

# Chicago Fire Media Conference

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## Ezra Hendrickson

Press Conference



**Q. I'd be remiss if I didn't compliment your shirt. Always good to see a Caddyshack reverence. Very well done. But beyond Caddyshack, just wondering what the status is for Shaqiri, Fede Navarro and Jairo Torres?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, we are hoping to have all of them available for this weekend. They will train tomorrow and Friday. We'll see how they get on in those two training sessions and hopefully we can have them in some capacity this weekend.

**Q. Okay. Cool. And then just moving on, you know, you guys after, you know, unbeaten in four, winning the Minnesota match, which I think you might have said was a statement. How important is it to build off that against Philly, which isn't off to the best start and might rotate their squad a little bit for the Champions League, but it's, it's Philly. So how important to continue that momentum against one of the better MLS sides?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, it's a couple of things. First, it's the only team that has beaten us this year, so we have that in the back of our minds. We felt barring that 45-minute man down, maybe we come out of there at their place with a point which would have been a good showing.

So we want to basically take those three points back that they got from us at their place, so that's one thing.

The second thing, we want to show progress, and what we have told the players is that, guys, playing well for one game, a couple games is one thing, but can you continuously do that. Can you have some consistency with your progress that you are making. We are home. We just need to pick up four points. We need to -- I don't want to say, revenge, but we do want to get those three points that we felt like we lost there at their points.

We want to get the three points, also, because it's a home game and also because we want to continue to build on

what we have been able to do over the past four weeks or since we have played them, since we lost that game to them.

Continue to build and trying to make progress with our own -- with our own team, with our own organization to get to where we are trying to get to.

**Q. We Johnny Dean coming on next, and his career, a bit unique for MLS, drafted, cut, coming through USL. What makes it so he has been able to thrive in the roles you put him in thus far?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: I think it's all him, his personality and his ability. Johnny is a player -- and give a lot of credit to our scouting department and people that go out and look even at the lower legs to find talent and find players that we feel can help our organization.

You know, he has come in with a personality of, you know, 'I belong in this league, and I'm going to show every day that I belong in this league.'

And we have a policy here: If you train well and you play well, you'll going to get your opportunity and you'll get more opportunities. He's been able to do that, we're happy for him. He's a big part of this team. Even though he's just in his first year in the League, we saw it in preseason and we are really happy with the way he's come in and really played well when asked and called upon in games.

Even as a starter at left back or coming in and playing some right back, some right wing, he's been able to fit in and his versatility helps a lot. Good personality, good attitude, good player. Very versatile. He's going to get a lot of opportunities if he continues this way.

**Q. Since the last match up between Philadelphia, how have the Fire improved and improved as a team since the first game against the Union?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: I think we showed some growth, even in preseason, in the NYC FC game, even the Philly game, going into a place that's so hard to play and so hard to get a result, lasting up until the 89th minute where we broke.

But I think since then, and maybe that game brought the

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players to a realization that, listen, if you can go to a team like Philly, one of the top teams in the League and give that kind of a performance, this is something you can do week-in and week-out.

I think we have shown since then, you know, the Cincy game, played really well but you know, let those last two goals in the last, you know, five, six minutes of the game. Kind of took -- took a step back, sort of, but we went out the very next week in Miami; got up. They came back and we were able to finish that game, late in that game and won that game on the road.

So I think that, and also, encouraged some belief and I think from that Philly game, because we performed so well, the players, their confidence rose, and they have carried that with them.

You know, we didn't get four points this year against D.C. at home, or Cincy, but we feel like even when we don't get four points, let's make sure we get something out of all the game and that's been good for us and that's why we are in the position that we are in right now.

**Q. Since you've seen that grow since this game against Philadelphia, what are you expecting from your team as you play against them on Saturday?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, we are at home, so I expect them to come out very confident. I expect them to use that framework from the game that we played in Philly, and just have that, you know, attitude and confidence about them as we start the game.

Yes, they are a very good team. I know they are not -- maybe not doing so well in league play right now but I think that's a result of, you know, shuffling the lineup, trying to give a push for the Champions League, but they are a very good team, so it doesn't matter who they put on the pitch on Saturday. We have to be ready and we have to go out with that same kind of confidence that we've been playing with all year and I think that will bode well for us, and at the end of the day, we are at home, and we need full -- three points, and that's going to be the message to the players.

**Q. Probably you find out yesterday that the Fire will face Chicago House in the U.S. Open Cup, I know it's too early to talk about it but what's the reaction in the locker room and your coaching staff about that?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: We talk about it amongst the coaches. C.J. Brown, actually, went up and scouted a game, and so he has a scouting report. But we are very familiar with the House. It's a team, a local team. We have seen them play against our second team before, so we

have a pretty good idea of what they are all about.

But C.J. has a full scouting report about all the things that they do. At the appropriate time we will start focusing on that game and that team. But for now, we have two big MLS games coming up, and we are not even looking forwards Atlanta, so definitely not looking towards the House right now. It's all about Philly, and the conversations have been, beyond, recognizing, okay, who we are playing for the Open Cup, the conversation has been about Philly and solely Philly.

**Q. It's become clear in the last four weeks that this team does have depth and a lot of options around the pitch. How does that change things for you as a coach, and how much of a challenge is that to try to work deserving players in that might be in place of other deserving players?**

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, it's a welcome problem. We felt that we were lacking last year due to injuries or some players just not being ready yet for the MLS game, and that's something we wanted to adjust in the off-season and address as far as making sure, minimum, two-deep at each position. We are close to there. We are still not finished. We are still not quite where we want to be, but you know, it's a great problem to have.

I want and I tell the players every week, guys, I want to make -- I want you guys to make my decision come Friday or whenever we decide the starting lineup to be difficult. I don't want it to be easy. Sometimes last year, you knew by Tuesday who was going to play on the weekend because just the competition just wasn't there. The drop-off from the starters to the non-starters, the gap was too wide and it cost us sometimes late in games because we just didn't have answers for, let's say, Charlotte bringing in Arena late in the game.

So we have that now and injuries kept us being at full facility but with Shaq and Navarro and Torres and these guys coming back, it's going to be even more stronger of a team. It's going to make my job harder as far as player section but it's something I have and we are happy as a staff to have because it can help us from game-to-game.

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