

# Chicago Fire Media Conference

Wednesday, April 5, 2023

Chicago, Illinois, USA

## Ezra Hendrickson

Press Conference



our concern right now that we make sure that we get him as close to 100 percent as possible so that he can do what we all know he's capable of doing and what we've all seen last year. We have been very, very cautious and very, very patient with that.

**Q. Just wondering, always my standard question: What's the status is of Jairo Torres and Fede Navarro and Xherdan Shaqiri for this weekend?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: So Fede and Jairo, not likely. They still have at least a week, I think, to go.

Shaq is a possibility and it's likely but it's not a for sure thing as yet.

**Q. Okay. I'm sorry, go on. I jumped the gun there.**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: I was just saying that Fede and Jairo Torres more than likely out this weekend. Shaq is a possibility but I'm not sure yet.

**Q. And then just with Shaq, what's the level of concern about what he could provide for the team this season considering that he had some injuries last year and then started off this season injured as well?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, that's the thing. We want to make sure that we get him back as healthy, as close to 100 percent as possible and not risk any further injuries.

But you know, Shaq make us a better team. I think we feel like when Shaq is on the pitch, we are a better team. So we want to get him back on the pitch but we want to make sure that it's in the right timing and that, you know, we limit the chance of him re-injuring himself. Those type of injuries are tricky and we want to just make sure that it's close to 100 percent as possible before we send him back out there.

**Q. Is there concern about his durability and that you'll be able to depend on him to be on the field for most of the season?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: No, not at all. I think if we do the right things. You know, he's not 22. So these things are going to happen. He's shown that when properly fit he can really deliver and really make a difference for us. That's

**Q. I wanted to ask about Koutsias arriving today or this week, what have been your first impressions of him in Chicago, and is he going to be available for this weekend?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Yes, he came in a couple days ago. He's trained with us. I'm looking forward to him, seeing him this weekend. He is available for selection and more than likely he will be featured this weekend.

He's a very good player. He has a nose for the goal. And he's just a very good -- his hold-up play, his movement off the ball, everything that we saw while scouting him, we've seen in training this week.

We are very happy that he's here. It just adds another element of our attack, something that we know we need to get better at. So we are very, very happy that he's here and he's ready to go. He's healthy and ready to go.

**Q. Just as a follow-up, there's now three senior-level strikers on roster, Kei and Kacper who have been playing, Koutsias and Missael and Bezerra who have also been with the team and you've been linked with a DP striker. With all the strikers on roster, how would you describe the competition for just one spot on the field?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: As of right now women have four because there's no DP striker here right now. Bezerra is injured, so it's just Kacper, Kei, Koatsias and Missael.

But you know, only one good player at a time. There will be some games where we feature two forwards, but as of now it's all about competition. It's all about who is playing the best in games and in training that sees the play in time, because obviously we can't play all four.

So it's what we want. We want competition. We don't think it's too much competition, especially at that position for us. So it's very clear to everyone that whoever is in the best form, best shape, playing the best, producing most, will be



featured.

So that's where we're at with that.

**Q. Kacper made his 100th MLS start over the weekend, and I'm curious what you've seen out of him that makes it so he has been such a long-time player in this league, and the difference between him last year and him being healthy this year.**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, I think this year, he's healthier. The back injury is gone. He's able to have surgery in the off-season. We feel like his hold-up play has been better this year. We are still not getting the goals that we expect from that position from him. So that's something that we have to continue to work on with him because if he can score, it makes us that much better of a team, that much harder of a team to beat.

We have only lost one game so far in Philly, being a man down, so we are not losing games but there have been a couple games at home, especially, where we feel like we should have won and that we tied. In one of those games, we did score three goals. He did score a goal so that mainly wasn't from lack of scoring. That was just from not concentrating for 90 minutes. That's just not focusing late in game.

But in the D.C. game, you know, we told him this week, listen, guys, at home, if we can hold a team, keep a clean sheet, then we have to, have to, somehow, some way, find one goal, all right, because there are too many times last year we ended games 0-0 and just one goal would have changed our playoff position, stuff like that.

