

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Chicago, Illinois, USA

Ezra Hendrickson

Press Conference



Q. I was just wondering if there's any update on Espinoza, Giménez, Ivanov, Przybylko if he'll be available and also Guttierrez.

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Przybylko is available, and some injuries -- so they are questionable but the others will be fine.

Gastón, he's also questionable with a slight hamstring. It's still early in the week. In the next couple days, I'll know better.

Q. You guys have taken a lower, long-term approach on getting him right, how far along is he right now?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, you know, it's very disturbing for us because he's -- inaudible -- team and -- but it's just been impossible for us to get him on the pitch for an extended period of time.

We've gradually increased his minutes and he's in a position now where he's ready to play, fitness permitting, as far as his physical fitness because he has not played a full 90 in a long time.

But he's available to play full on now. We were very cautious with that but we are at the point now where we think he's ready to go from the start.

He's a very good player. He shows it, every time he came on whether it was for 20 minutes, 30 minutes, he showed his -- inaudible -- and that's something that is something where we need to get our best players on the pitch so we can continue this momentum and get above that playoff line.

Q. The change in the schedule, is it any kind of an inconvenience to switch your home stadium at the end of the season when you're probably going to be playing some of your most important games?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Yeah, definitely. I think whenever

there's a change like that, it can throw you off. But at this point, we can't really worry about those things. You know, we just have to play wherever the game is. You know, so Soldier Field has become somewhat of a fortress for us. We were very comfortable for us when we play our home games.

So it will be a little change but we have to go on the road and win games. So it doesn't really matter where we play right now. The focus is always going to be on getting three points and that's something that we can't lose sight of regardless of where it is that the game is being played.

There will be lots of fans, their fans together with our fans, so it will be a great atmosphere. If we can somehow combine and have both sets of fans come to both games when obviously we are not playing at the same time that will be great. I think the fans will be up for a very, very good afternoon of soccer, a good three hours of soccer.

Q. (On Saturday's game).

EZRA HENDRICKSON: I think for the city, it's good to showcase both teams in a similar stage on a similar date on the same night. I think it bodes well for all involved. They are going to benefit as well as we are. So I'm all for it and I'm looking forward to Saturday night. I think it will be a great atmosphere for the fans.

Q. You passed the halfway point in your first season in charge. What's the biggest thing you've learned or surprised you about being a head coach in this league?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Wow. I've had many learning experiences. You know, be it the Open Cup game, I think maybe not so much player selection because we played who we had. But maybe in-game substitution in that game probably came a little later than it should have made them so that's something that I look back at and I think about.

But at the time I was worried about if it went into overtime, exerted too much energy on the guys that we have because we didn't really have a full squad at the time so I was worried about putting guys in too soon just in case it went into overtime. That was a big learning experience for me where if I had to do that over again, I'll just split the guys, and if they end up having to play 120 minutes, so be

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it.

So that's one thing I learned. Other things, there's games that we let slip away from us, and I take responsibility for that. Whenever we don't close games out, I talk about the New York Red Bull games away, the Toronto game away, when we don't finish out games like those, I look at myself and say, okay, what could I have done differently. Again, maybe substitution sooner might have changed those games.

At the end of the day, you know, I put the players out on the pitch and if the players make mistakes that cost us the game, that reflects on me: Did I have the right player in the right position; did I give the players the right -- put them in the right position to succeed.

So I take blame on some of those things. So I learn from those things. I promise to make sure that things are done better; that we won't go through those things again. We've improved somewhat but we're a team that's growing and when I took this job, one of the things I said was there will be growing pains. I as a first-year coach have gone through some of those growing pains with the team as a whole as far as some of my decision-making.

But you know, we're still learning. We're continuing to grow as a team. I think we've grown. We've progressed a lot further along than most probably expected.

But when I look at what transpired in the Columbus game and how the team was able to respond since, you know, that to me shows the growth of the team because it was very easy for that team after that game, losing that game in that manner -- a minute to go and tie games, out-possessed other teams the entire game and lose games. It's easy for the team to say, it's just not working.

But these guys responded from that game after that Toronto game and just really jumped from the start and got the ball in the first five minutes. For me that, shows a growth of a team, and we've since continued to grow momentum.

We are not there yet, even in the last game, Vancouver, we had moments last two minutes of the first half, we are not going to survive too many of those type of errors that we created; that we caused by ourselves towards the end of that first half.

But we came in at the half and talked about it and even when they tied it up, we knew that this was our game and we were in control of the game, even though we were on the road and finished out that game. That shows me a lot; that the players have bought into what we're doing and the

players have bought in. Of all the games when we look back as a team and the players are well aware of it, it's the one game that we thought got away from us at the start.

Yes, they caught us shorthanded, and we did have four or five starters at the time, suspensions or injuries, or what-have-you and we are not the same team that we were then but it's a game that we look back on and said listen, if there was game we never was really in it, that was it, and we want to make amends to our fans and ourselves and continue this momentum.

So Saturday we are really going to be prepared for this game for several reasons, but mainly just to continue to grow as a team.

Q. After the game, you mentioned some of the players were not in the MLS All-Stars which is almost a couple weeks ago, but what do you think of the players of the Chicago Fire, like Gaga and others have not been called up to the MLS All-Stars maybe because of the whole -- I wonder your opinion about that.

EZRA HENDRICKSON: When the team is successful, and you know, we started off the year -- but we went to a ten-game spell where it wasn't good enough, and we weren't winning games and I think maybe that was a deterrent, I'm not really sure.

But when you look at overall as of now, speaking as of now, you know, I would, you know, expect Gaga having the second-most clean sheets for goalkeepers in the League right now. I would selected Czichos leading us in scoring, our captain, our leader, along with Shaq, the leaders of the scoring. I think he should be looked at and Shaq.

When you want to show a good representation of the MLS in this league versus La Liga All-Star, you have to include someone like Shaqiri in it because he's that type of a player and he has eight or nine assists for us, and he's put in -- a leader on and off the field for this team.

Guys like those should get the opportunity to be in that All-Star Game to properly showcase the league and who are the stars in the League and who are the guys who are carrying the teams, because these three guys have been very, very instrumental in what's going on with the Chicago Fire right now. That was my point about the whole thing because I don't see how that cannot be.

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