

Chicago Fire Media Conference

Wednesday, April 13, 2022

Chicago, Illinois, USA

Greg Vanney

Press Conference



Q. Hey, Greg, it's good to talk to you again. I sort of wanted to take the temperature of the team after the game on Saturday and just how physical it was. We had a lot of guys cramping that you saw out there, and then mentally what that game has sort of done to your preparation this weekend. Do you have to manage that at all coming up against Chicago?

GREG VANNEY: Hello, first and foremost, to everybody joining us. The weekend was, it was a great competition, as these derbies often are. Obviously these guys are very pleased with the three points.

We're still early in the season, so it's very much an assessment of performance and cleaning up a few things that we felt like we didn't do at the level we wanted to do. It's recognizing and continuing to reinforce the things that we liked. Obviously when you can do that inside of getting three points, especially in a match like this week with the emotion that it had this past week, that that's a really positive thing.

And that's one of the things we've been talking about is getting three points and still having conversations about how to improve and how to keep stepping forward as a group is important.

So that's what this week has been about, and obviously looking forward to a very good opponent ahead of us in Chicago, who's been really stingy on the defensive side and obviously has the caliber of players who can hurt you with the opportunities on the other side.

So it's a little bit of looking back, but today's that day where we start to transition to look forward and start our preparations towards our next opponent. On top of that, next week is just a busy week for us as Open Cup starts. So a lot of things we're trying to prepare within our group, but really the emphasis right now is on Chicago.

Q. Did everyone make it out of the game unscathed? I know there are a bunch of guys, like we said,

cramping. Seeing that was the case, are you worried, or is anybody questionable for this weekend?

GREG VANNEY: Everybody made it out all right. There's, like normal season, just minor things we manage from guy to guy, but in general everybody made it out and everybody was in training today. So there's nobody that we're specifically concerned about.

Q. Just want to get your thoughts on Ezra, going back to those early Galaxy years. Any good stories you want to share with us? Are you surprised how he has his team playing so far?

GREG VANNEY: First and foremost, Ezra, wonderful human being. I imagine -- I haven't obviously been around him in the coaching environment, but I imagine he's a fantastic man manager, clear in his ideas. It's good to see him have early success and to get that group at least stabilized.

Obviously with Junior joining him from our club this past year, it's a coaching staff that I am rooting for. Not this weekend, but in general that I'm rooting for. I'm sure they'll get things moving, as they have.

In terms of playing, I used to love playing with Ezra. In our league he was one of the first real like guys who was a super attacking right back who would get forward, who was on the weak side -- because I was the left back, so I would just look a lot of times, and one of the things I enjoyed doing was hitting the ball across the field. So the amount of times I would hit the switch play from my side over to Ezra on the other side, who would be coming around Cobi, was -- I don't know, it was so many times that helped create attacks for us.

I loved playing with him. I loved just his energy and positivity, but also the way he loved to attack, which I think suited the way I played the game. So I thought we were a good pair even though we were on opposite sides.

I've been friends with Ezra and still talk with him all the time when we see each other and in passing. Again, wish him well. Not this weekend, but wish him well.

Q. Following up on that, I just wanted to get a sense of tactically what your guys' focus will be heading into

ASAP . . . when all is said, we're done.®
sports

this match.

GREG VANNEY: Just continuing to build on everything our principles in terms of our connectivity as a group. I feel like the last couple games we've been a little bit too far apart from each other and the opposition's been able to penetrate us too easily. I think those are things that we need to, again, get back together so that we're, again, a little more connected, our distances are better, and we're able to control the field a little bit better than I felt at times we were the last couple of games.

But continue to build off some of the things that we did and be able to assess the game to see how Chicago is going to come out and play against us, be able to assess that early on, and be able to adapt and impose ourselves on the game the way we would like to.

So those things don't change for us week to week. It's just a matter of what we feel like we need to turn the screws on a little bit more, what we need to clean up based off a previous performance or maybe a couple of performances as we assess and see what we like or what we feel maybe we're getting a little bit -- what's getting away from us and make sure we pull that back together.

That's been this week. It's nothing -- again, for us, it's we are what we are, and it's about choosing the right guys who fit together for the right moment and about executing on our principles and executing on our opportunities that we can create throughout the course of the game and protecting our goal. Those are the same every week.

Q. And being the possession focused and control focused team that you want to be in terms of style of play, do you feel like you're taking strides in the right direction every game, or have you guys kind of, I guess, strayed in some matches? Or for the most part, kind of continuing in the right direction?

GREG VANNEY: I think it's game to game, and I think it's situational. As always, in some ways, a struggle for a balance of power. Some teams want to have the ball. Some teams don't really want to have the ball. But at the same time, you've got to have the ball to score.

