

# Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Chicago, Illinois, USA

## Georg Heitz

Press Conference



**Q. Wondering with the Slonina news and him going to Chelsea on January 1st, what is the goalkeeping plan for next season, and is it possible that he could be loaned back here for the 2023 season?**

GEORG HEITZ: Yeah, I mean, we bought some time now due to the fact that we loaned him back. Of course, it is a great idea to also maybe loan him for the 2023 season, but this is to be discussed, also, with Chelsea, of course. We haven't discussed it so far. And if, if, if, this will not come, if we would not come to a result there, then we already have enough time now because it's the beginning of August.

**Q. The sale of Gaga is obviously a monumental thing for the club. Can you take us through what the process was like getting that done, and is there anybody at the club you want to single out for their work on that deal?**

GEORG HEITZ: Well, I mean, kudos definitely go to all the coaches who raised Gaga to the whole academy staff. He's a player who has been with us for such a long time.

But the guy who most contributed to this is the player himself. Gaga is incredibly mature. I mean, he's still 18 and you know, when it comes to this whole transfer, this was pretty complicated thing.

Also due to the circumstances at Chelsea with the change of ownership, which is nobody's mistake, but it just took awhile to get everything sorted out. There were, as you all know, other offers and many clubs interested in Gaga. I think, I personally think, it's the right step for him. It's a great club in the best league of the world.

**Q. Gaga is not the only homegrown player who has broken through since you came to the club. What does the high turnover say about the talent pool in Chicago and the work that's been done in the academy?**

GEORG HEITZ: Well, as I mentioned before, we have

great coaches in our academy. You know, we try, also, to sell the homegrown to our coaches in the first team and they bought in. It's absolutely great when you see, also, how good he progressed in the past few years, I might say.

And also other players, there's definitely more to come. It's great to have a player going directly from Chicago, from our academy more or less straight to Chelsea.

**Q. What can you say about this entire process with Gaga? There was rumors and reports that English teams were trying to sign him in the winter, and then there was this was a bid rejected from Real Madrid, a statement from his agent to push that through to Real Madrid, and now two months later, the deal with Chelsea is done and official. Can you take me through the process on your end and what it all means for the Chicago Fire?**

GEORG HEITZ: Well, first of all, this has to be a player's decision where he ends up and I can understand any player who wants to go to a big Spanish club, a big German club. I won't name any club; I think you can understand that.

My job is to defend the interests of the club here, and so we cannot just say yes to any offer that we get, and so sometimes you disagree with an agent. I think in Gaga's case, he has basically a very reliable and also a serious agent, so there are no issues; that every once in a while, someone gets a bit of temper. That's I think absolutely normal in this industry.

Chelsea had contacted us in January, back in January, just to mention this. So it's not that they thought, hey, wow, there's a young keeper, we could sign him. It's really that they followed the player. They followed him for months. I think he'll be in a good spot there.

**Q. You mentioned defending the interests of the club. Question for you is, why make the decision to sell Gaga now instead of in the winter or next summer when you might be able to get a little bit more for him maybe?**

GEORG HEITZ: There, I disagree, because the transfer fee of a player in the international market also depends on the duration of his contract, and Gaga had 18 months left

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on his deal with us. So the closer you get to the termination of this contract, the less money you will get in the end.

It's also I think not good for a player to be in the limbo for months, not to know what your future is. So he wanted to get this sorted out, which I can understand.

By the way, one big thing, one big achievement of Gaga during this whole process was how he did not get distracted. He performed and he performed well in the past few weeks, which is really -- I have big respect for that.

**Q. With the new ownership and then of course the change in the front office at Chelsea, there are reports that Todd himself was doing a lot of the transfer activity. So was this a unique or different experience to be doing business with a club where even the people at the very, very top were kind of more hands on? Or was it similar, different, like what would you say?**

GEORG HEITZ: It was similar, Todd being informed about this transfer before, and he had given green light before. Nevertheless, he wanted to double-check. We had a really nice chat.

And also, I always appreciate to speak to reliable partners in this industry, and he is definitely a reliable partner, at least, yeah, he was in this transfer. And very passionate about the club and about Chelsea and I think absolutely aware of what the job means.

**Q. I wanted to ask if you could look forward a bit, now that the deal is done, it's hard to track Gaga's sort of future prospects because he's been on such a steep trajectory and he's been so good, so young in MLS. What do you see as the next steps in his career? What does he need and what are areas where maybe he's special or where there's more growth is needed?**

GEORG HEITZ: I mean, he is incredibly hard working. I've never seen a player at that age, because they are not conscious of that but he is incredibly hardworking. He's here every morning at 7:00 a.m., he's working out here in our performance center.

And so his mindset is very special, and that's also what I mean by saying he is the one who contributed the most to this transfer. Because it's really outstanding what he did. He will have, as any young player, he will have to learn what it means to deal with setbacks because in every career, you experience setbacks. That's absolutely clear.

But he will also -- I'm highly confident he will also overcome any setback in his career. And listen, his potential is huge. The challenge is huge. We speak about EPL; we speak about a big club in the EPL, but I'm very confident. I have no sorrows when it comes to his future.

**Q. So switch gears a little bit, Jhon Duran on social media was asked whether he would want to leave the club, and he said yes, and then was asked his thoughts on MLS and sort of didn't really say anything. Now, he walked back those comments, but what was your reaction to those comments and what do you see for his future with this club?**

GEORG HEITZ: Well, I spoke with him. I spoke with him, and believe me, my Spanish is not really good. But I spoke in Spanish, and he understood. And so of course, we are not amused at all and because this is a question of respect in the end.

