

# Chicago Fire Media Conference

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## Gabriel Slonina

Press Conference

**Q. Thank you for joining us. You know the situation: You're 17, you have so much around you, you got called up to the national team this off-season and there's speculation about your future and all of that. How do you keep yourself in the right frame of mind? How do you stay focused with all the other stuff going on, you know, around you and the fact that, as I said, you're still 17?**

GABRIEL SLONINA: Yeah, I mean, I think first and foremost, I think age is just a number. I think anything is accomplishable and it all depends about the work you put in every single day. I think just having that mind set of how can I do better today and improve from the person I was yesterday is just what keeps me constantly focused and trying to improve every single day. So I think going into the season, I'm just going to worry about finishing this preseason strong and make sure I'm feeling good on the season and everything to have a successful season.

**Q. How different is it this year, this season knowing you're going in as No. 1 versus last year you were a member of the team but you didn't have the pressure of being starting goalkeeper?**

GABRIEL SLONINA: I still have a lot to prove. I don't like to think of me as the number one starter now. I still have to give my all in training every single day and putting on performances and training as well as possible to continue to prove that I can have that No. 1 spot.

So I think that, you know, the level of training and the mind set I go into every training will be the same as it was last season because again it's that constant wanting to improve and everything, and so you know, going into this season will be the same as it was last season and continue to give my all every single day and continue to work my hardest.

**Q. On a similar note, you have a new jersey number this year as you enter into as No. 1. What does it mean to you that the club has indicated to you that you are the starting goalkeeper for the team? What does that**

**mean to you and how do you take that and build on last season?**

GABRIEL SLONINA: Yeah, I mean, I love my No. 32. I love the No. 1. Again, it's about going to the first game, proving that I can wear that No. 1 because it's -- for me, it's a big deal. It's a big honor to wear the No. 1 for Chicago Fire. It's about going out and proving that I deserve it and now just putting on the performances and helping the team be as successful as possible for the season because I really think we can accomplish some big things this year.

**Q. Should we call you "Gaga"?**

GABRIEL SLONINA: Yeah, for sure. No problem.

**Q. We just learned about Jedi Robinson wanting to be Jedi. Wanted to make sure. I wanted to ask, it's a two-parter, the national team experience, talk about that, and how you found the balance between being the young kid and staying humble but also representing yourself and having the confidence that I'm sure is part of your game and two, I wanted to ask about your decision to sign with the Fire. If I remember correctly, you had European options when you were looking to sign a pro deal; how do you feel about that decision the way things have gone?**

GABRIEL SLONINA: Yeah, the national team experience was, as would you expect, was absolutely incredible. Seeing how the guys act on and even off the field was something I took into account every single day and try to learn from everyone, the performance staff, the players, and just giving my all every single day to prove that I can be there and perform with them as well because, you know, those guys playing at the top levels and Europe is something that is incredible and seeing how they play and learning from them every single day was truly an incredible experience. So I think, you know, I use it to the best of my ability to continue to improve my game here and there. Yeah, it was incredibly, incredibly an amazing experience and I'm super grateful for that.

And then for the second part, I think just like proving myself and doing the same things I would do here over there was something that was pretty easy for me. You know, sticking with the right nutrition and making sure that I'm getting in the gym after trainings and everything was just something

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that was a part of my routine now, so there's nothing out of the ordinary that I needed to do to prove that I'm -- that I'm trying to do extra or anything like that. It was similar to what I would have done here, I did there, so yeah, it was a great experience.

**Q. What was the biggest thing you took away from playing in the second half of last season and getting that experience heading into 2022?**

GABRIEL SLONINA: Obviously game experience is most important for a player's development so I think getting those games in at the end of the season was big for me. It built a lot of my confidence and made sure I was getting those games, as well, because in training -- game experience is much more difficult, as well, decision-making and having those games was a big part of my development and I'm going to continue to build off of that.

**Q. With the new coaching staff and new additions, Czichos and Przybylko joining the club, how do you feel about the upcoming season?**

GABRIEL SLONINA: I'm feeling great about the season. I love the energy that the coaching staff and the guys who bring -- the right attitude and mentality is there in training every single day. I'm super excited about the guys we brought in and the coaching staff. I think that this season is going to be very, very successful and I think that we are going to achieve some big things this year.

