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Ezra Hendrickson

Press Conference



Q. Kacper Przybylko has 14 of those were starts. Can you talk through what's gone wrong for Kacper this year?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, I think, you know, sometimes strikers find themselves in a funk, in a run of bad form, and I think that's basically what has transpired. He did have some back issues earlier on in the season which I thought slowed his progress down a little bit.

But you know, he was coming in, learning a new system, and just hasn't clicked for him, when we thought he was going to get going and get a good run of form, then he had the back injury, a freak accident that happened in training, and that set him out a number of weeks.

Not to make excuses or anything, but he has not been 100 percent this entire season so far. Hopefully now he's back in a better physical shape. Maybe he can get on a run of form here, so we'll see.

Q. Wanted to ask about Gaga. He seems to be a pretty focused and determined guy. But in May -- starting around May, he hit a pretty rough run of form and enough that even Gregg Berhalter mentioned it to some of us; that was why he couldn't consider calling him to the national team at that time and seem like there were a lot of outside distractions at that time, conversations about his club, futures, national team future. I'd like to know how he pulled himself out of it. For such a young guy to sort of go through that and maybe risk damaging his season, the club's season, for him to pull himself back into form so quickly, I think is interesting. So what is it about his character or his approach that enabled him to do that, and how did you and your staff maybe help him do that?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, there's a couple things. I think we sat down, spoke with him and let him know that we're still confident in him. He was our No. 1. He was going to be our No. 1. So we gave him that confidence.

The thing with his position is, you know, he's a young player, and they go through ups and they go through downs. You know, when a goalkeeper makes a mistake, it's usually a direct cost for a goal. Young forwards, young midfielders make mistakes, whether it be a bad pass or maybe miss a goal or something like that, and it sometimes doesn't directly hurt the team.

So a couple of those mistakes that he made led directly to goals and it just was unfortunate for him it came in consecutive games. But you know, we never lost faith in him. We never lost confidence.

And then second fold, him as a player, as a person, he's really confident and he works really hard. And so we knew that he would be able to work his way out of whatever was going through. There were some distractions, all the talk about Madrid or Chelsea or a couple of the teams wanting to sign him and stuff like that. I think maybe that was a little bit of a distraction.

But he's mature beyond his years, and so that level of maturity, that level of confidence in himself helped him a lot.

And then we have Adin Brown who is our goalkeeper coach who works really, really hard with him. Works with him in the film room, showing him films, on the field, off-the-field stuff. We were able to keep him afloat, so to speak, because we know what he means to this team.

When he's in form and when he's playing well, we're a very good team. You know, he's a big reason why we have ten shutouts so far this year. A lot of it has to do with his confidence, but us as an organization and coaching staff, instilling that confidence in him and showing him that we believe in him despite what was going on at the time.

Q. Shifting back to Slonina, it's been a long time in terms of, I guess, interest and reports and all that dating back to before the season started. What has it been like watching him day-in and day-out dealing with these big rumors about his future? First it was the national team and then Real Madrid, Chelsea, any other club that was interested in signing him. What's it like watching this process day-in and day-out?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: It's great for me as a coach. He's



18 years old -- or most of the time he was 17 because he turned 18 not too long ago.

But a young teenage guy like that being able to handle all that attention, all that pressure that comes along with it was great for me to see as a coach, and I watched this kid continue to develop from preseason to where we are now, and I've seen growth in just six, seven months.

And so I always knew that this day will come when he will -- when this will happen, and he's quite deserving of it because he works really hard. He's the first guy in at 6:45 and he's the last guy out. He's always doing extra work.

One thing just beyond his maturity on the field and his hard work, I watch him after some games, some home games, and he's the one young player that's there cleaning up the locker room afterwards. You know, not even being asked to do it. He just took it upon himself to do that, and that speaks volumes to me.

When you watch a kid having so much attention, having so much pressure, everybody looking at him, he's playing well, to still find the time to realize that, okay, I'm still just a 17-, 18-year-old, I need to do this kind of stuff. I need to sort of earn my keep, so to speak.

So that bodes well for him and his mentality, and I think it's going to help him going forward. So it's been great for me to watch this whole process and watch this all unfold.

Q. What makes Gaga such a great fit for Chelsea and what they do, and kind of the culture there? And secondly, while there are a few teams owned by Americans, how much of an advantage do you think it might be to go to one of those, that is owned by an American?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, I think he's going to be a good fit. I'm not a Chelsea scout, so I can't really speak as to what it is that they saw.

But from knowing the player and having coached him, he's very good with his feet, and I know Chelsea likes to build, and he's a very good shot-stopper. So you always want a keeper that can keep the ball out of the back of the net. His No. 1 job is to keep the ball out of the back of the net.

I think maybe that's something that Chelsea saw is his ability when things break down is to keep the ball out of the back of the net. That's a big part of his game. But he's also comfortable with his feet and he can play out of the back which fits them.

As far as going to an American team, I think the kid will fit

in, whichever team he went to, just because of the type of person that he is.

But I'm sure having American owners, there may be a little more patience with them, because he's still developing and still growing as a goalkeeper. That may help in that aspect.

But I don't really think, no matter what team he went to, I don't think there will be an issue for him fitting in just because of his ability to be focused and stay focused and work hard. No matter where you go, teams, coaches, organization, want players that are going to fight for that badge and work to do their best to be the best ones they step on the pitch to represent the club.

I think they will do well regardless of where he went.

Q. With Carlos's injury, what are you thinking in terms of who is going to start alongside Rafa in that position? You're in a little bit of a bind there now. And I know you're an Arsenal fan, when Arsenal plays Chelsea and Gaga is on the field, who are you cheering for?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: I love Gaga but I love Arsenal even more, so it will be Arsenal. It will be Arsenal.

