

Chicago Fire Media Conference

Saturday, August 6, 2022

Chicago, Illinois, USA

Ezra Hendrickson

Press Conference



Chicago Fire FC 3, Charlotte 2

Q. First of all, what's been different for you guys over the course of the last five games on this five-game unbeaten run, and how you've been successful as a coach, as a player, how do you maintain that Offor over a longer stretch?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, the thing with us, all year, I thought we were playing really, really good football, but there's a bit of naivety in some of the games where we didn't close some games out, some games we weren't -- we were getting opportunities but we just weren't taking them, so we are a lot more effective, a lot more efficient in the final third.

We are still not, you know, putting away as many chances as we should, but we are doing it enough to win, because we play very good defensively as a team. Even though tonight we gave up a couple soft goals, we were able to on the road score three goals to win this game and that's not easy to do, especially in a place like this with those type of fans and that type of atmosphere.

It's just a matter of us now shooting ourselves in the foot, so to speak, and continuing to be consist and take our chances when we get them.

Q. Where to start with this one tonight, just Kacper has really struggled for a lot of the season, and you dropped him from a lineup a couple weeks ago, and what does it mean for you to see him respond the way he has, especially tonight when he had a brace and frankly could have had three, or maybe even four?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: He's a good player, he showed that throughout his years in Philly. But he was in a slump. So where he decided to go with Jon, and Jon came in for a couple games for us and so now we have a competition there between both of them.

We have two very, very good strikers, and he played really

well tonight, and I expected that of him tonight. We felt like he was the player to go with tonight and he delivered. He made two really, really nice goals.

But beyond that, just his movement off the ball was better. His holdup play was better. Even defensively he put in a shift tonight. You have to tip your hat off to a guy like that; a veteran guy who, as you said, loses job two three weeks ago and stuck with it. Continued to train hard, and you know, when he got back in to pitch as he did tonight, he delivered and that's what we expect of him, so it's good to see him get a couple tonight.

Q. What went into the decision to start him tonight, and was Durán's social media a part of the decision not to start him?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: No. And I explained that to John when I decided to go with Kacper earlier on in the week. I just felt like Kacper on the road would give us a better opportunity to come away with three points tonight.

Going forward we need to get three points even on the road. I thought what he does defensively would be a better match, a better fit for us tonight. And he delivered. Not just when he did defensively but also on the only end, putting balls until the back of the net. It's something that we knew he had in him, and it's good to see it happening now. The decision had nothing to do with the social media at all.

Q. Rafa Czichos was unavailable due to health and safety protocols. So when did you find out he was not going to be able to play, and what did you make of Bornstein's performance in Rafa's absence?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Rafa is our captain and he's been very, very good for us this year, on and off the field. His leadership and on the field play speaks for itself.

Yesterday morning, when we went to training, he wasn't able it train, he was just feeling sick. We did COVID tests and stuff and he was negative but he just was feeling very, very poorly. We still didn't want to make that decision to leave him out. We knew he couldn't travel with us yesterday. If anything he would fly in today but when he got up this morning he still was feeling badly so we decided even though it would be a big loss, we needed to keep him

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

at home.

So today I just told Bornstein, listen, you're going to have to play and start at center back tonight. I have to tip my hat off to Bornstein because here is a veteran guy, he's a left back, he's been out with COVID all week. He trained one day and that was yesterday, day before, when we really don't do much. And he's called upon the day of the game to come in and play out of position so to speak at center back.

And I thought he went out and did really well tonight. It speaks volumes of the type of professional player this guy is and what this guy means to the team. He's a hard worker and he trains hard, even though when he knows he's not going to be the is it a, he does put in the effort.

So I had no issues about putting him on the pitch tonight because I know he could do the job and he went out and did a really good job for us tonight. Late in the game he was cramping up. But he wasn't about to come out of the games. We had Kendall Burks on the sideline to go in the game but Bornstein was not about to leave the game in that state.

He's the consummate professional and we are happy to have him on this team. Incidentally, tonight was his 20th MLS game, so that just goes to show the type of player that he is, and the longevity and being able to step on the pitch like that in that type of humidity, that type of atmosphere, and put in a shift was very good for him. We are happy for him and we are just happy overall how the team is playing right now.

Q. Book to Kacper. I think any player when they lose their starting position, you run the risk of losing them from the main -- in some cases, particularly with a striker. What is it about him that made you think, not only can I take him out and then reinsert him later, but that he could do it successfully as he did tonight?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: You always hope that for your player and you get to learn your players and know what type of player they are, their mentality.

Some players, like you said, would have went into their shell and it might have ended their season. You know, I sat down and spoke with him and said, listen, we need change. We need to do something. We are just not getting the results that we need to get. And before that Toronto game and I said, "Listen, I'm going to go with Jhon this weekend."

He said, "I understand, Coach. I'm a team player. I'm ready whenever you need me."

In some games when he didn't start, he came in and he played well for us. The game right after Toronto, we called upon him against Seattle which is a big, huge game for us and he played well.

So we knew that we could count on him, and tonight I just had that feeling that he was the right guy for this game on the road like this, but the good thing for us, we have two strikers who are, you know, doing well right now. They are competing, and as a coach, I always tell my players, I want my decision to be difficult as far as picking the team. And they are making it difficult for me, and that boils over to the team and shows how strong we can be when we are two-deep at each position.

We are here but we are not going to just stay here if we don't work hard, if we don't continue to do the things that we have been these past five games. I told them, it's hard to get here above the line; when I see here, I mean above the line but it's even harder to stay there.

Now it's a matter for us to go in week out and week in and put that kind of effort like we did tonight. The football was good. Even in the first half, it ended 2-2 at halftime and I said listen, guys, we played 42, 43 minutes of really, really good football but two moments, the first minute of the game plan and the last couple minutes of the game, we didn't and we allowed two opportunities, two crosses to end up in the back of our net and we have to change that.

But I assured them that I was confident we were going to get another one, minimum in the second half. We just need to make sure we don't allow them to score and come out with three points and they did it.

One other thing that was plaguing us in the first half was crosses in the box. We just weren't clearing them. We were getting beat a lot. In the second half, there was a lot of clearance because this is a team that likes to bump the ball into the box and Bornstein and Boki and Mauricio and these guys, Miguel, they won everything. Every cross was clear, and Gaga came out and what's clear when he had to be.

Great team win. It's about continuing to push and win games and make sure we are in the playoffs come October.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports ...