

# Chicago Fire Media Conference

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## Ezra Hendrickson

Press Conference



### **Q. Wondering the status of Shaq, Fede, Jairo and also Gastón Giménez.**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Okay, so Gastón is fine. He's in training. We have to be very cautious with him. He was starting to get a little soreness in that hamstring, so we had to get him off the pitch. Shaq is possible for this weekend. Fede and Jairo Torres would still be out.

### **Q. And just to continue on that topic just a little bit, maybe a little different but seeing the way that the attack has been in the last two games with Guti in the middle with Maren and Chris Mueller, would you consider going forward with that even when Shaq is healthy?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: I think when Shaq is here, he'll play. It's a good issue to have as a coach. I thought Brian has come in and played really well in the No. 10 position as he did last year whenever Shaq was not available. But I mean, with the experience and quality that Shaq brings to the team, that's not something that I think two games should unseat him of. There's a little bit of respect that goes towards that, also. He's a very experienced and very -- the engineering that he brings tonight pitch for us as a team really represents us.

We are a better team with Shaq than we are without, but I'm happy that the team is getting better, and we are happy to play without a player like him of his caliber. It shows progress what we are trying to do and trying to build. As long as Shaq is well. He'll be on the pitch.

### **Q. Is there a way to fit those four on the field together?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Yes, definitely. That's something as a coach after watching the past couple games, you start thinking of ideas and ways to do that. But we don't want to be so offensive minded that we give up too much in the back. I'm really not happy right now with the way we are giving up these silly goals, so I have to take that into

consideration while planning on making sure we have enough attack on the pitch, but especially as Fede is still out because what he brings as far as ball winning and recovery, without him, we have to make sure we have enough guys to protect because we are not always going to have possession of the ball.

It's a good problem to have. I welcome it. The staff and I, we are very, very happy the way the team has been playing the past couple of games. We are in a good situation. We just want to make sure we remain consistent.

### **Q. Wanted to start with a non-Chicago focused question, but we are connecting with a bunch of coaches around the league to get to the bottom of how has St. Louis started 5-0-0, so fight a lot of expectations externally, to say the least. What has most struck you about them as a club, and whether it's identity, tactics, if you have the answer for why everyone passes it to Klauss right in front of goal, I'm sure people would love to here. It what's your perspective on what the newest team in the League is able to accomplish?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: It all comes down to execution. They as a team, Bradley have them playing very, very organized as a team. We all get a break every now and again. Against NYC FC we got a ball played in to our striker but we didn't execute it. So their execution, when they do get those passes played to them, has been excellent. As a team, there's a spirit amongst that team is very good and it's good to see. I know it's an expansion team and it wasn't expected but he has got them in a good frame of mind and I'm sure they will take the added bad passes they have been receiving but beyond that they have been playing really well.

It's a team effort. It's a team effort. If you look at the team, they are scoring goals but there's no superstar on the team. Everyone rolls up their sleeves and fights for each other at home and on the road. I'm really happy for them and what they have going on down there.

### **Q. Brian Gutiérrez is finding some good form. What's the U20 outlook look like for him?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, he's doing well. I'm sure the



U20 are going to ask for his services and want his services but first and foremost, he's a Chicago Fire, and he has to, you know, be here for us and you know, it's a situation where we have invested a lot in Brian. We want Brian to be here. Brian, you know, I've said from last year, with him and Jhon Durán, about the ceiling this guy possesses. I like the way he's developing but right now his focus needs to be with the fire. He's going to get games and continue to develop but I think with being us right now is best for him.

**Q. My question is similar to the previous two. Guti has been very, very good at No. 10, nine goals for the team and he's been involved in eight of them. Is putting Shaqiri on the wing like he plays for the national team something you would even consider or would you just eliminate that possibility to get Guti in his best role?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: We can't give up too many tactics here to whoever is listening, but it's a possibility. But right now, you know, we are just happy that the team is playing well. We are doing the things that we need to do to finally put the ball in the back of the net. And we are just going to continue that way. Once one shot gets back, we'll determine what's the best way to move forward.

