

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Chris Mueller

Press Conference



Q. Just wondering, I believe you and I have spoken about it, that last year was quite the grind for you physically going straight from Scotland into the Fire and everything. How are you feeling now physically and how nice is it to have finally a bit of time to rest and recuperate for a season?

CHRIS MUELLER: Yeah, well, right now physically I'm pretty sore to be honest. We've been getting our butts kicked down here in Cancún but nonetheless, I had a good off-season. Took some time to kind of just disconnect, recharge. It was like you said a long time since I've had any sort of off-season since going from Scotland and having jumped in and played a lot of minutes last year.

So yeah, getting some time off was much needed. I feel really good. Honestly, I feel refreshed and I feel like I got that pep back in my step that I kind of started to lose a little bit of towards the end of the season last year just from all the wear and tear.

But no, ultimately, right now I feel energized and ready to go, and more than anything else, excited to get going and excited to start playing games again.

Q. Is that something you and others, like Shaqiri, for example might realize or underestimate it's going to be such a challenge going just from one knee to another and not having really an off-season?

CHRIS MUELLER: I mean, I think that's kind of part of it where you can obviously bump around in this career. You've always got to be ready and constantly be taking care of yourself. Comes with a lot of sacrifice off the pitch and making sure that you're healthy and able to play in all those games, all those minutes, all that travel.

It's a testament to Shaq and myself, just the professionalism that's required in order to be able to perform at that level for that long is not an easy task. But it's something that's done constantly by players all around the world who are moving and playing in seasons

back-to-back.

So not ideal obviously. You know you want to give your body time to recover and recuperate but when it's needed, I feel like it's part of our job to step up to the plate and do our best to deliver results.

Q. About the off-season, what are things that you had to do to get yourself focused back, and as you look forward to that, what are some goals that you have now that you do have a full season right away to start with the Fire?

CHRIS MUELLER: One of the things that I really needed and felt like I needed was just a break from soccer. I didn't want to watch it. I didn't want to play it. I didn't want to do anything for a week, two weeks. I went to Europe with my wife and just took some time to myself, and like I said, really just tried to reconnect.

I went through a bit of a tough spell mentally just in terms of the game and coming back from Europe and some of the personal battles I faced with that. So I really felt like I needed some time away from the game. I think it reinvented a little bit of hunger in me and kind of gave me back that drive that has always driven me.

Like I said, I've never needed a break from soccer. I've gone only in every off-season in the past since I was a rookie in the League and gone straight to work and am constantly really pushing myself tomorrow limits, grinding all the time. Like I said, this was the first time in my life after playing for three years. Because the year prior, as well, when I was in Orlando, you went into national team camp in December, straight into camp in January, and I didn't get an off-season that year, either.

It was close to three years that I went without taking any time off for more than a week. So that break in itself was just massive for me just to like I keep reiterating, recalibrate, reconnect with myself, recharge, get away from the world, turn off my phone and just, you know, get back to doing the things that make me happy and make me feel good.

So yeah, now after I've gotten that break, I feel a lot better and I'm really optimistic about this year. It's been great to get back into camp here in Cancún with the guys. We got

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some new faces which is great, and it just seems like we are all a little bit more motivated this time around.

Obviously I wasn't around in preseason last year to see what the vibe around the locker room was like. I came in midway, so to get a full present with the guys is awesome. We are shooting for big goals this year because I feel like everyone should be. Every individual player should be shooting high. They say if you shoot for the moon, the worst you can do is land amongst the stars.

I think that's what we are trying to do here. We want to go for the MLS Cup as a team. We want to go for the Open Cup. We want to win the Supporter Shield and just continue to push the limit here. I think that there's a massive opportunity right now in Chicago just dying for a sports team to be good in the moment, right. A lot of the teams are struggling in Chicago, and I feel like that's just a grand opportunity for us to step in and really change the narrative for ourselves and for the organization to really take the club back to the top.

