

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Chicago, Illinois, USA

Frank Klopas

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the Leagues Cup match day-1 press conference. We're glad to be joined by Frank Klopas, head coach of the Chicago Fire.

Q. The tournament is coming at an interesting time for the team because you were just picking up some momentum, had some really good form in the league. Now you have a couple weeks off from league play, so what are your thoughts on the format of this competition coming where it is, and how much of a priority is it for your team at this moment?

FRANK KLOPAS: Yeah, it's a great question. I mean, I think when you get momentum and you're playing sharp and you're playing well, I think you want to continue to do that. Obviously we have this break now with a really exciting tournament, the Leagues Cup, that's really a special format against some really top-level teams in the Liga MX. It's a great tournament for us. Obviously when you're in the momentum, you want to continue to play.

But look, it's an opportunity to showcase our league, to play against -- in a format, tournament format, that's really exciting with some top-level teams from Liga MX. For us it's not league play but it's important games that we can continue to grow and build as a team.

I think that's the important thing, and I think it's also -- there's a lot in it for the players, also, so for them it's important that they're also excited about. Not only an opportunity from a money standpoint, but CONCACAF, but also to showcase every time you step on the field.

The exposure that our league is getting right now, I think everyone is watching, and it's important for them to represent the club, the league in the right way. I think we're going in with the right mentality. We've had good preparation. That's always important. I think the players will be excited to finally get on the field and play. It's not always fun training.

For us it's also an opportunity with this break, you know

yourself that we've had some players that haven't -- that are coming off injuries, guys like Carlos Terán, it's an opportunity for him now to get quality minutes against quality competition and to get his sharpness back, a guy like Jairo Torres, and hopefully in the next game we'll also have Federico Navarro available to play.

The games come at an important time. This tournament is an important tournament for us and for the league, and we're going to take it very serious.

Q. Is Fede available for tomorrow, or is that an available?

FRANK KLOPAS: No, he's not going to be available tomorrow. The hope was that he'll be available for the Puebla game, but also we have Doumbia on the roster, so it's an opportunity for him now as he's been training and looking sharp and stuff like that to get him really important minutes in really good competition, so I think he's not available for this one, but for the second game he should be available.

Q. Just to follow up on that, is there a timeline for Wyatt Omsberg to return?

FRANK KLOPAS: He's been running. And I think with the knee situation, I think he has no issues when he's doing runs that are straight forward. He's not cutting at this moment and stuff like that.

It's not soon enough. It's not that I haven't gotten to date to say, okay he's back in one week or this or that. He's training really hard, and I think it's just how reacts to every day he's pushed, and hopefully there's no setbacks, and I think so far it's been positive, but I couldn't really tell you now a date that he will be back.

Q. In terms of potentially rotating the squad or having these two games available over the next week, how important is it for the team to get the result tomorrow night in order to possibly be able to rotate some players in who might not be getting normal time in the league on Monday?

FRANK KLOPAS: Yeah, look, it's a tournament format so you're playing a lot of games in a short of amount of days, so you rely on the squad, and I think for me it's always



been about how guys are doing in training, guys that are in form, and that's why you want to have also a competitive roster with players fighting in every position.

I think this is what we've been evaluating now since our last match through these training sessions to see who's been the sharpest and then how do we approach this game against a very good Minnesota team.

For me, we take one game at a time and try to put at that moment the guys that are the sharpest but also try to give meaningful minutes in important games to other guys that need it.

Q. Frank, first of all, with Teemu Pukki's arrival with Minnesota, how do you think that changes the complexion of their team and how they play? I'm sure you saw some of the highlights from their match against Puebla. The second thing, the strategy involved, if it comes down to a shootout with the extra point on the line, do you like that? Instead of playing the two 15-minute halves, do you like going straight to the shootout where there's more strategy involved, who's going to take the kicks, what order, with no ties? Do you like that or would you prefer to have the two 15-minute halves and then go to the shootout?

FRANK KLOPAS: No, I mean, I think because it's the format that's the tournament you're playing every two or three days, four-day games, I like that there is a winner. I have no issue going straight into PKs. I think it's important to have a winner and get that extra point if you do so, so that answers from my standpoint that question.

The other thing, look, I think with Pukki, I think the difference is we played Minnesota early on, but I think you have Pukki, but also the X-factor for me, a key guy for them is Reynoso. He's really a game changer, and he really makes -- can make things happen in any moment. He can be quiet for 89 minutes and then he's got that ability, and the quality that he can turn a game upside down by himself.

Obviously Pukki is an experienced player. I watched him even when he was in Europe and stuff like that. He's really a good link-up player, and obviously he's got quality and composure in the box when he gets opportunities to finish.

But I think with him and then Reynoso, they have some other pieces they've added, a really good team, but I think really both those guys, Reynoso is an X-factor that really is a game changer.

Q. I wanted to ask you about a little bit about what the atmosphere has been around training for the club the

past few weeks with the success you've had in MLS, and how much do you hope that will translate as you go into this tournament?

FRANK KLOPAS: Yeah, I think it's always great when you win games. I think that there's a big belief within the team. I think that you try to reinforce certain things, and whether it's a game plan or change certain things from a tactical standpoint, and then when you do get results there is a bigger belief and confidence within the team, and I think that's also very important, I think, going into games with energy and intensity but confidence.

I think that's given to you by results ultimately.

We've had a little bit of a break because of the All-Star Game, also, and stuff, and we've had an opportunity to give guys a couple days off and then back in training.

It's also reinforcing every day the importance of every game, especially in this tournament format how important it is to go in and for us to compete and do well as a club and as a team.

I think we have a long way to go. We're trying to improve within every match, and I think this is another great opportunity before our next league game to continue to play really top-level games where it's going to help the players get sharper and improve but also us as a team.

I think the victories have helped a lot, but I think also it's reinforcing every day your ability to stay grounded. I think you have to celebrate the wins but be even keel because things in this league change really quickly.

We've worked extremely hard from the beginning of the season to put ourselves in a good spot, but the last 11 games are extremely difficult, and for us it's about just being focused, laser focused, continuing to work hard, and push the bar every day in training.

If we take our foot off the gas and if we think that we get complacent a little bit, then everything we've done, it's really easy to fall. Really hard to climb up that ladder. That's why it's important to stay grounded and level-headed and stay low and understand that we have a long way to go and keep working hard. If we have that kind of mentality and attitude in our approach every day and training that way, I think we'll be fine because I think through hard training and preparation is the one thing that takes doubt away from teams and from players. That's what I try to focus on.

Q. This game is going to be important for Chicago, same as Puebla. If Chicago wins against Minnesota,



Puebla will be eliminated from the Leagues Cup. Is there a pressure to score points tomorrow?

FRANK KLOPAS: I don't think there's any added pressure. Thank you for the question. I think that we're always going in with the right mentality to try to win the game and focus obviously on our strengths and have a really clear game plan.

But no, we're going to go in and try to get a good result tomorrow against a very good team. Obviously I saw the first game, so Minnesota playing at home, the atmosphere is going to be great. They have a lot of confidence going into this match.

But no, we're well-prepared and we're looking forward to the match. That's all I can tell you.

If we eliminate Puebla, that would be great, because I think it's important for me. For me, from my standpoint, I would love that every MLS team goes forward and eliminates every team from Liga MX. Sorry to say that, but that's the way I feel.

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