

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Ezra Hendrickson

Press Conference



Q. Just wondering that's the health update on Carlos Tehran and Jhon Durán and the status of the players who will be returning from international duty. Will all of them be available for Saturday?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Yes, all of the players will be available for Saturday. Carlos Terán has been training with us for over a week now.

As far as being game ready, we're not sure yet about that. Jhon Durán probably have another week, he'll probably start training with us next week and be ready for the Orlando game, and then the players that were away for national team duty, they are all fine and they are getting back today.

So we'll have to evaluate them tomorrow and see how they are feeling and after the flights and stuff as far as their availability for Saturday. I.

Q. I know you wanted this break so guys could heal and rest. How is everything looking more generally toward's Saturday's game?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Last week we gave them a few days off to get everybody healed up and rest a little bit because we had been going pretty hard since the beginning of the season.

This week, we started focusing more on Dallas and the things that they like to do and how we're going to all plan, as far as how we are going to attack them and how we are going to defend against them. It's been a good week, a good couple of days so far in training. The boys are in tune.

We needed that break, though, because as I said we were getting banged up a little bit. It came at a good time for us. But hopefully everybody gets back safe tonight from their national teams and spend a couple days getting those guys back into the swing of things with the club and so we'll be ready on Saturday.

Q. This match comes with interesting scheduling in that you're coming out of a FIFA international window, and it was a big game for the USA players, and two the players scored from FC Dallas. Seeing that, does that help in preparations knowing what you're going up against?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, these are players that we know from before the past week in this national team break. So nothing -- no surprises there. I think you're speaking of Ferreira and Arriola, but we know these players really well. We know what they bring to the team, to their team. So we'll be ready for them as far as our prep for Dallas and including those two guys.

As far as whether or not they play this weekend or how much they play, that's up to their coach but we are going to prepare as if they are going to play 90 minutes on Saturday.

Q. You talked a little about the players who were away on national team duty in the last week. There were reports that Gaga Slonina was not released for the US U-20 national team during the international break, while Chris Brady and Brian Gutiérrez were. Given that the CONCACAF U-20 Championship and Olympic qualifying is during the summer and concurrent with four MLS regular season games, is that a competition you would consider making Gaga available for, and is that something you've discussed?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, that's something I think we'll deal with when it gets close to that. It will be more of a club-wide decision when a decision is made far as allowing Gaga to go. He is No. 1, and it's a long period of time to go for qualifications and actual tournament itself.

So it's something that, you know, right now we just want to focus on week-to-week MLS play and making sure that he stays healthy for us for those games.

As far as the U-20 World Cup, that's something that I think we'll cross that bridge once we get there.

Q. Ferreira and Arriola aside, how do you assess Dallas as a team, obviously off to a solid start Western conference themselves. What are your thoughts so far



heading into the match-up?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, they're very good team. I think the results they have gotten have shown that in the last game, getting four goals against Portland just reiterates how potent they can be on their attack. They are a very fluid, flowing team.

But you know, we focus on our -- on what we have to do and how they are going to combat against us. We are very aware of what they have going forward, how they like to defend, the type of players that they have.

But all focus is really on us and what we have to do in order to be successful, making sure that we maximize our strengths and limit our weaknesses and not expose ourselves too much and be better going forward, and when we do get forward, do better in the box. I think the last two games, we have played we have improved in that aspect, not just creating chances, but finishing those chances but we are just looking forward to continuing that.

Q. Looking big picture, your start to the season here, unbeaten through four games, only one goal, what do you think is the next step for this team and what are the things that you want to work on and improve on to try to build on this good start that you guys have had here?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, I think we are very organized defensively, so we are not getting broken down as much. But teas, they watch film and they study it, so eventually teams are going to learn how to break us down more easily. So we have to make sure that we continue to get better defensively.

Going forward on the attack, I think our ability to get from mid third into the final third has to improve, and that calls for guys running off the ball. We have a player in Shaq who is really good at finding that final pass.

But I think a lot of times we don't get him the ball, or when we do get him the ball we are not running off the ball effectively so we can get to the end of his passes because he's very good at making the final pass. That's something that we as a team have to improve on and that includes getting our outside backs forward a little more.

I played outside back as a player and that's one thing I like to do was to get forward. I would like to see Miguel and Boki or Espinoza or Bornstein, whoever is in there, get a little more forward into the attack to help the options that Shaq has available once we do get him the ball in the front half.

Q. Just wanted to know, I know it's very early, but just talk about the momentum that you have with the good start for not only the psych of the team and you as a new coach, but also the fan base.

