

Chicago Fire Media Conference

Wednesday, May 3, 2023

Chicago, Illinois, USA

Ezra Hendrickson

Press Conference



Q. I was just wondering, you know, with the squandered leads late and the late goals allowed, and the fact that you've really stressed that and really made that a big point for you, though, are you concerned that your message just isn't getting through to the players about how to close matches?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: No. And the reason why, it's because marking up on set pieces, and it's not just late in the game, it's throughout the game, our set piece marking just have not been good enough. It's a fixable thing. So it's not something where you're telling the players about it, and there's no hope of it being fixed.

You know, if we were sitting here talking about giving up three goals per game and losing games 3-0, stuff like that, and I kept repeating about what the issues were and it wasn't changing, I'd be more worried. I'd be more concerned.

And we talk to the players about if we could just be even league average in defending set pieces, how much further up the table up we would be. That's something that's a group, we've decided we can fix, we have to fix and we will fix.

Coming up this week, will not be no lesser task because of Nashville and their prowess in their attacking set pieces, so it's going to be another big test for us. We just have to get better at that. I think the rest of our game has improved so much that it's just that last part that we are just not very good at right now but we working on it and it's very, very fixable.

Q. Hope you're doing well. I wanted to ask about the availability of a couple players: Carlos Terán, injured in the previous game, Jairo Torres, and Shaqiri coming back to full fitness and the last two, your the players have done quite well in their place. What are your thoughts on that situation with the two DPs and their competition that's been doing quite well?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: We have to be very careful with both Shaq and Torres because they are that -- they are so important to what we do here and to our team. Beyond being DPs, they are very good football players. And yes, without them being on the pitch for the past five or six weeks or so regularly, we've done all right.

But we can't negate their capabilities, their abilities to make us a better team. We feel like they make us a better team, and that's why we have them on the team and that's why they have such labels to them. We have to find a way to integrate them with the players, and that's what you need from a team, from players who maybe don't normally play as much when a star player or a player who normally starts goes down. Can the next guy step up; is it next man up or is there a big drop-off there, and that's something that we try to fix in the off-season.

I think we have done a very good job of not having such a very big drop-off of when we do take injuries or when someone is unavailable, possibly for national team duties or whatever-have-you. We just have to find a way of integrating them into things. We are being very cautious in the way we deal with things, as far as not rushing them back too quickly.

And when you have the guys in their absence doing so well, it kind of gives you that luxury to be able to make sure you slowly get them back into the swing of things. So that's good that the guys who have stepped in have stepped up.

Also, Terán, he's day-to-day. We are going to make a decision on that within the next couple of days as far as his availability for this weekend. But he, also, is a big part of what we do. You see what has happened to us in two games now that he's had to come out of the game. You know, it's taken a toll on us because of the type of player he is and how good he is back there.

Q. Kind of a little bit off-topic and looking forward, talking about Gutiérrez and Chris Brady, the U-20 World Cup is coming up and the United States are going to announce their roster in the coming week or weeks. In your position as a head coach, what's it like balancing these decisions where you don't have to release the players, and I'm not sure if you are or not going to or if they get called. But, like, what goes into

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those decisions from your end for losing two players who have been key starters for you, if you are to let them go, or keeping them rather than letting them go to kind of this big tournament that the national team are trying to call them into?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Yeah, you know, the answer to that is no, we will not be releasing those two players. We discussed it at length as a staff, with the front office.

We feel that because these players are such an integral part of our team, two regular starters, having them being gone for such a long time during that time would be detrimental to what we are trying to do as a club and what our goals are as far as getting into the playoffs.

You know, our May schedule if you look at it, it could be possibly seven or eight games in just May alone. So to not have these players along with some of the injuries we have would not be conducive to getting to our goal. So in that aspect, we decided that, you know, we will not let those two players go.

We understand the situation. Players want to represent their country. But it's something that we discussed very, very thoroughly and decided that for the club's sake, it's best that these players stay on with us because they are regular starters.

Had they been players who are not playing much on the team, the decision would have been much easier or probably lean towards letting them go but because of how important they are to what we are trying to do here as a club, we have decided that we were not going to allow them going to the tournament.

Q. I know you're not thinking about this right now but I want your personal opinions about confronting next week, St. Louis FC, one of the best team from the league right now, and also probably you are going to use some rotation for next week. I want to know your opinions, and also any injuries updates for some of the players.