What I will say good Brian Gutiérrez is if you look at that game against Cincy, at 3-1 there are a couple times where we get on the break, he's going in on goal and he missed, once Kacper, another time he missed Maren and maybe once Chris Mueller and we talked about that. We have a reflection video. We sit down and talked about that on the Tuesday following that, and that was brought up in the meeting. The clips were shown to him where just being more aware and efficient in that final third to maybe sweep that ball to the open guy rather than trying to dribble three guys.

He was found in that similar situation on two different occasions in Miami. And he made the right choice. And to me, that shows me a player that's developing not just physically, but developing mentally as far as what he's thinking, his vision of the game, and so that's good because sometimes you tell young players and you show them clips and things that they could do differently and they go out and find themselves in the same situation and nothing changes. So it was good for me as a coach to see that bit of development in a short-week span where he can go from missing out to putting us up 4-1 and putting that game away to now getting that opportunity and not thinking self; thinking, what's the best decision for the team at the moment. First it was slipping back goals to Chris and then it was clipping it to Kamara or the game winner. I'm very happy every all with what Brian is doing and I hope he

continues to develop like that for us and for himself.

**Q. Any update on Koutsias?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Yeah, I'm expecting him soon, possibly latter end of this week but I don't have an exact date or anything. I know he finished his last U19 game earlier this week so we are expecting him sometime soon but I don't have a timeline as an exact date.

**Q. And the team still won the game but you did blow another lead beforehand. How much of a concern is that for you?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Very much. And it's not even so much the blowing of the lead; it's the type of goals that we are letting out. We are a team that pride ourselves on being very organized and making it very difficult to score. So teams are not playing through us, dribbling us in the back and putting the ball in the back of the net. It's simple little crosses that we're missing, it's not clearing the free kick. It's things like that that we need to really, really be better at because yes, we worked a lot on the attacking part of things, in the off-season, and we are seeing that benefit in us, but also, we need to make sure we get back to keeping teams at zero because it makes it so much easier for us to play when we don't give up those soft goals, and I thought that goal it was so untimely at the end of the first half, in Miami, it was just a bad goal to give up, what, 30 seconds or so to go in the first half, which kind of gave them momentum.

We talked about it at halftime and tried to regroup a little bit because that could, especially on the road, spiral you down wards, and then they come out and get a second goal which is a bad post, miss marked. But you have to also look at the positives. It's at home. We knew they could come out and try to tie the game which they did, but we never gave up. We made some switches and we made some changes to make sure we come away with points and when the opportunity presented itself to take all three, to do that, and I'm happy that we did that. I was happy for the boys in the end that we were able to finish out that game differently than we did against Cincy.

Just the type of goals we're giving up. If teams were completing 15, 20 passes and putting it in the back of the net I would say you know what, we need to revamp this whole way of defending, but it's not that. It's that five-second lack of focus, concentration, that's putting us in these situations. Hopefully that's out of our system now and you get the lead and you stay ahead and don't let teams back in because it's very troublesome when it happens like that.

**Q. What's the message to the guys on the Fire II when they are sent to that team?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: That you are constantly being evaluated. You are on a first team contract but the second team is for but this second team is for guys who don't get much minutes, who doesn't play in the game, to get minutes so that you stay physically fit and you stay sharp. The mental to them is it's not a kick about. It's not free to go down and just, it's second team. No, it's for you to go and stand out. You're on a first-team contract. We need players, whether you're coming back from injury or not, to stand out in those games, because we're watching the games. As a staff we're watching the games and you're being evaluated. Because we need to know that we can trust you to put you on the pitch in a first team game, and if you're not playing much or not playing at all on the first team, it's only way for us to see you in a game is with the second team. Yes, practice helps, you have to do well in practice also but getting you in game situation and minutes so that you're sharp and when you do step on to the first team pitch you're not lagging behind or it's a drop off for us.

That's the message when the guys go in. All the guys, when asked to do it. Even the guys who had to stay over, if the first team the next day were willing to do it; they are all willing to do it because they know it's part of their development, and if you're not getting on the first team, you have to get with the second team.

**Q. Did you have to pull any of their arms to spend an extra night in Miami?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: No.

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