

# Chicago Fire Media Conference

Saturday, October 1, 2022

Chicago, Illinois, USA

## Ezra Hendrickson

### Press Conference

Chicago Fire 3, Cincinnati 2

**Q. Nothing ever comes easy for you guys, but was there any concern about how the team would come out, considering the relatively low stakes for the team, and what did you think of the performance tonight?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: You know, I thought up until the last maybe ten, 15 minutes or so, the performance is how we want to play. It's not easy coming into an environment like this, hostile environment. They still have playoff hopes and missing a lot of key players. I thought the guys were up to the task tonight. In the first half we played some good football.

We were a little slow, and the ball, didn't move it as quickly as we'd like to, especially once we got into the front half.

But all in all thought it was a good game. Don't like to give up two goals like that. Gave us flashbacks, you know, on the sideline. But that's something we have to improve on and I think that's just going to come with being together, finding a way of finishing games out. Fortunately for us tonight, we end up winning the game. All in all, good game but some things we still have to work on.

**Q. You have to be pleased with the play of Jhon and Brian tonight. For Jhon, what's his ceiling in MLS heading into 2023, and for Brian, being a hometown, how good of a player can he be at this level, do you think?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, they are both -- I've said this from the beginning, they both have very, very high ceilings.

If we talk about Jhon, a player once he gets it all together, he can be a really, really special player. He has all the tools. Guti, as well, he's a very good player; his vision, his ability on the ball. He needs to get a little stronger on the ball and maybe see some things a little quicker. But the ceiling is very, very high for both of those guys, and you know, that's why they are playing.



When guys show in practice that they are ready to step on the pitch and play, they will get minutes, and these two have especially excelled throughout the year and we like the progress that they have been making and it showed tonight.

Jhon Durán, he's a very tough guy to handle for defenders in this league, and we expect that from him going forward.

**Q. You could say that it might be a little late for this team, for this victory, but the end, a victory. How can this create momentum, I know it's going to be a long preseason and everything, but how this victory and the way you guys played today can create momentum for next season for 2023?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, that's the idea behind it all. You know, once we were out of the playoffs mathematically, we talked to the players about these next three games. You know, the Leon game, Cincinnati and then next week against New England, we wanted to end on a positive note.

Because we know deep down, a lot of these teams that are ahead of us, we gave points to, you know, Cincy being one of them, at our place, an on-goal in a late giveaway on the top of our a-team. So we wanted to rectify that, avenge that.

So we came here; we knew it wasn't going to be easy. This is a very good team. They have shown it all year. That's why they are still in the playoff hunt. Really well-coached team.

And the environment, it's amazing. What was said to the players was listen, let's use this environment and use this crowd to our advantage. You know, get an early one, get on goal, get up 1-0, 2-0 and then take the crowd out of the game. The crowd stayed in the game.

But for us ending on a positive note, it's something that we want to do. It's not over. We still have to go and play against New England, a team that we also thought, first game against them, we make that penalty and we come out with three points and maybe we are still alive in this thing. We also want to avenge that.



A lot of times this year, we fell short by our own undoing and we wanted to make sure that whenever we play those teams again that we got the points back.

Same was with Miami, and then with Toronto, and we were able to do that. We aren't able to do it against the Red Bulls and against Columbus, and I think if we got those two back, then we would be in a different position now. That's in the back of our mind.

So it's easy to stay positive because we know what it is that's happened to us this year. It's mainly us, just kind of falling apart in the second half, and that's something that we are going to work on and try to get better at, and I know once these players get enough experience, it's going to be much much easier to see games out. That comes with the maturity of players, and we have a lot of young players, and they are learning on the job so to speak. But we'll be better for it.

Football was really, really good tonight. I like the passing, the spacing was too slow like I said before, but we are heading the right direction, and that's good to see. The players, we are missing very, very key players tonight, but the players that we had went out and did the job and I commend them for that, and we still have one more to go next week.

**Q. I wanted to ask about the goalkeeper position, what did you make of Spencer tonight, and going into the final game against New England, have you thought about who is going to start that game, Gaga or maybe Chris Brady?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, for obvious reasons, we are not going to expose that to the rest of the teams or to New England, specifically.

But we have a plan going into the second -- into the last game of the season, and you'll know that maybe about Thursday or Friday next week.

But I thought Richie did well tonight. One of the reasons why we wanted to play him tonight is because this is a place where he played before. Brady has never played in a game, and we thought maybe this game might be a little too huge for his debut, because you have to be very careful how you initiate a young player like that, so to speak, especially in that position. We knew it was going to be hostile and we knew they were going to come out on the attack.

So we wanted to make sure that for his sake, we didn't put him in the lion's den, so to speak. But going into next week, we have a plan, and like I said, we'll expose that

later on in the week. For now, I just want to say that I thought Richie did well tonight. He came up with some saves when he had to, and we got the win. So all is well.

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