

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Ezra Hendrickson

Press Conference



Q. Wondering if there's anything you can say whether a deal for Giorgos Koutsias is close or just anything with the possibility of him coming to the Fire?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Yeah, you know, we are looking to add players to the roster because we feel that we need to have some additional players, some reinforcements, so to speak. But Giorgos Koutsias is a contracted player right now and is something that I don't feel at liberty to speak on.

But he's a player that I'm familiar with the player and he's a very good player. He definitely has some qualities and stuff.

But as far as speaking as to whether or not he's joining us or whether or not that's something on the table there, I'd rather not discuss that just because of the fact that he's a player that's under contract with a different team, and I just want to respect that, that situation.

Q. Hope you had a good off-season and even prettier preseason. Just to start, without giving away too much, who has impressed you the most this preseason up top and who can the fans possibly expect to start this weekend?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, I think, you know, several guys have been very impressive. We feel that due to the number of injuries we had at the end of the season last year, with Kacper and Jairo and Wyatt and Gastón and Herbers, we are very happy with the guys that have come back and played this off-season, this preseason.

Jairo, especially, I thought has been playing really, really well. Kacper has been a lot better than before the surgery, so that's good to see some improvements being made there with him.

But I think we are just happy with the entire group. It's a group that, you know, we are very confident in, and to see these guys, especially the ones that with are out for the latter part of the season last year come back and almost

having like three or four new players, because they were gone from the team for so long last year, it's very delightful for us and we are happy right now with the way things are going.

Q. My understanding is about Jairo, last year he suffered a lot of injuries and probably this year is going to start like brand new. How have you seen his improvement in the off-season and in the preseason?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: It's been very good so far. Like I said, we are very happy with the way he came back. He's a player we brought in last year to really help make a difference, and due to injuries, he was unable to do that. You know, he never really got going. And so we never got to see the player that, you know, we recruited and that we signed to come here.

But I think, you know, he took an initiative upon himself to get himself healthy, get the surgery that he needed, and also, he hired a personal chef, personal trainer in the off-season, which I think has helped him a lot.

I think the fans and the League are going to see the Jairo that we brought in last year that they didn't get a chance to see due to the injury. From that standpoint, I'm very happy with the way he took care of himself in the off-season and what he's been able to do for us so far this preseason.

It's really uplifting to see him. We've all played this game. We all know, no matter how good you are, your talent injuries are sometimes the thing that keeps you back, and I think him getting over his injuries and being able to play so well and perform so well this off-season, this preseason, has been very good for the team and for himself, for his confidence. So look for a brand new Jairo, so to speak, this season.

Q. I'd like to ask you with Slonina departing overseas, how do you feel about the goaltending this year?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, we have three very competitive, very capable goalkeepers in Brady, Richey and we brought in Gal now. Brady is someone who has come through the ranks, just as Slonina did. Richey has been with us now a couple years and Gal we just picked up in the off-season.

What we wanted to do is make sure that at every position, there's competition. I think that's what we have with the goalkeeper position, and they have all three, when called upon, have showed well this preseason. So we are very happy from that standpoint.

Obviously they don't replace Slonina and what he's able to do for us last year, but we feel like we are in the right track as far as having three capable goalkeepers that could step in in any game in the League and do well for us.

You know, we still have a week due to the bye week before we have to make a decision on a starting lineup, so they will continue to compete for that position, and either way it turns out, I think we'll be happy because all three have shown really, really well this preseason.

Q. Just to be clear, you have not made a decision on the starting goalie for March 4th?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Yes. That has not been made yet.

Q. Moving on, we are going to talk to Carlos Terán in a few minutes. Just wondering, is there a way, is it possible for you guys to find a way to get him, Czichos and Omsberg on the field at the same time? Because it seems like those three have the potential -- have all been very strong for you in the past. Is there a way to get them all on the field at the same time?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: I think if we went to a back three where we had three centre-backs, that would be possible but for right now because we play on a back four and we use the two central centre-backs, there's only two on the pitch at a time. You know, the way our games go sometimes, maybe we go to a three in the back to shore up a lead or something like that.