So when we play teams, like a team like LAFC this past week, they're good in their pressure, especially once they get organized. If we weren't great with the ball, that plays into their hands and their ability to recover things. But if you break their press, they're exposed. Then we had the tendency at times to want to rush attacks and not set up and be patient in the attacking half of the field.

The more transitions there are, then obviously that can go

either way. We were able to hurt them at times in the transition, but also times when we transition and lose the ball too quickly, it puts us back into a defensive posture.

Again, it's game to game. I would say to you in the first four games we had loads of possession, but in those last two games we scored first, and we scored pretty early, which then also forces the opposition to maybe adjust a little bit. Maybe our mindset adjusts, maybe again in some of these transition moments. Because the opposition is chasing the game, we feel like there's so much space to expose them, but then we rush and attack and give it back.

This is something we'd love to have the ball, and we'd like to control the game and we'd like to control where the game is played, and I think that's the case for everybody. But sometimes the game has context and you do some things better on one day or maybe you get leads and the game varies.

What's key for us is we're able to adapt inside of a game and be able to get results and control the game whether we don't have the ball or whether we do have the ball and that we're effective in creating chances and effective at preventing chances.

Outside of that, there are some very specific things we want that aren't for this call, but that's what we try to do in every single match.

Q. About Ezra, why do you think it took so long for him to get his first head coaching job? And just what was your personal reaction when the Fire were the team that finally snatched him up?

GREG VANNEY: I think, as it relates to first coaching job, I think the league has gone through kind of these trends. When teams have been added to the league and jobs have opened up, there's two things that happen. Either coaches tend to get recycled around into positions, or what I think has happened lately is a lot of new clubs have come in who have just gotten international coaches. They really haven't thought much about coaches that maybe haven't had a lot of coaching experience. They've gone and gotten international coaches.

I think this set a little bit more, younger guys, or guys who have been assistants -- I'm thinking of Ezra, I'm thinking of Paulo Nagamura, guys like that, Pat Noonan -- these guys have been given opportunities to step in where they've known the league, they've been around the league for a long, long time, have now been given the opportunity to lead the teams.

So I think that's been the same case for Ezra. A lot of

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

these jobs have opened up over time, and teams have just looked for guys with more experience or international coaches. But I love seeing that the guys who have been around this league and have put in their time, have been assistant coaches, have developed their ideas, now getting opportunities, and guess what, those guys are doing well. And Paulo's doing well as well.

So the guys are doing well because they understand what it takes to win in this league and they understand how to manage inside of the league.

So pleased for Ezra getting that opportunity. I was happy for him. When I heard he was going to get the job and I was happy for him, and obviously Junior, who is his assistant coach, was working with us at the time as our second team coach. Pretty quickly, I knew their relationship, and we knew we might be losing Junior. So when Junior decided to go and support Ezra in this, I was pleased.

These are two guys I like a lot, and I believe they have great knowledge of the game and great knowledge of the league. So I'm very happy for them.

Q. I just wanted to ask about Douglas Costa. You've had a new addition to the squad, and he's obviously had a wealth of experience, playing for Juventus and Bayern Munich. How is he adapting to the squad? Have you see other players learning off him and kind of his experience coming through?

GREG VANNEY: Yeah, for Douglas, he's an extremely talented player. I think any time any player, regardless of the level that they've played at and their qualities, it's adapting to our league.

One of the biggest adaptations for any player, and it's one that Douglas is managing a little bit, is there's more transitions in our league than you see in the top clubs and top leagues in the world. The games are much more under control, balls don't transition as much, things are a lot more controlled. Inside of MLS, turnovers can happen when they shouldn't, which puts the game into these moments a little bit more often than maybe he's used to.

So I think some of that is just him getting used to, again, that transition, reaction, connecting with the group, staying in it, all those kinds of things where he's probably sometimes scratching his head, how did we lose the ball just now? We don't want to do that, but it happens more time than he's used to happening.

Continuing to work on things, getting his fitness level high. He joined us late in preseason, so he was still in the

process of getting fit. Unfortunately, just a very minor setback after a couple games, but we were able to take a step back and build him up.

So he's now just working into match fitness again. Again, his quality is off the charts. What he's capable of doing is fun to watch in training, and it's going to be fun to watch as the season progresses. Again, it's just a little bit learning about his teammates and learning just the nuances of our league that maybe were a little different than where he's been in the past.

Q. Quickly as well, prior to coach, you were at Galaxy for seven seasons over two stints, one of them overlapping with a certain David Beckham. How much did you learn from him not only on the field, but kind of in terms of leadership, which has helped you in your position now?

GREG VANNEY: How much did I learn from David?