On the other hand, we should not forget, we have a young -- it's almost a kid. He's almost a kid, and he has his dreams. I mean, it's absolutely -- it's good to have dreams and he is also allowed to make mistakes at this age. But I made it very clear what we think of this and I think he understood what I meant.

His potential is also huge. He has to learn what it means to be consistent on the field, to work hard. I think we saw a glimpse of his talent in a couple of games, but he has to keep it up. He has to work hard. Yeah, to take maybe someone like Gaga as a role model and then he can also definitely, definitely play for a big European club one day.

**Q. I would like to find out, a few months ago, Ezra said he was looking for two, three players that will back up the team, and obviously you brought Jairo Torres and you brought Chris Mueller. Now, in these summer transfer windows, are you still looking for more players to add to the team?**

GEORG HEITZ: Well, there's I think 30 hours to go from now and of course, I think every club until the last minute of a transfer window is looking for opportunities.

Unpredictable. It's not an easy market because if you want to make trades at the moment, many teams, or all teams, are still in the race to a playoff place. So they won't give you their best player at the moment because they would also have to replace him.

Yeah, we are definitely very happy with the signing of Jairo, of Chris Mueller, and I don't think that we necessarily have to make something right now. On the other hand, we are a bit short, especially when it comes to the center back

position after Carlos Terán's injury.

**Q. A few weeks ago, the Mayor Lori Lightfoot in the City of Chicago released potential plans for renovation of Soldier Field regardless of whether the Bears move to Arlington Heights or not. Those plans still need full City approval. What is your reaction and the club's response to those plans?**

GEORG HEITZ: Well, I think this is not a question for me because I really focus on the sporting side of this club. Of course, these plans looked great to me. But I'm really not the one who is competent to tell you things about what is feasible and what not.

**Q. How would you assess the return this season on the three designated players you brought in, not based strictly on how they have performed on their own but what their contributions have been relative to their salaries?**

GEORG HEITZ: Yeah, it's the never-ending discussion about salaries. Salaries, you play a salary because a player has a certain market value. You pay possibly a salary because the player was already on a certain salary. You pay a salary to a newer player to come to your club. So I think you cannot measure this directly.

When we come to our DPs, I mean, everybody has seen that Jairo has struggled with injuries. Unfortunately he came, he arrived injured. It was a risk that we knew because we had signed him weeks before he arrived, and this was part of the deal that he would only arrive beginning of May.

Xherdan has also struggled with injuries. I think he did well the past few weeks. His statistics are good. He has proven that he can be a game changer as we had hoped he could be. He had games where he could not even take a free kick or a corner kick due to injury.

This injury, you know, really, the worst weeks were after he went to play for the national team, and I don't blame any of our own; it's my national team. But it's as a matter of fact when they had this, my opinion, crazy four-game national team break in, I think it was in June, and we got injured. Just four games in ten days, no wonder the players get injured. Yeah, don't want to say more about that.

Gastón has been very consistent this season. They are pretty happy. Lately he also suffered an injury but he's already been back. He's been hard-working. I think he's physically in much better shape than he had been in seasons before. So,.

Yeah, pretty happy with all three of them. All of them can do better, as any player can always do better but pretty happy with them.

**Q. The season probably has not gone quite as you had hoped because you're not above the playoff line but the last four games have been really promising. Walk me through what you think you have done well and what you think Ezra has done well this year, and what are the areas you could have improved or done better?**

GEORG HEITZ: I don't want to assess myself. I think that's not my role here. Other people have to do this, maybe you from the media. Ezra has done a lot. He has changed -- I think he has changed the mentality of this team. He brought a winning spirit. He stayed very calm when we had a bad streak some months ago. He is very clear in his instructions. He is creative when it comes to his speeches in front of the players. He gives the players a lot of confidence and every player should know what he's got to do.

There are, for all of us, and I'm the first one who has to improve, all of us have to try to improve.

**Q. Yes, a question about some people in the media, some fanatics asked me about the color of the Fire, maybe some marketing. We have seen the Chicago Fire wearing white shirts and blue shirts but we haven't seen any red shirts worn by the Fire. Is there any change of the original shirt color of the Chicago fire?**

GEORG HEITZ: I recommend to be a bit patient because the colors of shirts can change over time. Be patient. I'm pretty sure that you will see the red color coming back.

**Q. First of all, you talk about Jhon Durán's injury, and what is the timetable for him? And last month Joe Mansueto said you are out of contract at the end of this season, but he would like you to return. Have there been any more contract talks between you and Joe, and would you like to return next season to this organization?**

GEORG HEITZ: Two quite different topics.

So first of all, Carlos, Carlos has a hamstring injury unfortunately. Look, I have a lot of faith in our medical staff and in our performance staff, and we hope that he will be returning in, I'd say, four weeks from now.

So it will take a bit of time because we also don't want to risk that he gets injured again, and I think by the way he

has also performed well in the past few weeks. Improved a lot, which is also -- especially young players, every player needs minutes and the more minutes he plays, the more he can progress. I think Carlos has really done well in the past few weeks.

When it comes to my future, I truly care about this club; I think I may say this: I love this job for sure, and I have a really, really, really, a great relationship with our owner. I will not publically hold any talks now. I think you can understand this.

But yes, I would like to return, and I'm sure that we will find a way.

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