

# Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Chicago, Illinois, USA



## Ezra Hendrickson Press Conference

**Q. There's been some reports out of Switzerland that Shaqiri after the season will stay with Lugano just to train and stay ready for the World Cup. Is there anything -- are those reports accurate?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: At this point I can't really say. That's not correct but he will help Shaq as far as doing what we can to provide the proper environment for him to train getting to the World Cup. From our side, he'll probably train two, three days a week for about three weeks or. If that's adequate for him he'll be training with us but as far as him going to Lugano, nothing is concrete or set about that as far as that goes.

**Q. Will he play the last two matches or will he get a breather?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: You know we always want to have him on the pitch when possible but this week he's playing a couple games now, 65 to 70 minutes each game and as far as how much he'll play this weekend, we haven't really decided it yet but we are very conscious of the need for him to maybe get some rest leading up because he never really had a rest going from last season in Europe to this season. It's something that we are conscious about sitting down and talking about make sure we send him to the World Cup in as best physical shape as possible and healthy as possible.

**Q. A number of players had good performances during the international break. How closely have you been following those and will some of those positive performances translate necessarily into opportunities in the last two games?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: It was great to see that some of the younger, inexperienced players step out and played well as you said.

As a team as a club we always want to step on the pitch with the idea of winning the game, so yes it was a friendly, and maybe we didn't have a number of our starters due to

injury or international call ups but the guys who played I thought performed well. Going forward that's an opportunity for them to show us what they are capable of it and to show us that when called upon, they can deliver. So we were happy to see that.

Some of the players were from the second team so they are not assigned to first-team contracts like Charlie, for instance, who I thought played really well but some of the other guys I thought showed well for themselves.

As far as are they going to start going forward, no, but it's good to get an idea of where they are as far as playing against good competition. So it was good to see and I think that's a credit to the guys on the second team, what they have done because these guys have played most of the minutes this year with the second team. It was good to be able to put some guys on the pitch who have not played in an MLS match or not much at all to just kind of see where they are at, a litmus test for them. So that was good to see.

**Q. The opinion about the contract with Guti and Navarro, what do you think that, and for the team, the extension contract? And also, Jhon Duran has an international game, he was subbed. What do you think about that?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Let's start with the two contracts, Fede and Guti, who young and very good players we see as part of the Chicago Fire going forward. We want to make sure we have those guys on board and let them know that they are going to be a part of this team with the club going forward. That was the reason behind that, making sure that we lump those guys up and reinforce how much -- how we feel as a club, as an organization, about them. I thought two of them, you know, two young players, both 22 and under, played some really, really good minutes for us this year to the point where they were full-time starters by the end of the year.

As far as Durán, he's another young player who is a very good player who has shown in limited time this year how well or how good of a player he is. And you know, him being called up to the Colombian team is a testament to that as far as his quality and his future and his potential because Colombia is not a very easy squad to break into and to have him get an opportunity to join the squad

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against Guatemala and México was good for him and the organization. It shows that we have some young talent in this group that needs nurturing not just us and other people seeing the potential in these other players. It's going to take time getting experience sort of learning on the job so to speak but it was a great opportunity for him to go out and represent his country.

**Q. To go back to Shaqiri, he left the Charlotte game late because of the squad issue, but meets up with Switzerland and plays 130 minutes over four days with them. What was your reaction to seeing him healthy enough to play for Switzerland and make you question his commitment to the Chicago Fire and how much he prioritizes them compared to his national team duty?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Not at all as far as questioning his commitment.

I think Shaq came here with a commitment to get this organization back to where it belongs to and I think he's shown that throughout the entire year. Even when he was carrying injuries, he played. That wasn't the case for every player on the squad this year.

So I think his commitment to this team is very high but you know, he knows his body and he knows what he's feeling. We're coming back off the road off two road games which he wasn't healthy but he played in both of those games, against New England, against Columbus, even in Montréal, he played so he put it out there and it was a success of games, and he felt it late in the Charlotte match. You know, if Shaq says that he's feeling it, I truly believe him because he's shown to me as a coach that throughout the year, he was able to play with some injuries and if he's not able to go it means it's really, really bothering him. You can't blame a player for not want to go get injured or to feel something and pretend that it's not there and then it end up being worse.

But you know, as far as representing his country, you know, we all want to represent our country, and if he had the opportunity, he's a big part of what they are doing, and so I have no problem with him being able to play. Obviously he wasn't able to play 90 minutes but he's able to play in both games for about 60, 65 minutes each game. His commitment to the Fire and real and it's a hundred percent and I don't question that at all. He's shown that to us throughout the year.

**Q. With the playoffs now officially out of the picture mathematically, how much do you valuing the last 180 minutes of MLS soccer to build towards next year?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Cincinnati was one of those

where they came into our place and they were able to walk away with three points due to an on-goal by us and a late give away on top of our a team. That's still in our mind and that's something that we want to rectify because we felt like, you know, they took points from us at home so we want to go ahead and do that and we want to make sure that we have the right combination of players where we are giving some players an opportunity but you know, we are not just throwing it all away and just giving up on the season because we are out of the playoffs. We still owe it to our fans and this organization to put a good product on the pitch and play the best football that we can to try to win the game.

And like I said, you know, get those points back from them that we felt like they stole from us in the home game against them early this season.

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