But to start a game because we play a back four, it will be two of the three, and again, there's very good competition there. I think in the beginning of the season last year, Carlos came in a little injured, Wyatt came in and was playing well, and when Wyatt went down, Carlos came in and he played well, and Rafa was just consistently good throughout the season.

We have a good situation there, and also we have Kendall Burks who has come on really, really well, has developed really, really well, and showed very, very well in preseason this year. So we have, you know, a quartet of centre-backs that are playing really, really well right now and it's a good situation for a coach to have. And especially a team like us that want to continue to keep it as zeros in the back, it's really, really good to have that strength back there in your

team. So we are very happy with all four players, and again, we have another week to decide on the starting two, but it would be two at a time as far as how we line up to start a game on March 4th.

Q. And just to clarify, Wyatt after the injury, how is he doing physically right now?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: He's doing well. All of the players that ended the season last year injured have come back and are playing well right now. We still have to be careful with some guys because, you know, we don't want to re-injure guys but we are very happy with the way the guys are performing and it makes for competition. That's all we wanted, you know, is to have players competing week-in and week-out for that position come Saturday at 7:30 at night because I think at times last year it was too easy to just say, okay, this guy is probably going to start or that guy is probably going to start. We wanted to MLS is Back sure in the off-season at every position, we had minimum two guys competing for that spot on Saturday because, you know, that's how you get your team better. That's how you get your training sessions to be more competitive and I think we are on right track with that.

Q. You guys brought in Arnaud from Montpellier, and you highlighted that you wanted at least one position at each position to try to get the best out of each other. What does he offer that maybe Justin Reynolds doesn't? I know there's a big age gap there but, do you see Justin getting some game time there this year besides Arnaud?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: As far as that position goes, we have three guys there, so we have Arnaud, we also brought in Dean, and we have Justin that we brought up from the academy from the second team.

So Arnaud was brought in because we needed someone after losing Boki. We needed someone with some experience there, so he was brought in. He's a very good footballer and he plays the style that we like as far as how we like for our outside backs to get forward. So he fits that profile very, very well, so that's why he's here.

But again, it's competition. You know, I would say Arnaud, he's probably the frontrunner there, but as far as backing him up, we have Justin and we have Dean, also, that can play a little left side also but he was mainly brought in to compete for that position at right back. So we are now three deep in every position but that's one position that for sure we have three guys that we're going to allow to compete for that position. Just tin is probably a little faster, probably more athletic but he's probably 18, 19 years old and we have Dean who is, you know, about 24, 25, has

played some time in the USL but Arnaud was brought in because we needed to shore up that position after losing our starting right back last year.

Q. So I'd like to ask you, the way that you prep for the New York City game, is there like added pressure when it comes to starting the season off with a team that obviously ended up in the standings like they did last year that kind of give the Fire some trouble last year? Is there added pressure since this is the first game of the season?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, you know, in this job, there's always pressure, right. But no matter who you're playing in this league, you'd better be prepared. You have to be prepared week-in, week-out, because there's a lot of parity in the League and at any point, any team could -- can beat you. So we realize that, you know, first two games against the teams we finished playing for the Eastern Conference Final Championship last year, so it's not going to be an easy task.

But you know, we can't let that pressure stop us from, you know, being confident, and stepping out there and being confident. Especially in the first game. We are at home. We know that if you take care of your games at home, you'll put yourself in a good position as far as August, September, making the playoffs. We definitely want to start off on the right foot this year, and it could have been an expansion team in St. Louis or it could be NYC FC. The pressure is always going to be there and we would have to, you know, make sure that we are prepared and ready to play.

But you know, that being said, it's a home game and we are expecting to win our home game. So we are going to go out and do -- try to do exactly that and not let the pressure get to us.

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