using him?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, the plan right now is to use him as a ten but we know that he's very flexible and he can play mainly all across the front three. We play in a 4-2-3-1 system, and I think anywhere across the three, either as a wing or the 10, he can play. But his versatility is really going to help us going forward.

Q. As a coach, you've got to be salivating to have a guy of that calibre at your disposal. How are you feeling right now?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: I'm feeling great. I spoke with him last Saturday and just within first two to three minutes, you could tell how much this guy wanted to be here and how, you know, how much him being here is going to help us, and just the excitement that you can hear in his voice and wanting to really come here and really help this city and this club.

That was very important to us beyond what we know he can do on the pitch because we've watched him perform at a very high level and very good teams. To hear his enthusiasm about joining the Fire was very good for me. I'm excited to have him.

Q. How does signing a player like Shaqiri with his sort of skill-set and overall significance, what kind of an impact does that have for the club on and off pitch? And as a coach, how do you ensure that his status doesn't go to his head and you keep him as one of the guys?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, I mean, he's just a great player, and I think when you sign a player like this for an organization like the Chicago Fire, on the field, it's going to show and I think off the field, also, fans, just the excitement that's going to create for us having a player of this quality, that calibre type of player is going to really lift the fans and

it's going to create some excitement off pitch.

Definitely going to help on the pitch, and we'll see that once he join us because he's that good of a player. I think off the pitch, it's going to help the organization.

What was your second question?

Q. As a coach, how do you make sure that his status doesn't go to his head?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, I kind of spoke about that a little bit earlier about just speaking to him and just seeing how humble he is and how he talks about being a team player and coming here, not for vacation but to win a championship. Only the things that when I spoke with him that he was saying, I think it's going to be easy for him to fit in.

We have a young team that he's going to have to be patient with some of the guys, but I think after speaking to him, I can see that he's a guy that's going to come here and do whatever it takes to help us, whether it's defending, because we talked about, you know, everyone defending as a team and we all attacking as a team, and he has buy-in to that, so I think that's going to help all of us.

Q. I was hoping you could give background into how this deal got done, how long Shaqiri was on the radar, how it came together, what the factors were and what you had to deal with to get this over the line?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, we have a very good technical staff. Those guys really did their homework, and Georg had a little bit of history with Czichos, so that kind of helped it.

But we knew what positions we needed filled and the type of players that would fit into the system of play that I want to play, my philosophy and style of play.

So he was definitely a target. We didn't know if we could get it done but he was on a contract with a team, and he's a good player. But those guys did the groundwork and they got it over the line. We were all hoping that it was something that we could see happen but we're never sure. We're never for sure until maybe about ten days or so ago where we thought, okay, maybe this is a possibility.



But I have to give all the credit to the guys, Georg and Sebastian and Eddie and those guys in the technical department that really made sure that this happened.

Q. Wondering what plan is for Xherdan to join the team, what the timing of that is like. Do you have any insight into that?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, he's excited to come ASAP and he want to have him here as quickly as possible. However, there are, you know, visa process that he has to go through, and hopefully that takes -- that happens sooner than later, because you know, the season is upon us and it will start in a few weeks here.

So if we get him within the next week or so, we'd be very, very happy but it's all about the visa now. Everything is set and we're just waiting for that process to happen and he'll be here.

Q. I know the visa is a complicated matter but do you personally think he'll be suited up on February 26th?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Yes, I think so, and I definitely hope so. I think if we can get everyone in from the beginning of the season, that would be very good for us because we need to start off on a good foot so to speak.

So having everyone in camp and being able to start with a full arsenal, I think would be very good for us to get season started. But that's something that's beyond our control and hopefully he can work some magic and he can get here, like I said, sooner rather than later.

Q. For the media, this is start of the Ezra era. How much of a statement of intent is this signing for the new era and do we expect to see any more bodies in the door anytime soon?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: We are always trying to improve this team and this organization, starting with the owner. We are all about being successful and bringing success to the city, so we are doing whatever it takes to ensure that that happens.

But there are rules that we have to abide by, so we will do our best to continue to add players when it's possible. But you know, the end goal is to always be as successful as we can be, and we have an owner that I think is going to do whatever it takes to make sure that happens. He's a Chicagoan and he wants to see success in this city. We'll do whatever we can to make sure that happens.

Q. Switching gears just for a moment, how is Carlos

Terán doing? And in the friendly against Minnesota, you played Pineda in the midfield. Is that where you see him moving forward this season, or was there another reason to play him in the midfield?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, Terán was out for the first -- most of the first part of preseason with an ankle injury, but he's back now in training, so we didn't have him in the first part in Orlando.

But as far as Pineda, one of the things that any coach loves about a player is versatility, and he's a player that we know we can play in the midfield and he also can play in the back in the central defense.

We'll use him accordingly, but I think as a starter going forward we would more see him as a midfielder we are Terán coming in and being a center back, along with Rafa in the back, in the middle of the back. But his ability to play both positions is going to help us a long way as the season goes along.

Q. We had a few big signings the last couple days: Shaqiri obviously with the Fire; Insigne with Toronto; Thiago Almada with Atlanta; the New York City retained most of their major players, Revolution still looking strong. My question is: How confident you are with the players you have right now among the competition in the Eastern Conference?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, we're very confident and we are always going to step on pitch as a confident team. We do have a couple spots that we're trying to fill as we are now but we think that we have enough to be formidable in the Eastern Conference.