So we've had conversations within the group and are really, really looking forward to being able to prove ourselves.

Q. How did you get away from soccer, and how difficult was that? You mentioned you took a trip but how difficult is that to not focus on the game and really step away and take that time to recover?

CHRIS MUELLER: It's massively important. Like I said for me in that moment in time, it was really easy for me because I was really needing the break. I really have pushed myself the past six years. This will be the seventh season of my career to the limit. I really feel like I've put it all in.

So at this moment in time and when I went over to Europe especially with my wife, it was three weeks that it wasn't hard for me to get away with the game because I had really needed it. I've gone to the extents of deleting all of my social media, of just really just trying to focus in on myself and eliminate all distractions. Yeah, that's where I'm at at this point. I feel good. I feel reenergized, and like I said, I'm just ready to go. I'm excited again to get going doing what we love.

Q. It's good to see you happy and motivated but obviously we can tell that you have a lot of goals with the Chicago Fire. Do you see yourself going back to Europe in a couple years, especially after seeing Gaga and Durán going to elite, Premiere League teams? Do you have the goal of going back or right now your future is just thinking of MLS and the Chicago Fire?

CHRIS MUELLER: Yeah, I think what they are doing is awesome, and it's really cool and good to see the young players take those steps in their careers. Obviously I'm super happy and excited to see them continue to grow into the players that we all know they can become.

As for myself, obviously I'm focused on the Fire and like I said, bringing success back to the organization and winning a trophy for my hometown city would be an absolute dream come true. I'm never going to -- I won't say -- I'm never going to say never, right. Like I'm not going to sit here and say, oh, I'm never going to go back to Europe, because life is going to change a ton by that time. And it's something that I've learned is not to write your plans in pen but to write them in pencil because things always change. That's the nature of the game. That's the nature of the beast.

So we'll see what the future ends up bringing, but all I can say right now is I'm very, very happy and content with where I am right now with my role in Chicago. I'm absolutely loving being back with my family and being able to see my parents, being able to see my grandparents and hang out with my brother and cousins. I have a ton of support in Chicago.

So to be home for the first time in my career and playing for Chicago, it's made me a lot happier than I could ever have managed playing anywhere else. So with that, who knows what the future is going to bring. I don't know if I would go back. I think that the offer would have to be one that you couldn't turn down. But even then, I don't know, I really don't.

So like I said, I'm never going to say never, but right now I'm focused on this year, this season, trying to make it my best one yet, trying to get back to playing my best football and trying to get myself back into the national team, and we'll see where it goes from there.

But right now I just want to focus on Chicago, and for as far as I'm concerned, I'm staying here for a bit.

Q. Speaking of the future, you touched briefly, the national team, is that something that motivate you, especially 2026, playing right here at home in the United States, is that something that motivates you to go back to the national team?

CHRIS MUELLER: Yeah, 100 percent, that's one of my main motivators. I had gotten into the team and had a really good debut, had a good January camp, and then kind of had that stint in Scotland where I guess I can say I took a bit of a dip in terms of my form and a lot of



uncontrollable circumstances kind of turned for the worse.

But nonetheless, I definitely used that as a motivation factor, especially after watching the World Cup this year. I knew my quality, and know that I definitely could have been in that group, and especially with the way that I was pushing myself and right on the brink of getting into the team. Kind of bad timing, like I said, with how I went to Scotland and how things had shaken out.

But I also feel like in a way, that's put a really big chip on my shoulder, which has always been something that's pushed me, has driven me, is me constantly getting overlooked which is, you know, it's fine by me. Like I said, it motivates me every day. It's what gets me up earlier in the morning than everybody else and it's keeps me working later than everyone else.

I'm just going to keep proving everybody wrong and I'm going to get myself back into the national team at some point, I know that that's for sure.

Q. I wanted to ask two brief questions. One, I don't know if you've ever done preseason outside of the States, but what's different, looking at the opponents that you're going to face in preseason? And secondly, last year, the team was doing so good with the attack with Duran. How different is it going to be or your expectations are with a different component up top of this offense?

