

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Georg Heitz

Press Conference



Q. Wondering, first of all, why now, considering both it's relatively early in the second season, Ezra's second season, and also with a pivotal Open Cup game tomorrow. Why did you decide to do this now?

GEORG HEITZ: Yeah, thanks for the question. I think it's a fair question. You know, we were trying to analyze properly and we just said, look, a season can slip away quickly, and we really thought that we had to change now.

Now, you can always discuss whether we could have waited until tomorrow. There's never a good timing for such a decision. It's always a difficult moment, of course, especially for the ones that are concerned.

Q. I wonder if you can go through kind of looking back on the decision to hire Ezra, and what you think kind of went wrong, especially obviously in the last few months but maybe in the big picture overall in the last couple seasons.

GEORG HEITZ: Well, what shall I say. We were hopeful and we thought the philosophies would be aligned. I think in the past few months, yeah, we realized that the philosophies were not aligned any more, and you will understand that I cannot go into details there.

I would like to take the chance to thank Ezra for his hard work and his dedication. I can understand that he is disappointed. It is never the fault of one person if such a thing happens, and of course, I am the first one who is responsible for the results of this club, for the sporting department of this club, and therefore, I would not blame it on Ezra. It was maybe the whole situation, the whole consolation was no longer one that we considered could be successful.

Q. I just wanted to ask, your contract is up at the end of the season, did that factor into this decision at all, and how involved would you say you're going to be in the search process given that you don't know if you're going to be here next year yet.

GEORG HEITZ: Thanks for the question. It had no influence at all. My job is to do the best or to do what I think is best for this club, and I only think about the club and not about myself in such a situation.

We have announced, as you know, that Frank Klopas will be our head coach for the remainder of the season, and then we'll take it from there and see who will be there, who will be here to decide on the future head coach.

Q. In what ways, I mean, do you think that Ezra was coaching the team any differently this year than he was, say, last year? Did you sense a shift in tactics, in the way he was relating to the players, in the way he was making decisions, any of those things?

GEORG HEITZ: Well, the only thing I can say is that you also saw that we dropped a lot of points in the last minutes of the games or in the last 30 minutes of the games, and this was something that was more and more concerning for us. That's one thing.

Whether ultimately this was because of due to coaching decisions or not, that's hard to say. Everyone in professional sports will always be assessed because of results, due to results, and that concerns me but that also, of course, concerns any head coach in professional sports.

Q. You guys appointed Frank and kept C.J. and Zach around. Frank is someone who has lost more games than he's won as a manager in Major League Soccer. Why is he the right person to keep around and elevate to that position, and why are C.J. and Zach still with the club at this point?

GEORG HEITZ: Short answer is they all know how to win trophies. I strongly believe in Frank's skills as a head coach. He has a lot of qualities when it comes to communication.

Maybe I also have to add that I really think, and I'm not the only one in this club, I really think that we have a team that should make the playoffs.

So we are hopeful that Frank can turn the wheel around and that we will start winning the games. We've dominated a couple of games but we have to close out these games.

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I strongly believe that Frank and his team, that they can turn the wheel around.

Q. There's a summer transfer window coming up, and you guys still have one open DP slot, and as Alex mentioned, your contract, you're up at the end of the season. Will you be looking for a designated player this summer, knowing that that designated player could outlive your tenure with the Fire?

GEORG HEITZ: Will I not? I didn't get that right.

Q. Will you be looking for a designated player this summer?

GEORG HEITZ: Most probably.

Q. Considering your contract?

GEORG HEITZ: Most probably. Most probably yes.

Q. Do you think that's a wise move for the long-term future of the club, though, considering your contract situation?

GEORG HEITZ: Well, I don't think I need to answer this question because I'm not the one who should answer this question, and you know this as well as I do.

Q. First of all, I want to find out why after selling Jhon Durán to Aston Villa and Slonina to Chelsea, Chicago Fire -- \$30 million, so why has the club failed to invest these huge sums of money into the club? That is my first question. The second question is, fans are agitated about the services of Shaqiri. Personally, how do you feel about his performance?