Q. Yeah.

GREG VANNEY: For me it was just a great opportunity to play with David at that time. Obviously he was our captain. I would say it was probably -- it was one of the more -- one of the least stable years that the Galaxy has had in its history, the year that I happened to play with David. So it was an interesting season in which we had two coaches during that year. We didn't have a great season.

So it was more of a season of challenge than I would say of stability and clarity, and that was challenging also for David. So for me it was just his professionalism, again, the way he managed and handled himself every single day, his capacity to stay pretty even but also stay focused on the things that were important inside of a season that was not easy for any of us.

Obviously he's always a professional, but also just hearing some of his experiences, stories, things like that. For me, again, first and foremost, it starts with the leadership by example and the work rate that he brought and the intensity and attention he brought every day to the training world and the match world. It was great to see.

Q. Javier so far has scored 5 of 8 of the team's goals so far. Do you find it a bit concerning that you guys are still really dependent on Javier to score goals and get these game-winning goals to put points on the board for your team?

GREG VANNEY: No, I think that's the way it goes. You look at the season that some of the top scorers in our league have had, guys that are true strikers, you look at

the seasons they put together, and they tend to score close to 50 percent or 40 percent of their team's goals, the guys who are true finishers and true strikers like Javy is. That's kind of about where it's at.

We need to support him more. We need to take more chances when we have the opportunities. Other guys have had opportunities to score and haven't been able to do so as consistently as we would like them to. So, yes, we have to build up the supporting cast on that, but the goals that Javy has scored, a lot of them are team goals. They've set him up in good positions to be the finisher that he's capable of being.

It's setting him up with the opportunity to make the runs like he made in Portland. He made three, four runs to get unmarked in the box, and we found him. These are striker goals, and they're happening inside the box. He's not having to create these worldies that would make me more concerned. If we were relying on Javy to have to beat three guys and pin something in the upper corner from 25 yards out, I would tell you I'm really concerned about things.

But these are team goals where he's scoring because of the work of the team and getting the ball in great spots and allowing him to make the moves that he's making, that's a positive thing for the team. To answer the question again, yes, more guys need to contribute to that so that we can have a little bit more balance in our scoring.

But I think he's at a clip that I think he would feel comfortable with, and I think that's fantastic.

Q. I have a question regarding Javier Hernandez. You was his coach. You know his talent, his leadership, and his commitment to football as the No. 1 scorer with the Mexican national team. I would like to know your opinion regarding the head coach Tata Martino about not to call him to the Mexican National Team. What do you think about this?

GREG VANNEY: I think these are decisions that are in the hands of the Federation and for Tata. He's got to choose his team and his lineup and who he wants to score. He's going to be accountable and responsible for the results, and ultimately those are his decisions.

What he has is an opportunity. We've seen that. He has a striker who's in form with us, and it's an opportunity, if he sees it as the right option, to bring him in and help him help the -- or bring Javy in and put him in a position to help the Mexican National Team. I know that's a desire and a passion for Javy. He would love to do it.

Javy's job is to keep putting goals in the back of the net and keep performing at a high level. It's the coach's job, the Federation, the supporting cast. They need to choose the teams that they feel are going to help them win because ultimately they're accountable for that.

I don't have an opinion because it's not my job that's on the line. My opinion is Javy is in great form and would love the opportunity, but who chooses the team and how it gets chosen is not for me to decide.

Q. Another Javy question. He's a pretty popular figure here in Chicago because of his successful history of course. I'm just curious from your perspective, everywhere he goes in the U.S., he's got fans everywhere. There's going to be a ton of people out there to see him in Chicago on Saturday. What is it just like watching him kind of like own that role?

GREG VANNEY: Javy, first and foremost, he's just a great human being. He's very passionate about what he does. He's an emotional guy, but he rides the wave of the game and his passion for the game. He's accepted for sure his responsibility on that side of things, in terms of representing his community, and he puts it out every single day.

At training and the games, you see that in the way he plays. He's not cutting corners. He is working tirelessly to perform and to be successful and to score goals, which is why he's doing what he's doing.

I think that's also why people love him. He shows his passion and, again, wears his emotions on his sleeve, which people love, and he's been hugely successful. He's successful because of the work he puts in and how smart he is about how he puts in his work in the game but also in the training environment.

Yeah, I'm happy for him. My job here is to support him and to provide him with everything he needs to be successful and to provide him with a team that can help him be successful because, again, as I said earlier, he's not a goal scorer who creates a lot of opportunities just on his own. He's a guy who's kind of a poacher, and his movement is extraordinary, but his movement is off of the actions of the team around him. And if the team is doing its stuff, then Javy is always going to be goal dangerous.

So that's my job to support him, but again, his fans love him because of what he does -- because of his emotion, his passion, and the way he works every single day.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports