

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Frank Klopas

Press Conference



young kids some experience but now there's two-thirds of the season left and a Cup possibility as well. So how does that change your mentality, as opposed to two years ago?

Q. I guess to start off, having listened to Georg, he felt like there's more out of this roster than we've seen so far this season. What do you see as potential changes you can make off the jump to try to spark something in this team?

FRANK KLOPAS: Yeah, listen, I definitely believe that we have enough quality and a roster that's good enough to ultimately reach our goal, which is the playoffs, something that we said in the beginning. Then obviously a whole new season is beginning.

At the moment, I think we are also dealing with some injuries, and it's really short time to try to change too much, knowing that we have obviously a game tomorrow. Some tactical changes, but more than anything, just making sure that especially in such short notice, that the guys are well-prepared. They have a good understanding of the game plan. They know what to do when they step on the field, and more than anything, just give them confidence, believe in them. I definitely do. I'm fortunate, also that, on the staff, I have some quality people with me who, you know, have spent some of them all their careers putting the Fire jersey on. So they know what it means to put that jersey on, and I think they can transmit that to the group and what it really takes to represent the Fire organization.

So I think short term, more than anything, it's good to give the team confidence and make sure that they are really clear about the game plan, very clear about their roles on the field, and more than anything, man, it's like we've got to go out there and enjoy the game. That's the most important thing. It's a game that we love. And some moments like this, you know, we kind of forget a little bit of those things but I think you have to bring the joy and go and play and compete with passion and enjoy the game.

I think short term, more than anything, those are the things that I can try to focus on.

Q. When you took over for Rafa two years ago, it was basically just to see out the season, maybe get some

FRANK KLOPAS: I think it doesn't really change much because I'm in a role that, look, I want to win every game. Whether we're six, seven games or now, it's obviously more than half the season; the club has entrusted me to do a role.

I think I have the experience over my playing career and also have been a head coach here before in difficult situations to step in and do the job. For me I'm going to put everything I have, all my energy and my passion. I care a lot about this club, about the city, and I will bring all my experience along with my colleagues that I have.

Like I said, I have a really great staff with me and so I approach this in a way that we have a lot of games left. There's a lot to play for. Obviously there's no bigger game than tomorrow, an opportunity to advance in the U.S. Open Cup. We take this very serious, the club does, over the years. We have also myself with C.J. and Zach, guys that have won the Open Cup with the Fire and they know what it takes, and we can transmit some of that focus and determination to the players.

But I approach it the same way. I want to do the best job that I can and I want to try to help the team reach its goal, which is to be in the playoffs and continue to do so, but try to win an Open Cup, another one with this team. That would be an incredible accomplishment I feel. With some guys that have played together to be able to be on the staff together and to be able to raise a trophy that, would be incredible.

Q. One of the big talking points for the fans and pundits has been the failure to get the most out of big stars like Shaqiri and Jairo Torres. Does anything established out to you about that situation and how those players can help you reach the playoffs?

FRANK KLOPAS: I think they are both quality players. Myself, having an opportunity to see Shaq every day in training, the guy has got so much quality; and I know that a lot of the people haven't seen it in games where he has had the impact that he can.

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You know, last year in the season, I believe he started really well, his ability to make passes in the final third and put teammates in great spots to score. I think he was able to do that. I think this is something that he can continue to do but he understands that as a DP, there's a big responsibility, and him also to contribute, to score goals, to put assists on the field. But it has to be a team effort. He's not the one guy, the one piece that's going to solve all the problems. I think he can do his part. I think he can do more, that's for sure. I think maybe there's, you know, got to find a way how you can get him to have a bigger impact in games and maybe he takes one game where he has, you know, a breakout game where he's able to do that.

But he's got tremendous quality, and myself, I believe in order for this team to move forward and reach the goals that we believe we can, Shaqiri has to play a big part in that because he's got so much quality that he can impact the game at any given moment.

With Jairo, the thing with Jairo, he's been dealing with injuries. There's nothing he can do. It's been frustrating for him. It's been frustrating for us when you have a player of his quality, and now who missed a big portion of the season last year, and then now he's very close but he's not quite there yet. So I think he's very close where now he can become available for selection for the team. But he's also a player that I think can bring so much to the team, and it's been unfortunate that we haven't been able to have him because of injuries.

Q. You mentioned Xherdan Shaqiri. Is there a possibility this season that you implement an offense with him and Gutiérrrez on the field together. It's been a big talking point throughout the year. Obviously health has been an issue for Shaqiri, coming back from it, but do you see the two of them thriving on the field together?

FRANK KLOPAS: No, definitely. I think they are both quality players, and I think it's been really impressive to see. I've been here now, even with Rafa and Guti was a young player, and we gave him a lot of playing time. You could see his development year after year and we talked about him having a bigger impact in the final third and really maturing and being more consistent in his play over 90 minutes. Man, he's definitely grown into really a difference-maker in this league. There have been times even this year where both have played on the field. It's just, you know, at times, you see where has Guti been able to be at his best. I think when he plays and he can find space in the half-pockets where he can get the ball and turn and face at people, he's been really special, and right now, I think there's another element to his game, his final

passes, his ability to finish play is getting much stronger.

So yeah, there's definitely a way we have in the past, and I think continue to see where we can put both of them in the best spots for them to be successful, whether that's in the 4-2-3-1, maybe that's in a 4-3-3 where Shaqiri can also be out wide as a winger coming inside in the half-space. He's played there before with the national team. I've watched a lot of his games, playing as a ten and out wide in a 4-3-3.

I think we also have to be more creative and see where we can put the special players in positions where they can be at their best, because those are the kind of players that the fans want to see.

And at the end of the day, I think the fans pay (for) tickets because they want to see a show. Soccer is an exciting game and we want to see special players, and those are two are two very special players that the fans definitely want to come out and watch.

Q. Unless, maybe I missed this, and I apologize, but will be adding to your staff? I know that you have C.J. and Zach right now. Will there be any additions to the coaching staff?

FRANK KLOPAS: Well, we have C.J., obviously, and Zach and Jeff DeGroot has been the analyst. Also I'm going to ask him to do a little bit more of a role. And we have Nacho Torreño who has been our head of performance guy, but he's got a lot of experience, also, being on the sidelines with different coaches in Europe.

I think, look, it's just the beginning right now but I have to assess after this game and see what else do I need to give us best opportunity to be successful. As I said, I have tremendous staff with me, both C.J. and Jeff have done a tremendous job and Nacho has got a lot of experience.

As you can tell, my hair is very gray, so it seems like I have a lot of experience over the years. But yeah, I just think we have to evaluate. It's the first day. We play tomorrow. It's been not an easy day overall. A lot of stuff to deal with.

At the end of the day, you know, look, soccer brings people from all over the world together, and like I've always said, I think the sport builds friendships that last a lifetime. I think our working relationships might not last a lifetime, but then our friendships do. It's been a difficult standpoint from that part because -- from a human level, you build friendships and relationships, and those two guys are very good people and wish them the best, but we have to move on.

Yeah, we just have to evaluate and see what else is needed maybe after tomorrow's game and after Saturday's

game, also, and see what else is needed. But I can guarantee you that the club is committed. I've always said that and I believe it, an incredible owner. We are very fortunate to have someone like Joe Mansueto at this club who loves the city, who loves this team and seriously, if it's something that we need that will give us an opportunity to better ourselves and to give us an edge, he will be there to support us all the way.

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