Kacper, he's much healthier now, and the last piece of it now is for us to get him, you know, producing more as far as putting the ball in the back of the net. And that's something that we are going to continue to work on, but not just Kacper, but all of our forwards, because it could make a difference between playing in late October, early November, or not.

Like I said, these two -- last two home games. We feel like we left four points on the board. Just means we have to go on the road now and find those four points. I think the team has showed that we are capable of doing that, so there's no panic or anything. But we do need to produce more as far as in the attack.

**Q. There was only about 8,000 fans in the crowd in the last two games at Soldier Field. Has that had any effect on you and the team?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: No, because we don't realize

there are 8,000 fans because our fans are very loud. You can hear them clear. They are cheering the whole time. So the fans have been very, very good.

We don't even realize there's not 10,000 people in the stands because of how energetic our crowd is and our fan base, our supporters. So we are happy for that.

There's been some bad weather in all three games. We are hearing that it's supposed to be better this weekend as far as the weather. We expect more fans to come out this weekend.

But at the end of the day, we have to give them reason to come and to keep coming. Win games and they will come; that's how I see it. But the future that have been there, we have really, really appreciate the energy and they are cheering for us.

**Q. I know you say there's pressure to win your home games but is there extra pressure to win these next two since they are both at home?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, we don't want to put added pressure on ourselves. One of the things that we have said to the players from day one is that if you take care of your home games, getting into the playoff becomes easier, and then it's less of a pressure on you on the road to pick up these points.

Because every time you don't pick up points at home, and mind you, it's not been losses but they have felt like losses because we felt like, especially the two, not the NYC FC we felt like a point was a fair deal because of the way that game went.

But definitely Cincy and D.C. felt like we should have got all six points and we didn't and we left four on the board. But we have shown that we can go on the road and get the points.

But the thought about winning home games is that when you do that, one, your path to the playoff becomes much much easier and two, you don't have to go on the road fighting for these extra points that you're dropping at home. And also, what we say to them is, guys, three points in April is just as good as three points in late September, early October.

So if we put ourselves in position to get all three like we did in the last two home games, why not do it. You know, why not do it? The miss by Kei late in the game, nine out of ten times he's going to core that and that's three points for us.

So we are happy but we are just not satisfied right now



with our play at home.

**Q. Wanted to ask you what you've seen out of Mauricio in the year and a half you've worked with him, what stands out about his game or work ethic?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: You know, he's a homegrown player that really bleeds Fire. You know, it started last year when Freddie was injured, he was starting, him and Gastón in the middle was a very good combination. Fede came in and started, but he never gave up. He kept plugging away. He works hard in training and he's always going to get on to the pitch. He's someone that he's probably going to play every game because of our situation.

So I'm just happy for him that he stayed focused and he didn't get discouraged when he didn't get playing time or didn't get playing time at all. He just kept working hard and that has kept him in our -- as one of our players that we look at when we say, okay, who do we need on the pitch, what type of players we want on this team. He's one of those guys. He brings it in training and when called upon in games he's been very, very good for us. We're very, very happy with him.

**Q. Wondering about Wyatt Omsberg, obviously coming back from the injury, having a very strong start to the season last year before getting hurt, what's the plan and outlook to get him some playing time and what has the message been to him as still waiting his turn right now?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Yeah, you know, Wyatt is another one, similar to Mauricio. He came in beginning of last year when Carlos was injured and played well, and even when Carlos came back, we kept him on the pitch because he was playing so well. Then he had the injury and Carlos came in and Carlos was playing well.

What we told all of the players coming into preseason this year is it's going to be an open competition for these positions. We are trying to make the team stronger. We felt like we were stronger, and we just felt at the start of this season, that Carlos was the best fit with Rafa.

Carlos brings an element that really complements Czichos very, very well back there. But I have spoken to Wyatt and told him, listen, you're going to get games. The month of May is going to be very congested. It's going to be a lot of three and eight, three and seven that we are going to need him. Just make sure that he continues to stay sharp.

He's played in one of the second-team games now to help keep that fitness that, game form. So he's willing to, you

know, step on the pitch whenever called upon and do the job, and we are very -- you know, we are very optimistic about what he does and what he brings to the team when he does step on the pitch. So he's another one.

But you know, players need games. Players need games. So we will get him on the pitch in a timely manner.

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