CHRIS MUELLER: Yeah, well I've done preseason in camp, this is my second or third time in Cancún for preseason. So I'm pretty familiar with this area, actually. It's a great place to come to train. Obviously you get good weather. We have a good setup here at the resort, and it just gives the guys a lot of time together.

I feel like regardless where you go to travel, as long as you've got good weather and you're able to spend a lot of time getting to know your teammates, especially the new ones and building chemistry with the ones that have been there for the year prior, I feel like those are all positives in that fashion.

So what was the other question? Oh, right. I feel like obviously losing Jhon Durán was a big piece. You could obviously see he had a ton of quality and got bought by a Premier League side for a massive fee. Obviously losing that is not ideal, right. Like, we are going to have to replace that and a lot of guys are going to have to pull weight in different areas.

I feel like the team is coming together in a strong fashion where regardless the role of an individual, as long as the

collective is strong and we can continue to build together, I feel like the team is going to out-ride any loss of an individual because it's a team and not obviously an individual sport.

So as long as we can continue to grow and build in the direction that we want, I have no doubt that we'll be successful regardless.

Q. I'd like to say that we would like for you to stay with the Chicago Fire, so please do so. The other day at SeatGeek I heard you speak in Spanish, I had no idea that you spoke Spanish so I was pretty impressed, right on. I wanted to ask you about the unfortunate situation that happened with Anton Walkes. Does that impact the way that you go about your off-season when certain tragedies like that happen in professional sports?

CHRIS MUELLER: Yeah, no doubt. I mean, the guy was 25 years old. I'm pretty sure he had a kid.

You know, I feel like it broadens all of our perspective just about life and what really matters to us at the end of the day. Because I feel like a lot of times, tons of us, we're all negated by these minor worries in our own heads. Everyone has got securities and doubts and anxiety in some way, shape or form.

You know, something like that happens that's just so grand, I feel like it completely changes your perspective and it eliminates a lot of your worry just in terms of, okay, well, what's life really about. You know, what really matters at the end of the day if you have this day you're present and you're alive and breathing and able to walk, you can spend time with your family. You can call your loved ones.

It's like, you know, what are we really worrying about at the end of the day? When something like that happens. It's tragic. And it's sad and a testament to the fragility of life. Just you never know when your last breath might be.

So I think for all of us, it's a good reminder just to not take any days for granted. And it's obviously a massive tragedy to Anton and his family, and I can't even imagine what that team is going through and the adversity that they are facing.

And, like, I really just pray for his family that God grants them strength during this time. Because as we will move throughout the season, sometimes you can see, not to say that you forget these things, but you want to keep them in the front of your mind and you know for sure that family is going to struggle a while, maybe a kid losing their father, a mother losing their season, it's terrible.

Like I said, I think all of MLS supports the cause and wants to do whatever we can to help support them, but I know definitely I've been praying for that family myself, and just trying to use it to give us all a little bit more perspective, like I said, because it is just extremely sad.

Q. I would like to ask you about Chris Brady who is getting ready to take a bigger role with the team. What's the vibe with Chris Brady, and what have you seen with the future goalkeeper?

CHRIS MUELLER: Yeah, we'll see. I think Chris obviously has a ton of quality. Kind of funny saying Chris because I'm Chris, too.

Honestly, I feel like he's a great kid. Like I said, he's got tons of quality, a lot of talent, a young player, and this is exciting for him. It's a great chance to step in and try and solidify that No. 1 role. You know, you want to see guys step up to the plate and take on the challenges, right. It's not going to be easy. It's going to come with tons of ups and downs just as a lot of all young players you go through, you make mistakes, you learn, you get better, you grow.

So I'm excited to watch him in that and hopefully he can step into it and just really embrace all of it but no doubt he's a top talent and he's going to have a big future ahead of him. So yeah, I'm excited to watch it.

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