

# Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Chicago, Illinois, USA

## Ezra Hendrickson

Press Conference



**Q. Curious about your initial feelings with Alonso Aceves and what he can bring to the club going forward?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, he's another young, talented player that we've been able to bring into the squad. Our scouts did a really good job of going out and searching and making sure we made the right choice with our last 22-initiative player, so he fits that. We're happy to have him. He's going to be a very good addition to the team. He's in training already, so that's good.

**Q. Just switch gears a little bit, the news about the training facility, what's your reaction to that project now seemingly like it's finalized, and just what does that mean for the club to have that coming in the not-too-distant future?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, I think giving back to our community has been the score of our club mission, and this is just another way for us to be impactful in that situation. We have a world-class sporting facility and we'll be able to help the people in that community.

I think it's going to be very impactful and I think it just goes to show how embedded the club is, our own, starting with Joe Mansueto, just wanting to be a part of this community, and enhance the lives of the people in our community.

**Q. What's your perspective on Alonso Aceves? When do you expect him to be in market, and what do you expect him to contribute to the team?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: He's in market and he's training with us right now, so he's available. He's just another player that he adds competition to a squad that we are trying to make as deep as possible, because we know with the grueling MLS season how having depth is important. He's going to compete for a starting position, and he's just another player that, you know, at his age, that you see a lot of potential, a lot of talent. He's played, even at his young age in some big games.

He's going to bring that to the squad and he's going to make us even better, at least defensively for sure. He's a good 1v1 defender, and he's good the ball, too, so getting forward is something we'll be looking forward to getting from him, that ability to getting into our attack.

**Q. This Saturday, you'll probably have a lot of fans out this Saturday. How do you plan to come up with all the players that you have? You said that you have multiple positions available now.**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: We have done a good job in the off-season to make the team deeper. But you know, injuries are something that you just can't, you know, get by sometimes. So with the two injuries that happened in week one and getting the two red cards on Saturday, it's depleted us a little bit.

But due to the fact that we've made the team stronger, it's not as devastating as it would have been last July or last August when we lost multiple players, and then we just didn't have the wherewithal to finish out the season as strongly as we were in the beginning or in the middle of the season.

So we don't like it. We wish we were at full tilt because these are very important games. It's going to be the third of three really, really big games. We've lost one and tide one and hopefully this weekend we win this one. But playing against New York, Philly and now Cincy, it really sets the stage and really, because you're coming up against who most people feeling are the top teams in the conference.

So it's a good test for us, another good test, but we are at home and so we are expecting to win these games when we are at home and that's what we are going to go out and do on Saturday.

**Q. Just wondering, on Saturday, what did you think of Chris Brady's performance? Obviously there were some ups and downs. Continuing on that point, last year, you guys went through the growing pains with a young, talented goalie, and now it looks like you're poised to maybe do that again. How prepared are you to go through those again this year, and just how confident are you in Chris that he can get past some of**

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## those bumps?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: I think first of all, Chris has been performing really well, through the preseason, in the first couple games, I thought he's done well also.

I'm sure he would like to have that goal back from Philly, but that's something that, you know, young players go through those growing pains, just unfortunately when you're a keeper, that gets a little highlighted. It's a little exaggerated because that's what people see. I thought up until then, in that game he was playing well and he made a couple big saves for us.

Yes, it's growing pains, but we are confident in him and his abilities, and now obviously we've got to win some games, so can't be making, you know, too many mistake, especially, in that position. I think for now, he's in a good space, and he'll rebound really well from that.

If you remember last year when Gaga was going through his two or three games where he had some downs, he was able to work his way out of that. Hopefully Chris keeps that time of mentality. He's a very strong-minded kid, so we expect a similar outlook and a similar recovery as we saw in Gaga last year.

**Q. What did you learn from that experience going through that with Gaga that you might be able to apply to Chris this season? I know they are not the same person, but there are some similarities. What can you apply from that experience to Chris if that does happen to him this season?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, as a coach, the key is reading the player, because every mayor is going to handle a devastating situation differently.

But from reading Chris and from being around him, I think he's very strong mentally. I think he'll be fine. I think he'll get through this and he'll be better for it on Saturday.