We do realize that there are some teams that are very strong and have gotten stronger but we think that we also have improved from our roster last year. We are not going to any game fearing any opponent. That confidence is top down. It's going to start from us as a staff all the way down to every player.

We understand that we have to now go out and show it, but I think we are very confident that we can go out and play with the big boys, so to speak.

Q. Questions about a couple other players. I bet you're finally happy to have Rafa Czichos with you in camp and wonder how he's looked so far, and can you tell us what happened with Kendall Burks, and how did you wrestle him away from trying to go to Nottingham Forest?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, Rafa has been great. He is

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a leader. He's shown that off and on the field so far with us and on the field, he's a great passer, he's a great defender, and he's someone that we wanted to have come into this organization, and so we're happy to have him and we think he's going to be very good for us.

As far as Kendall, I spoke with Kendall and told him we didn't just draft him for the sake of drafting someone. We saw potential in him and we think that he can be a very successful defender in this league.

And I told him, myself and C.J. Brown who is going to be in charge with that defensive unit, two players who have played that position, who have played in the back in this league and were very successful.

So, you know, we have an idea of what it takes to be successful as defenders in this league and we'll be very, very influential in making sure that he reaches potential. I think that, and just wanting to be close to home; the kid just wanted to play in front of his folks.

Again, the technical department, guys like Eddie and Georg and those guys did a lot to make sure that it was possible and that he saw the benefits of coming back to the U.S. and playing with us rather than staying overseas. So we're happy to have him. He's looking great, also, in training.

Q. Wondering if you can go into a little bit more detail about your conversation with Shaqiri, and how did you sell him on the vision for this club in the future for him to come?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Like I said, a lot of the groundwork was done by the technical department, Sebastian and Georg and those guys. Why I wanted to speak with him, because I always want to speak with a player that we're bringing in that's a big name or that's going to be a very influential player; same I did with Rafa before he came.

Just wanting to make sure the player knows what's expected of him, because sometimes you can have players coming in not really knowing their roles and what's expected of them and then it becomes an issue. I've been on teams before where maybe their roles were not clearly defined or players were expecting certain things and it didn't happen.

But I just wanted to get a feel, also, and talk to him about how I like to play, how I see the game and how I see him helping the team and just getting a feel for him and letting him know that because we are such a young team, he'll be expected to be a leader on and off the field.

So mainly just getting a feel for him and letting him know what's going to be expected of him. He was very good. We have a lot of the same ideas about how the game is to be played and it was a really, really good conversation. Like I said, within two to three minutes, I knew, okay, this guy is for real and he really wants to be here, which very important when you bring in a big name superstar like that.

Q. You sort of touched on this in the last answer but you've been around for the designated player era and seen it evolve and seen what works and what doesn't. Could you maybe go a little bit further into what about Shaqiri gives that you confidence to embrace everything that you're expecting from him off and on the field?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, he's just a quality soccer player. He can change games. He's one of the type of players, if you look at teams who have been successful recently and win championships. There's always that special player, maybe Castellanos last year, a couple years ago, Zelerayán with us in Columbus, back to -- in Atlanta with those guys with Josef Martinez and those guys like that.

I think you need a player that can really be a game changer, who by the snap of the finger could change the game for you. Maybe it's an 89th minute goal or maybe it's a special, spectacular free kick, what-have-you. I think that's something he can bring to this team.

And also, and we went out and got a striker in Przybylko, he needs someone to get him the ball and we think Shaqiri going to be very useful in unlocking defenses and being able to get him the ball so he can finish it. We wanted to make sure that, yes, we have our No. 9 but we need players around him that could get him the ball.

And I think that's something that Shaqiri is going to bring to the team and if you look at his set pieces, be it corners or free kicks from wide, with a guy like Przybylko, we are expecting a lot of goals on those set pieces. So he's going to bring a lot to the team.

Q. Regarding roles and those conversations with players, I just want to know, how the process is going with Jhon Durán, he's well known as a center, he's young, a lot of expectations on him from his country and he's coming in and you guys have Przybylko now which is a proven goal scorer in MLS. Checking out the roster and everything that you explain in your philosophy, it looks like you try to get him play as a second striker, maybe wider, how does conversation goes with him because he's not played in other

position other than center. How is he feeling with those ideas of yours?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: He was brought in to be a number nine, to play a center forward, but as I said before, we are always trying to make the team better. So when the opportunity came to get Przybylko, that's something we wanted to do. We knew with Jhon being young and sometimes young players, they are very inconsistent. You know, it's an up-and-down thing.

But to have someone like Przybylko alongside him I think would be great for the kid. I think the kid would learn a lot from someone like that who as you said is a proven goal-scorer in the league. But being versatile is something that as a coach and as a staff that we like. So whether it be playing Jhon as a withdrawn forward, playing him off the wing, wherever he can fit in, he has the talent to be on the pitch.

As of now, he's obviously behind Przybylko as far as pecking order goes but he's still 18 and he has a long ways to go and I think he's going to learn a lot from Kacper. So we're looking forward to them being, you know, a deadly combo. Whenever he has to spell Przybylko, he goes in and hopefully he continues to do what we've seen him do so far, even though he's young, but also we don't have a big drop-off as far as the talent level and the scoring ability on the pitch when he does get his opportunities.

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