

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Ezra Hendrickson

Press Conference



Q. Kind of a long-winded question, but you were an assistant with the Columbus Crew in 2020 when the Crew won MLS Cup but you didn't win a single road game that year but you were like 9-1 that year at home. Especially with the home opener coming up at Soldier Field, how have you stressed the importance of getting the maximum amount of points at home?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Okay, so basically what we talked about before the season even started is making Soldier Field a fortress and making sure that we pick up maximum points at home. That is something (indiscernible) to this game with that attitude that this is our home and no one is going to come here and take points from us. We want to make sure that we solidify our home field and make that something, like I said, our fortress, and then pick up points as we can on the road.

That Columbus team back in 2020, some of those games were in a bubble, so that's kind of distorted when you talk about not winning on the road or whatever have you.

But it's very important that you pick up points at home and maximize what you can because you never know what can happen on the road. This league there's a lot of parity, so anything can happen.

Q. Wondering how training has gone this week and if there are any injury updates on Carlos Terán.

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Yeah, so Terán is still not available, but training has gone well so far this week.

I think the guys are excited for the home opener, and there just may be some anxiety, some anxiousness, just waiting for Saturday to come. We're looking forward to going out and performing in front of our fans, and that's something that, like I said, it's our home and we want to put on a good show for them.

Q. Last week it looked like there was still a little bit of lack of familiarity between Shaqiri and his new

teammates as he gets acclimated to the team. How has training been so far and how much does he need to adjust his game to his teammates' and vice versa?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, that was the first time he played an actual game with us, so there were some moments where maybe he was hoping we didn't find him because guys are still trying to get used to playing with him and trying to learn some of the things that he likes, some of the places that he shows up on the pitch. But a lot of focus this week has been finding him because he's a big part of what we do, and he's going to be a big part of what we do going forward.

We've got to make sure that when we have the ball we know where he's at at all times, and if we can get the ball to him then we do that because him on the ball is something that we're going to need a lot. He has to take this team on his shoulder and get us from our back half into the front half into the final third. He's a big part of what we do, so we need to make sure that we're on the same page with him.

But it'll take some time, but it's getting better, and the guys know that they have to look for him when we do have the ball.

Q. What are you expecting from this Orlando side on Saturday?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, they're a very aggressive team with and without the ball, at home or away. We have to expect them to come in here and try to press us, even when we're on the road, and we've just got to be a little better at moving the ball quickly.

I thought against Miami whenever we moved the ball quickly we were able to find the spaces and was able to move the ball forward and create some chances, especially in the first half.

So we have to come out with that same kind of mentality, that progressive possession, where we have to try to get the ball into the front half, into their half of the field because we expect them to come out very aggressively pressing us and trying to get turnovers in our half.

Getting the ball forward as quickly as possible has been

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something that we've been kind of stressing the past couple days.

Q. We're getting ready to speak with Kacper here in a few, and I'm wondering your thoughts on his adjustment to the team so far, what you're seeing from him in training and what we can expect from him once he hits the ground running and gets a few goals to his name.

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Yeah, well, I think we know that Kacper is a very talented player. He's a goal scorer. He's proven that. That's the reason why we have him here. He hasn't been able to score as yet, but I think, again, he's learning his teammates. His teammates are learning him, knowing his runs.

Especially our wingers, they have to get the ball into the box when we have it wide, and I think we can do a little bit more of that, and eventually he'll get that first one because it is sometimes with strikers, it just takes that first one and then the floodgates open.

It's just a matter of him remaining confident, remaining patient, and putting the first one away, and I think we'll see the Kacper that we all know.

Q. Right now a bunch of U.S. goalkeepers in the pool, in the national team pool are hurt, and some people are speculating that maybe, just maybe, Gaga would get the call to start at Azteca in a few weeks. I know that you're not making this call, but would you trust Gaga to start in a game of that magnitude, and why or why not?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Of course. I think the kid has shown -- I think I read somewhere he's had like five or six shutouts in the games that he's played and he hasn't had that many that he started. He's shown that he knows how to keep the ball out of the back of the net.

Even on Saturday night, he wasn't called upon much, but whenever he was called upon, he was there and he answered the call.

He's a young player, but this kid has talent, and I think going into Azteca or wherever, if you have a goalkeeper with that kind of pedigree, with that kind of ability, it works wonders for a coach and for a team. I would definitely be fine with playing him in such a game with such magnitude.

Q. You had said before the Miami game that you'll start thinking about sort of the accomplishment of becoming a head coach once you've kind of finally had that match. Now that we're a few days past Miami, has

it sunk in to you?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Yeah. Well, it certainly has. You know, it's a fun job, guys. I like to go out there and teach these guys how I want to play, my style of play, myself with the coaches and coaching staff, and then to go out and see that on display on a Saturday night, it brings joy to me.

For me on Saturday, even though we didn't get a win and we were a little disappointed because we thought we could have put that game away in the first half, just to see the players grasp and buying into what it is that we've been teaching them the past six weeks, that brought joy to me, and so I'm a very happy guy, and I just want to continue to push these guys, push them to achieve what I know that they can.

We have a lot of potential on this team, and this team could be really, really good. I know no one is expecting us to do much, but within the group, we are confident that if we play as a team and we stick to our game plan and we implement our style of play in games, we'll be fine.

As a coach right now it's a happy time for me. We get to come home and play our first home game to open the home game stretch here, but it's a wonderful opportunity for me, and I'm just enjoying every minute of it and just loving teaching the guys.

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