I'm not worried about him going out and being in a shell or being nervous or anything like that. Now if that happened to be the case, then we'll make, you know, the necessary moves that we need to.

But as for now, I think the kid is going to be fine. I think he's going to come out and make some big saves for us when called upon. We don't really ask our keepers to make big saves, because we're very organized defensively. But when that opportunity does present itself, I think he'll be up for the task on Saturday.

**Q. First off, I know it's only two games, but in general,**

**what is missing? It looks like it's another reconstruction, at least of the roster; the ideas are there and the model of play is there, but what are you missing now?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: I've been saying this in the preseason, and it was a fact of last year, we just have to finish. We just have to finish our chances. We create enough chances, especially early in games; that if we take those chances, it makes the game a lot easier for us.

Let's take the first game. We get -- defend really, really well in the press. We get Kacper played in, and we don't take that. Now they come and score at our place, and we have to fight to crawl back into the game to tie it up. We end up getting a second goal which got called off-sides. But I think had we taken that goal, which, you know, it's a 90 percent, you have to make that, 95 maybe, some would say.

We go to Philly; it's a very tough place to play. Every chance you get, opportunity, you have to take it. I think they have won now 10, 11 games in a row at home. It's a very hard place to play, but we came in with a very good game plan.

We switched to the two forwards to help for the lack of midfield presence that we had losing Fede and Jairo the week before, and we started off really, really well with a good mentality. We get the ball forward; we get the free kick. We have five, six guys, 6'2" or higher, and we knew that set pieces could be a big part of the game. We get one in the first 30 seconds that we should have taken but we end up -- we missed that.

Played a really good steady first half with them. I thought it was an evenly played match. Not so much on the referee end but we're not going to go into that. But still, it's 0-0 at half; and we come out, take that red card in the first five minutes, and it becomes difficult from there. Now we have to play 40-plus minutes a man down.

We gave it the best we can. You know, but you can only hold out for so long. Unfortunately we gave up that goal in the 89, 90th minute, and it's really hard with six minutes added time to kind of get back into the game. But we still pushed and tried to get it.

But my point is, had we taken that goal in the first 30 seconds of that game, and we also had a couple other opportunities we had, Blake made a couple good saves, I remember one on Kacper's head in the back post. If we take one in the first 30 seconds, it's a changed game. Now they have to come and open themselves and give us more chances to create chances.

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So, finishing. Finishing; it's what's lacking right now. We work on it. It's not like we don't work on it. Because while we're trying to keep our defensive shape, we want to add some dimensions on our finishing, and we're getting players in. That's going to continue to challenge and make the team better and hold guys more accountable.

Right now, it's our Achilles' heel. We don't give up many goals. We're not going to give up many goals, but we've got to get goals on the other end. One goal in two games, it's not a good start for us considering what it is that we're trying to accomplish this year.

We need to take our chances. If we weren't getting chances, then it's a different topic. But we're getting the chances and we're getting good chances, too. We've just got to be more clinical, more efficient, more effective when we do present ourselves with those opportunities. And it's not just one person. It's whoever is in that position, you know, being composed, being confident, and just sticking it away.

**Q. How many players are you losing during the international break? As far as I know, maybe Gaston is going to be called up.**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: I'm not quite sure as yet. There are a couple guys that's been called in, but I'm not sure who is going to be going. Hopefully not too many because we are already depleted with a couple injuries.

**Q. You don't have that number now?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: No, I don't have the number. No, sorry.

**Q. Injuries, that's my question. What's the prognosis currently for Jairo and Fede, and also how is Shaqiri doing right now?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: So Shaqiri had some tightness in his leg, lower leg. So would he have been real careful with that. Hopefully he's in for Saturday, and I expect him to be.

Jairo and Fede, different situation. They probably are a couple weeks still out. Hopefully after the Miami game, we will have these guys back. If for some miracle we get them back by next week, but they will be out again for this weekend.

**Q. Are there any other injury concerns?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: No. A couple nicks and knocks, but nothing that we should be worried about. Hopefully in

the next couple days, nothing happens, as I knock-on-wood (knocking on wood table).

But beyond those two, that's for sure out this weekend, no one else is out at this point.

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