As to the first question, Mauricio Pineda has filled in for us earlier this year at center back when we had a few injuries and didn't have red cards. So for now, it would be Mauricio. He showed that he can do his job there. For now, he will step back alongside Rafa in the back, the middle of the back.

Q. Just wondering what your reaction was to Jhon Duran's comments on social media about wanting to leave the club and what can he learn from this experience?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, at first what I saw it, I was kind of shocked. But because I don't sense any issues with him or him having any issues with the club, and I thought, nah, maybe this was taken out of context or something, because it wasn't a direct interview. It was a question-and-answer thing on Instagram or something.

But after listening and seeing his apology, I realized that it was maybe taken out of context. But what these young players need to learn is with the social media -- back in my days, we didn't have this kind of exposure and it wasn't so easy to take something that we say to a reporter or to a friend maybe out of context, or if it was taken out of context, it wasn't broadcast over so many viewers where so many people could see it.

So what these young players need to learn is that everything you say, to your friends, to your family, to a reporter, it can be easily, one, taken out of context, or two, be broadcasted.

So they just have to be more careful when they make comments like that because I'm sure the kid doesn't mean he doesn't like it here. But it came off as him being unhappy here and readers who are reading, they can only take it for what they see on print.

He's a young player and we have several young players, and we just have to make sure that we speak to these kids about being very careful and being particular as to what they say because things can get taken out of context and things can get broadcasted in a manner that doesn't represent you, doesn't represent your views, doesn't represent what we stand for here as an organization. Because at any moment, young or old player, we want players here who are going to be professional and represent themselves, their family and the organization in that manner, in a professional manner, and that's what we seem to have here.

I was very disappointed with it but I glad he was able to clear it up a little bit, but still, he needs to be more cautious going forward as to what he said, because it didn't look right and didn't read right to anyone.

Q. How do you think he feels about being with the club? I know he has ambition to go to Europe, sooner or later. How do you think he feels about his role with the club this season and how things have gone for him?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, I think earlier on in the season, maybe he was a little disappointed because wasn't getting the minutes as he probably would have liked, and we put him in some positions sometimes on the wings.

But he's a young player and he's still developing. You know, what he had to learn was how you perform in training puts you on the pitch. You could come in with a lot of talent but if you're not showing it in training, if you're not putting in the work in training, it's difficult for a coach to put you in on the pitch.

I think now that he's playing a lot more and he's getting an opportunity more, of course he's liking it more. I always want a player who is not playing to be unhappy as far as wanting to do more to get on the pitch, as far as wanting more playing time.

But I want that energy and that disappointment to be

channeled in the right way, and that is by showing me in training, hey, coach, you were wrong. I love when players prove me wrong as far as they step on the pitch and say, you need to put me in or you should have put me in sooner.

I think now he's get to go play a lot more and he's happen see. That's why I was so surprised when I first read that quote. I think the kid is happy but just like any other player, he wants to be on the pitch and he wants to play.

As long as he performs well, he'll play. When he doesn't perform, we have capable people to spell him because we know there will be ups and downs for an 18-year-old. He's going to have some good games and he's going to have some bad games.

We are in a position right now that we want the best players for us, the best informed player on the pitch, and it's good now that we have a good competition between him and Kacper going forward because you need that type of competition. You don't want either one of them to become complacent. So it's healthy for the team and I think that the kid is happy being here.

Q. This week marks two-thirds of the way through your first season as a head coach in Major League Soccer. What has surprised you the most over the season so far in that role?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: I think just every week, the game-to-game grind, as far as a head coach, when you're assistant coach, you have specific duties that you're responsible for, whether it be the defensive units, working with your attackers, set pieces, what have you.

But as a head coach, the moving parts and the management that you have to do as far as the tactical preparation, and as well as managing your staff and the supporting staff. You know, the trainers, the high-performance people; you have to make sure that you're not doing too much in training. So you have to adhere to that and make sure the loads are right, depending on the type of week you're having; when there are injuries, having to figure out who to bring in, what changes to make; in-game decisions.

It's been a lot of learning for me and a lot of good experience for me. I'm enjoying learning, and I'm enjoying the job. But it's just a lot of managerial things that you do as a head coach because there's a lot of parts that you're responsible for at the end of the day, and whether there's a W or L, that all falls on your shoulders, so that's something that you have to make sure that you have a good grasp of.

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I think it's been a fun time for me just learning all the different aspects that is under your control that you're responsible for.

Q. The playoff race is obviously pretty tight right now. What point level do you guys think you have to hit this season to be safe that you have a playoff spot. Last year the line was 48 and right now the seventh place team is on pace for 43, so what number are you guys targeting?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: You know, old coach, old mentor of mine who God bless his soul has passed on, Ziggy, he has always said you need 1.5 points per game, which we put at 51.

Now, looking at the schedule, the standings, 51 will really, really put you in there just because the way the standings are now.

I think it's a little lower than that. It will be maybe, I would think 48. I think if you have 48, looking at the way the schedule is and the standings and the teams, who is playing who as far as the next ten to 11 games, I think if you get on 48, you put yourself in a good position.

43 is a little low. I think it's more 47 to 48 points would be able to do it, in which for us, is very feasible, very, very feasible. We need to win our home games and pick up some games on the road, and every time we miss a point or two at home, we just have to go on the road and pick that up.

Not getting full three points in Atlanta, we know we have to go and get a couple more points somewhere on the road which we think is feasible to do.

I think 47, 48 points would be -- it's looking like would be the bar, so to speak, this year.

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