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Yeah, so we really don't want to focus on St. Louis right now because Nashville, it's not an easy task. Having to go there and play, it's not going to be an easy task for us. So our focus right now is on Nashville.

Come Saturday night after the game, we will switch our focus to St. Louis but I will say that St. Louis is a very good team. It's not a typical expansion team. They have shown that in the MLS play so far. That's a team, and we play them twice within five days, you know, Tuesday and then again on Saturday. So it's two big matches coming up for

us next week. But as far as right now, our focus is on Nashville.

As far as the rest of the schedule and having to rotate, that's something that we wanted to make sure we did in the off-season. Make sure that we have players, again, that when we have to rotate; that it's not such a big drop-off. I think last year a lot of times, it was a big drop-off from starters to when we had to rotate in. It cost us, even in the Open Cup, first round, being out. So we wanted to make sure that that didn't happen this year, and we beefed up the squad a bit to avoid that.

So what I told the players this week during our reflection about last week's game is, listen, May is going to be a very congested schedule. A lot of people are going to be called upon, and every player registered with the first team signed with the first team, has to be ready to step up when their number get called, if their number gets called, because we are going to have to rotate. We just can't run out the same 11 for the seven or possibly eight games in 30 days or so.

So the players are aware that, you know, rotations are coming, and everyone is upbeat. Everyone is really ready to step on and do their task. But we are expecting to have to rotate our squad a bit.

Q. What was the reaction of Brady and Gutiérrez when you informed them that they were not going to be going to the U-20 World Cup?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, this had been back early in the year, I think February or so, sometime during preseason. And myself and Pelly and Georg sat down and spoke with them and explained to them the reasoning. And of course, every player wants to represent their country. A U-20 player, a U-20 World Cup really wants to go there.

But we just explained to them our reasoning. And I think after a while, they understood. Of course, they really wanted to go. They expressed that it was something they were looking forward to, and we didn't want to disappoint them and we didn't want to disappoint the U.S. Federation.

But we have to take the priority here in this situation is the Chicago Fire, and so we had to keep that in mind when we made that decision. It was not so much about, oh, we are just going to keep them going.

It's about, we are keeping you from going and this is the reason why. And I think after we explained to them, you know, our reasoning behind it, they were fine, and they have been fine. They both went on now and did -- like I said, this happened in preseason. They have had a pretty

good start to the year, and Guti has been very, very influential in what we are doing and the progress that we are taking, and Chris has come up with some big saves, also.

I think they understand what we are trying to do as a club and why the decision that we made was such.

Q. Considering the questions around the availability of Carlos Terán, we saw Mauricio come in with his stead with Wyatt and Kendall not on the bench over the weekend. Is that a role potentially for Mauricio to fit into, or are you looking more at the traditional center backs of Wyatt and Kendall?

EZRA HENDRICKSON: Well, certainly, Wyatt and Kendall are the traditional center backs that will get the first call as far as replacing one of the starters.

However, Wyatt had a slight hamstring injury that he couldn't be on the 20, and it came down to taking Mauricio or taking Kendall on the bench. And because Mauricio had that ability, that versatility to also play center back, we wanted -- we decided to go with him because we needed cover in his normal position. One of the two pivots because Freddie Navarro was just his second -- his first MLS start, and we had limited time where we can play. We knew we couldn't play him more than 60 minutes or we would risk a re-injury there. We knew we had to come out. We know Gastón is also not fully 100 percent, so there's a possibility that he would have to come out, also.

We figured with having to possibly play Mauricio at one of the pivots, bringing in him and Herbers and his ability to also play center back, of the two, Mauricio was the better choice to put on the bench. It just so happened that Carlos had to come out in the first half, and we had to put Mauricio back at center back. But the intention was that Carlos would finish the way we started in the back, and Mauricio would come in to spell either Gastón or Fede in the middle.

But didn't happen that way but we were able to adjust because we accounted for that just in case. Because going into that game, we had, you know, Shaq is coming off injury, Jairo is coming off injury, Gastón is not fully 100 percent, and then Fede is coming off injury, so he had limited time. We had to juggle with a lot of scenarios as we were plan our 20 and our starting lineup, and we were able to get through the match without any further significant injuries beyond Carlos.

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