

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Ezra Hendrickson

Press Conference



that we need to win our home games going forward and it's important come playoff time how we do in our home games.

We just had two good weeks of training after taking a few days after that first week to reset and regroup. So we are expecting a battle. We feel fully prepared for them. Looking forward to the game on Saturday.

Q. What's the latest on Shaq's injury?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: He's day-to-day right now. We are still trying to make a final evaluation on that but he didn't just slightly strain his hamstring. We'll know more in the next couple days as to how severe it is.

Q. And are there any other interventions?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, he's still nursing his ongoing injury but he's making progress in that. So again, that's another day-to-day stuff that we are trying to make sure we get him back fully fit before we put him back on the bench.

Q. Just wondering, over the last couple weeks, the progress of the team and some of the struggles?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, we are always trying to get better as a team, reinforcements, whether it be attacking or defending to where we are trying to get to. We just talked about what are the things we need to do to improve.

We are very close, the last four games that we've played we have showed that we can play with anyone in the League. I don't think there's a team out there that is looking forward to playing the Chicago Fire even though we are in, you know, basically last place right now.

But we know that we do need to make some improvements, just be patient with that and make sure we make the right decision at the right time and not rush anything. But it's an ongoing conversation as to what we can do to get better.

Q. What are some takeaways that you can apply this weekend?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, things have change, right. Just the simple fact that they have a different coach now, so we're not expecting they are going to come here and lay down for us. It's going to be a battle. They needs points just as we do but we are in the mindset now that we know

Q. How would you evaluate your performance coaching and what are some things you think you've done well and what do you think you can get better at?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, you know, being a first-year coach, it's not easy, lots of turnover, we let go of nine players in the off-season. We knew it would take awhile and that some patience would be needed. I'm still learning on the job even though I've been an assistant coach for a number of years. When you're making those final decision, things become a little bit different, more pressure.

All that being said, I think I've certainly handled it well. It's not easy, especially when you're not getting the job done, not so much tactically, but just the mistakes that's been made that as a head coach you're responsible for, ill-advised to the box or ill-advised to the red card in the first half. Things like that, I take responsibility for that because it's my job to make sure the guys stay disciplined and remain disciplined.

When we make mistakes that hurt the team, hopefully it comes down to me. I think on that aspect we have improved and we have been trying to improve but that's discipline, basically just leaving the ref alone and just playing the game, being more in control of that. Just finding ways to finish games is something that ultimately comes down to me.

Yes, the players have to execute but I think it's my job to make sure that the right players on the bench do the job, and so that's something that I think I need to improve on because it's a result-based business and you know, we need to find ways to win. As the head coach, you need to make sure that you have the right people in the right spots doing the right things at the right time to win games, and that's something that we haven't been doing, just winning two games the first 14.



But we have seen improvement, especially the last three or four games or so, so looking forward to Saturday.

Q. Obviously this break came after a tough stretch of results. How did the guys respond to some time away from the game?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, I think, you know, we had some nagging injuries that we need to get some guys held up, so that was good for us and then sometimes when you're so close, and so far away, many times it's good to take a break.

Sometimes you need a couple days off to reset, refresh, reset mentally, especially, as well as physically. That last week, those last four games, possible 12 points, only getting one. While we played so well at home begins Cincy, losing on our own goal late in the game; and then going to the Red Bull being up 3-2 in the 8th minute and still tying that game; then losing in a questionable handball in a box in NYC FC, the defending champions; and then the Toronto game, playing so well, having 33 shots, 60-plus percentage possessions, stuff like that and really dominating that game.

But finding someone to lose that game, that could be mentally draining on the players. After that, after four games, it was good to take a break and take some time off. We have had two really good weeks of training now, and make sure that we keep the guys confident.

And it's easy to keep them confident because we're not getting dominated in games. It's little mistakes here, little questionable calls from the refs here and there that has really put us under, us not being disciplined, as I alluded to you earlier, getting silly red cards and stuff like that. We just wanted to stay mentally fresh, stay confident, know that we're very close and just we're looking forward now to just getting back on the pitch and really going after it and making a push these first few games.

Q. There seems to be a constant stream of rumors about Gaga's future. What's the latest on any negotiations with external clubs and how are you making sure that doesn't become a distraction for him?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, you know, sure, everyone has heard the rumors or seen the reports about Gaga's future. I hope you understand that we cannot discuss any ongoing negotiations or anything that's going on currently. I just want to leave it at that.

He's a very good, promising 18-year-old goalkeeper, so it's nice to have some of the big clubs that's been mentioned in

some of these reports have an interest for him. For the kid, it's really good that he's kept his head and stayed focused because that could be really distracting. This is something we really can't discuss, and just let the guys do the negotiations, whether they are, handle that stuff and we just want to focus, me staff and my staff on the games coming up.

Q. Firstly, over to the other 18-year-old keeper, do you have anything to say about Chris Brady and the opportunity he'll have in the Olympic qualifying tournament in Honduras, and secondly what went into the decision to not releasing Brian Gutierrez for that tournament?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, as far as Chris is concerned, he's also a very good goalkeeper, so it's fortunate for us we have two very young, very capable goalkeepers with lots of potential, and that's why he's currently with the U20 in the qualifying right now because he also is as good as far as potential-wise with Gaga. We wish him all the best and we think it's about for him to be in that, gain some experience and I'm sure he'll do well.

As far as Guti goes, the situation that we're in right now, Guti is going to play a big role, so he's going to play a lot of minutes for us, start a lot of games for us and he's someone that we felt that we couldn't let go at the moment because we need him on pitch with us because we are trying to get this team back to where we started this season, back on that right track and trying to turn this thing around because my staff and I, we came in here with the job of being successful and turning this organization around, get back to the glory days, so to speak and Guti is going to be a big part of that.

He's a very, very good, young player with a very high ceiling, lots of potential there and he's someone that we felt that we really needed at this moment.

Q. You talked about patience and you talked about it a couple other times. How do you reconcile the idea of patience with a team that by my count has five starters who are 29 and older, and it seems like it's built to win right now?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, five guys don't play on a game day, you know, but the patience I'm talking about is you can have ten guys 25 or 29 and older as you said but if they haven't been playing together for a while, takes a while to get the team to mesh and to gel because like I said we had a lot of turnover coming into the season.

I think nine guys, a lot of those were starters. It's a matter of getting guys to learn each other. Jairo just came in a

month ago as well as Chris, guys who are a very integral part of this team needed very much due to injury and stuff like that.

It's not so much patience because guys are young but it's patience because it's a new team and it's going to take awhile to get guys to mesh and gel with each other, and now you have also a new coach with a new philosophy that they have to also grasp. So that's where the patience, when I talked about patience, it's not so much about age or anything like that.

It's about giving time to develop and we're seeing the progress. We're definitely seeing the progress. If we were sitting there losing every Game 3-0, 4-0, 5-0, we would have an issue there but it's games where, you know, liked the last four games, 12 points, we put ourselves in a position to get seven possibly nine of those points and we came out with one, so that's something that, you know, is going to take time to finally close out games, and so that's what I mean when I say patience. It's about getting the team to finally grasp the philosophy and also learn each other, playing with each other for a while, for some time.

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