

Chicago Fire Media Conference

Friday, February 17, 2023

Chicago, Illinois, USA

Ezra Hendrickson

Press Conference



Q. Just wondering if there's -- what the current health situation with the team is, and also just wondering how Gastón Giménez is coming along and two of the new guys, Haile-Selassie and Souquet.

EZRA HENDRICKSON: First of all, it's been a very good preseason so far for us as far as health standpoint. We do have a couple knocks but nothing we hope is major. Selassie did have a quiet strain, but nothing -- he could be back training tomorrow. Souquet in camp now and he just came a couple days ago from France, so he will be -- he's back in training everything and.

Gastón is coming long. Hoping to have everybody in training next week so hopefully that's the situation with that.

But so far it's been a good camp from the physical aspect of things.

Q. Just to follow up on Gastón, is he in doubt for being available March 4th?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: We have to see. I'll be able to tell you better by mid next week, later next week. Right now it's a wait and see but we are hoping it doesn't take that long to get him back on the pitch. Like I said, we are hoping that even next week he'll start -- be back in training with the players.

Q. And it's still the issue that ended his season last year or is it something different?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: It's something different. But I think it's from compensation and right now it's hard to say exactly what the issue is but he's having some issues and it could be from compensation, that injury.

Q. Looking at the current squad, looking at the transfer market, how happy are you with the roster as it stands right now going into the beginning of the season, and do you think that there are still areas that you need to bring players in to be ready to compete in Major League Soccer?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Yeah, well, we are happy but you know, we are not satisfied. We have some areas that we still think we need to add some players, and that's an ongoing -- we are actively trying to do that. But we have gone out and brought in some players at some key positions, some key attribute that we thought we needed.

So Selassie, somebody we felt that we needed some pace on the wings to stretch defense. We have guys that are fast but they like to play in the half-channel and play in front of defense. So it's nice to go out and get someone that can stretch the defense because with Shaqiri's skill set, that's something we felt like we needed.

We obviously need a right back due to Boki leaving, so we went out and got that. We got Jonny Dean, is going to compete for the starting position. But we felt was a good, young mid-20s player that we would add nicely to the team.

But we know that we need to get some goals. One of the things that we were lacking last year was some goals. Losing Jhon Durán, the depth at that position is not quite where we want it to be, where we need it to be, frankly, but we are actively trying to solve that situation.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Chris Brady, what you've seen out of him, end of last season when he had a chance to make his debut at the club and in camp as he fights for playing time and possibly a starting spot?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Yeah, so we were really careful towards the end of the season once it was obvious that Gaga was going to leave that we didn't throw Chris into the fire so to speak. We gave him that last game and we thought he did very, very well. That was very promising for us.

He's been very, very good in training this preseason. He's been a very good delight, but you know, we also got Jeff and we have Spencer Richey who is here from last year, so it's a competition. But he has been performing really, really well so far this preseason.

Q. Can you do an evaluation of the four games you've had already and what do you think of the squad? You said you needed more goals and attacking but you

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have more goals. I wanted to see if you can give us an evaluation of the four games that you've played already.

EZRA HENDRICKSON: What we are trying to build here as far as building a championship team, we know that we have to be solid and we have to be organized defensively and last year we were short a lot of that.

But we knew going into the preseason that even with 12 shutouts last year, we failed to make it to the playoffs and that's a goal of ours, to get into the playoffs. So getting better in the attack is something that we knew we had to do.

A lot of the focus in this preseason has been on our final third effectiveness efficiency. We are getting there but we are not really -- we are getting there but not enough chances with the rate that we need to with being so good and organized. That's something we've been focusing on in preseason and it's showed in some games.

What we don't want to do, is the last games, for instance, we scored goals but we gave up three. You could say there were some players on there getting some minutes, some inexperienced players on the pitch but at the end of the day, it doesn't matter for us who is on the pitch.

As a Chicago Fire team, we want to be very, very solid defensively and we want to make sure that we don't give up three goals in a game so that was very disappointing from that standpoint. We are not going to forget what we need to do defensively as we try to get better offensively.

But you know, it's good to see that the goals are coming but I was -- we were very -- as a coaching staff, we were very disappointed that we gave up the three goals in the last game. So that's something that we need to make sure that we rectify going into tomorrow's game against Salt Lake.

Q. Regarding this year, you have a new tournament, this league's cup, and it's like another goal and another thing to go with the Chicago Fire and it's going to be against Pueblo in Minnesota. How do you expect this is going to be?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, yeah, certainly, it's good to be involved in a tournament like this because it's always good to see how you match up against other teams in a tournament-style setting, and one team being from México, that's also good to see where you stand against those teams. But our focus is the MLS, and making sure that we get to the playoffs this year.

So that's going to be our focus. We are not going to take the League Cup lightly because we want to see how we match up against these regional teams. But our focus going into this year is coming out strong like we did last year, but this year, the difference, getting some goals this year and to win some of these games that we were tying at the beginning of the year last year.

Yes, the League Cup is something we have to play and we are a part of it and we want to be a part of. We will be part of it. It will be good for the team and for the club to be involved in that tournament. But make no mistake about it that over focus is MLS play and that's going to be the focus for the entire year and making sure that come October or November, whenever the playoffs starts, that we are one of the teams that's still playing.

Q. Doesn't seem like -- there's been some reporting about what the playoff format could be how many teams will make it. What have you been told about the playoff format for this season and how much does that affect -- how much does that uncertainty affect your planning for the season and what your goals are in terms of points and wins?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: So yeah, we really haven't been given a final detail about how that's going to go. The MLS guys were here last week doing the MLS Associate, some meetings and pro meetings. I spoke with a couple of those guys and it's still in process, they are trying to decide the exact format of the playoffs. I'm not even sure exactly how that's going to play out. But anyway that this plays out, we just want to make sure that we are in a position to be in the playoffs and we are doing whatever it takes to be in the playoffs.

I have heard rumors of everything from being a play-in game with ten teams and teams 7 through 10 having a play-in. So I'm not really sure of the exact format, and you know, according to the MLS as of last week, it wasn't fine analyzed yet but it's something that either way, we have to be ready to do whatever it takes to get enough points to make sure that we are playing still late October, early November.

Q. What would be your preference for a playoff format? What would be the best move for the league?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: I think how it was last year was fine. I think the difference this year might be the number of games that's in the first round. I heard of maybe going to a home and away or something like that. Just making sure that each team has an equal opportunity to move on once they have made the playoffs would be the ideal for me.

Sometimes if it's just a one game, maybe the home team has the advantage and it's really difficult. Let's say you come in at 7-seed and finish the season on a five-game winning streak and you're in a good rhythm to go and play at the No. 2 seed or whatever have you away from home, it could stop some of the momentum and cost you going on further. To have that second game would be would be ideal.

But with the League Cup and Open Cup and all these other games, that also could be detrimental to the physical aspect of players and cause injuries and stuff like that.

I'm just a coach. I just need to get my team ready for whatever situation, the playoff, whichever format the league decides to go to and then let the guys at the league office decide how that's going to play out but for me, you know, given each team that makes the playoff an equal opportunity to move on to the next round would be ideal.

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