GEORG HEITZ: So I'll start with your second question. Of course, Xherdan is not happy with his performances. Everybody must improve. Every player must improve, especially the designated players, I understand this. But on the other hand, both of them also were injured, which is always a difficult situation for a professional athlete. And if you cannot perform at your best level due to an injury, this hurts. This hurts. This hurts the team, also. That's clear.

So everybody must improve and this includes, of course -- of course, Shaqiri.

The first question, we are not playing in a European league. We cannot spend whatever we want in this league, and I think that this club has spent a lot of money in the past, and I mean, we spend a lot of money for also acquiring Durán, don't forget that. The player cost a lot of money when we acquired him. The plan was not to sell

him after one season; the plan was to keep him.

But sometimes the dynamics in this industry are not to control. You cannot say no to a player who can go and play in the EPL. I think we found a very good striker with Kei Kamara. We found a very interesting young striker with Georgios Koutsias, and we also invested money in Koutsias, for example.

I think that it's not correct to say that we did not reinvest.

Q. I wanted to ask you, speaking to the players, what was their reaction, if you have spoken to them so far, and I'm curious what their reaction was to the change.

GEORG HEITZ: Yeah, of course I've spoken to the players. I usually say -- and everybody in my position would say the same, what we discuss in the locker room stays in the locker room.

But just generally speaking, it's always a sad moment when this happens; that's clear, and don't expect that anyone was happy. But on the other hand, it is also -- it is professional sports, and there is a huge task tomorrow awaiting St. Louis in the U.S. Open Cup.

So the players are professional athletes and they have to focus on their duties.

Q. Real quick, this is the second time since you've been here that Frank has taken over at the manager spot. What are the things that you see in him or the characteristics that you see in him that make you think he's not only a good fit back then in 2021 but here to try to get the team back to the playoffs?

GEORG HEITZ: Well, he knows the league. He knows the league very well and he knows our players. He's been part of this coaching staff for a while now. The coaching staff also always has a say when it comes to the roster building. He knows all the players really, really well. He is someone who likes to speak to the players. He's a positive person. He believes in the players. He cares about people. He cares about his staff; that's also part of the head coach's job is to care about not only about the players but also about the staff. It's a management duty that he has.

Yeah, he'll do his best.

Q. Two questions, somewhat related, but maybe a little bit different so bear with me. The first would be, was this move done this early maybe to see just how good this roster is? Obviously there had to be some level of thinking maybe you guys were

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underperforming where it could be, and the second part, when you do make a move this early in the season, it seems to signal, look, we think we can do more, we can win more. Does that set up maybe an aggressive approach in the summer window to try to bolster this team and make signings, trades, to make a push for something big?

GEORG HEITZ: Yeah, I mean, to change the coach early might seem -- might look a bit aggressive. But on the other hand, you also want to provide the new coaching staff, you know, with enough time to also implement their ideas. So that's definitely one of the reasons. Then I think -- but that's my personal opinion; that the table does not reflect the strengths of this team.

I think we are much better than we look at the moment, which also, you know, is a good segue to your second question. Because no, probably not a very aggressive and not a very busy transfer window in summer for us because we believe that this team, basically, is strong enough to make the playoffs.

Of course, everybody knows, as I think Brian mentioned, we have a DP slot open, and yeah, we will of course discuss with the coaching staff and see what we can do there.

Q. When Frank was a head coach permanently with the Montreal Impact and with the Fire, his tactics were different to what Ezra's are right now. Are you expecting a shift in how the team will approach games on the field for the remainder of the season?

GEORG HEITZ: He will change things. Every head coach has different ideas; that's clear. What things he will change, you will have an opportunity to ask him in a couple of minutes about his ideas, but of course he will change things because we also, we want to start winning games. We should start winning games.

And so we definitely have to change a couple of things. Sometimes it's details. Sometimes it's not that obvious. Sometimes it's details. But Frank is also a very sensitive person, and I think he is a soccer expert. He will know what to do.

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