**Q. As we've alluded to already, you've achieved so much at a young age; what are your ambitions for this season and beyond?**

GABRIEL SLONINA: Yeah, I mean, just want to keep building off of the things that I've done last year. So I'm going to continue to put in the work every single day. But at the end of the year, I want to win the MLS Cup and I want to do big things with this club this year and I want to make sure we are giving our all on and off the field because ultimately that's what's going to push us to be the most successful this year.

**Q. How difficult will it be not having your brother in the locker room this year? In general terms, who do you rank of the top American goalies and do you agree with those three?**

GABRIEL SLONINA: So you know, not having my brother in the locker room this year will -- it's going to be, I feel like I'll take it the same way as I take it that last year because I just want to continue to give my all every single day. Who were the three goalkeepers?

**Q. Melia, Howard, Crepeau?**

GABRIEL SLONINA: They are all amazing. They are all done amazing things in their career. All of those guys are guys that I look up to and make sure that I can one day be up there with one of those names.

**Q. Czichos, way he scores goals, what is your opinion -- how do you feel with Frank Kloppas, the last six games coaching last year and this year is right there helping the team?**

GABRIEL SLONINA: I think Czichos is a great player and I know he's going to come in with the right attitude and mentality to help this team be successful. I think he's an amazing player and has done amazing things in his career. Super excited for him to be joining the team.

I think Frank being here with us is incredible. He's a Chicago Fire legend. Having his passion on and off the field is something that's going to push us towards success this year as well.

**Q. I've got to ask, your name was linked to some European transfers over the off-season. Do you have a timeline for when you would like to make that jump? And also, similar, do you have a timeline or have you considered whether you want to commit to the Polish national team or the U.S. national team and when would you want to make that decision?**

GABRIEL SLONINA: I think I can answer both those questions in -- in one. I think right now, the main focus is about this preseason and finishing preseason long. I'm not the type of player to look too much into the future. I want to be here, present now because obviously that's what's most important but we never know what the future holds so I think I'm just going to continue to give my all every single day in training, making sure that I'm helping guys on and off the field to, again, have the most successful season that we can for this club.

**Q. How do you keep the distractions out of your mind? How do you stay focused? What are some things that you do just to stay firmly focused and present on what you have to accomplish right now?**

GABRIEL SLONINA: I mean, I think it's about all the routines I've established. I think meditation is a big part of constantly staying in that focused mind set. It's a daily thing that I do in the morning to make sure that I'm present, you know, feeling everything around me and making sure that I can give my all for every single shot, every single pass, because, you know, obviously that focus and everything is what will excel you to have that best athletic

performance.

So I think that's a big part of it.

And just all the routines I've established to make sure I'm keeping my body fit, healthy and doing everything to the best of my ability. So yeah, I think the routine you establish for yourself is how you can stay in the moment and just continue to work and give your all because it will keep you hummable and it will keep your ego -- it will keep your ego down low and it's something that's going to -- I'm not going to think I'm too big of a player and I'm not going to think I'm too little of a player. I'm going to have that perfect balance of just giving my all every single day.

**Q. You've been working with Adin Brown across a couple different coaching staffs. What's your relationship like with him and what's he taught you?**

GABRIEL SLONINA: I think working with Adin is amazing. It's almost like a father/son type. We work on and off the field every single day, we watch every video, working on the field and seeing what works for me and what doesn't. I learn from him every single day and he's learning from me and we have a very good relationship on and off the field it.

Puts me in a spot to have the best performance I can when that game day comes.

**Q. What have the coaches said they want you to work on from a national team perspective?**

GABRIEL SLONINA: Obviously it's a different play style than club level, so just having that speed and aware tons adapt to those players, seeing how fast they are coming in, knowing what to do with the ball before receiving it, everything is like half a second quicker. You know you're getting guys from the best parts of the world coming in and playing, so I think being a little bit calmer on the ball, that explosiveness, those things will come, just feeling that comfortableness and getting those repetitions in.

I think I can improve on everything, my shot-stopping ability, my decision-making, my calmness on the ball. I've talked with the coaching staff from there about specific things I want to work on but all in all it's about improving everything.

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