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, I think it's great for us. As a staff what we talked about before preseason and during preseason is how important it was for us because of, you know, the most recent years and the lack of success that we've had here at the club to get off to a good start.

And when there's a new regime, a new staff like that, that helps the players' confidence and confidence as a staff and also it helps buy-in.

Like I said, it's a new regime and it's a new staff, so being able to get off to a good start -- and that started back in preseason. We weren't giving up goals back then either but we needed to score more goals.

I think once MLS started and we continued to play well defensively, knowing that we will get better on the attack. Because there were some moments even in the Miami game where we had really, really good attacking moments but we just didn't finish those chances, I think that helped give the team as a whole the confidence.

When the fans see that, they get buy-in and we have really, really good fans, but they want to see good football and they want to see us win. They don't want to see teams lose. What I've heard a lot from the fans is that a lot of these games, even the 0-0 ties would have ended in a defeat for us in past years.

So that's something -- that's a mentality that we have changed not only with the staff and the players but also with the fans because now the fans are expecting us to go out and win games, and that's good. That's a good quality to have where your fans are behind you and they are expecting wins rather than losses. That's good momentum for us going forward.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Wyatt Omsberg, what you've seen out of him this year and what he's been able to contribute to the defense's success.

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, Wyatt, he's still fairly young, inexperienced, but he's coming along really, really well. I think he started the season really, really well for us. He's doing the job.

You know, he replaced Carlos due to injury but he stepped up, and you will never know that he wasn't the original star. So that's good for us to see. It makes us that much deeper and as long as he keeps playing well, he'll get his

minutes.

Because one of the things we tell the players in preseason is you're going to play here based on performance. There's no favoritism and nothing is set in stone. Yeah, we have guys that we brought in that's going to play, but if they are not performing and if the quality is not where we need it to be, we need to have guys on the bench that can step in.

So it's good to see Wyatt step in like that, and it's his job to lose now if I'm being honest.

Q. I know it's four games in, and you took over the team I believe in November, but four games in, how well do you know this team and how much discovery is there still on your part that you have to do before you feel like you really have a grasp on what you have?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, it's going to take a while. One of the things I mentioned when I took the job is that there will be growing pains. Fortunately for us, we haven't really run into any of those growing pains as yet.

But there's still a lot that we have to do. There's still a lot of things that we have to be better at as a team and as a staff and as a coach. There's some things that I like to see done better and that's why we keep working day-in and day-out, every week.

Yes, we are happy for the good start but we are not satisfied. We know that's a lot better soccer that we can play. We feel like we should have won at least one more game, especially that Miami game.

So we are definitely not satisfied with the way things are going. We are happy but we know that there's some weaknesses that we have to improve on because we know what it takes to be playing come October, November, and right now, we still have a lot more to do to get to that point.

So yes, we are happy but not satisfied.

Q. I know he's not your player until May 1, but how much are you tracking Jairo Torres right now, and what you're seeing of him right now with Atlas?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: We just want him to stay healthy is our main concern. We play differently than Atlas does. So we have been watching his games. We like the way he's performing. But when he get here, we are going to ask some different things of him and things we know he can do.

May 1 can't come here quick enough. There's always that

possibility of injury that we keep in the back of our mind, but we are very happy that he'll be joining us, and it's just going to make us that much better. He's a player that we sought off and we were able to get and we just can't wait until May 1 when he gets here.

Q. Fire II started playing last weekend. Their home opener is, I believe, Sunday. How much are you going to be tracking them, and what's the importance of that for the club and also the players who will be getting some competitive minutes for that team?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, it's definitely, definitely very important. I once worked as a second team head coach, so I know the importance of those guys, those players. I remember back in Seattle with guys like Nouhou and guys like that, Delem, and how important it is to get those guys developed so you can move them on to the first team.

So Fire II is a very important aspect of what we do here. It's to bridge that gap for players that we see potential but maybe they are very young, very inexperienced, and give them games to help them improve and develop and that's very important.

And also for guys from the first team who are coming off injuries who have not played, maybe like a Carlos, who has not played in a couple months or month and a half or what-have-you, and he can go out and play and gain some match fitness and stuff like that.

Now we have to be careful that we don't put too many of our first team players on a Sunday morning to play because we don't want to risk injuries. But players who need the time, who needs game minutes will go and play with the second team because it's very important for us as far as making sure that players, let's say, 12 to 20, keeps up as far as game time and game quality minutes as guys 1 to 11, 1 to 12, what have you. Very important; we'll be watching every home game. We watch the games on the road. We keep tabs and talk with the coaches as far as how players attitude and mentality is when they travel and stuff like that.

We are going to keep a close eye on that team as far as development of those players.

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