

Chicago Fire Media Conference

Monday, October 2, 2023
Chicago, Illinois, USA



Frank Klopas Press Conference

Q. I wanted to ask you, with the uncertainty of Messi, how do you prepare, it's kind of a two-part question, how do you prepare not knowing if arguably the best player in the world is going to play or not play? How does that affect you as you're preparing and also how is this team different when he's on the field from when he's not on the field?

FRANK KLOPAS: Really good questions. I think we have to prepare for both scenarios. I think even when he's on the field -- first of all if, he's not on the field, I think they are still a very good team. They have made some really excellent additions in the secondary window.

Obviously that's been shown within every match and the way they play and compete. Obviously with Messi on the pitch, it's an element to their team and in their game where you have a very good team but you have a player now that at any moment can turn the game upside down with one play, so obviously it's a little bit of a different team. Obviously with him on the pitch but we have to prepare both scenarios, if he's on the pitch, if he's not on the pitch. I think our tactical organization has to cover -- we'll go through a couple different scenarios, and then I think we have confidence. We're playing at home. We need to also be -- come out with a lot of energy. I think the atmosphere is going to be great. I think they are all fans here from Chicago, they want to come see obviously the game and see Messi but also it's an opportunity to showcase our talented players that we have. So we'll cover different scenarios, and like you said, obviously with -- if he's on the field, it is a different team because you have one player that at any moment, you cannot take your eyes off him and with one play can change the outcome of a game. But they are still a very good team.

Q. I wanted to ask about Shaqiri, he's had his ups and downs this season, sometimes he's really looked like that player we know he can be but he's also struggled at times. How do you think you can get the best version of Shaqiri in these important games down the stretch?

FRANK KLOPAS: I think Shaq is a player that steps up in big moments and in big games. I think he relishes opportunities like that when he can be in pressure moments. I think he's used to stepping up in pressure moments in all of his career, and I have all the confidence in Shaq. For me, he's still a difference-maker and in every match, I think he provides moments in his play that can change the game, also. I've always said that we need -- obviously other very good players on the team, very good team performance within the match to get the results.

I feel Shaq for me in the big moments, he's the kind of guy that you can count on. I know that he's going to be ready to give us something extra on Wednesday as we put ourselves in a great spot now. Everything is in our hands to take the next step and one game at a time, and also put us in a great spot in order to be there in the playoffs.

Q. Quickly, availability, curious if Brian and Rafa are at the point where they could potentially play a full match on Wednesday? And curious about your three center forward strikers. We saw Kacper get an extended run on Saturday, down a man but he was very successful on the pitch. Curious how you're feeling about that position with Kei still unable to find the goal in the last couple months but Kacper playing well and Koutsias getting that goal?

FRANK KLOPAS: That's a long one.

Q. Sorry, it's a big week.

FRANK KLOPAS: Yeah, first of all, with the strikers, I felt like, you know, I think as coaches and as a staff, we try to find solutions in the game. I think Koutsias, all players have obviously different characteristics. I think with Koutsias, we knew it's a game that we needed energy and we needed someone to be able to stretch the back line, to constantly make runs because there was a team that in transition moments, I think that they really struggled and have given up a lot of goals. I felt that he is someone who is willing to get behind, is willing to make runs behind the back line and he came in with excellent energy.

Obviously a big goal in really a game where it was almost like a must-win on the road, and a lot of people can counted us out. But the team came and had an excellent



performance. We made some changes that we needed to because we felt that going into that game, it's what we needed.

Kacper, look, he's worked hard. He's a guy that I've had different conversations throughout the year with him, and you know, trying to manage the players and making sure that they stay focused and continue to work hard, and once their moment comes, and it can come in different times throughout the season, to be ready to step in and perform. He did that. He came in, worked extremely hard, and so they are all ready to go.

As far as Guti and Rafa, they are all ready to go, which is a good thing. The guys that are not, still, obviously it's Pineda, Mauri, he's still out and Federico Navarro, but they are getting very close.

Q. What does this game and this moment mean for the Fire? What does it mean to your team? What does it mean to the franchise? You're going to have so many people who will be at that game who may be seeing the club for the first time. What does it mean to have this kind of match, not only the significance, what does it mean to you guys?

FRANK KLOPAS: I think it's a big moment. You know when you play international matches like we have in the past and you bring Manchester United and fill Soldier Field, those are the moments as a team that you have to take advantage. There are Chicago fans, sports fans, that might not always come to the games, but you have an opportunity where they come out to see probably one of the best players in the world.

But also, it's an opportunity now for us to showcase the quality of the players that we have. So it is an opportunity for us, really, to take advantage of a moment like this, and you know, get people that maybe come, you know, once or twice a year to games, games like this, where they can say: Hey, this was an exciting game, exciting team, really exciting team, it was a really exciting game; so why not buy season tickets next year. Moments like this, you have to take advantage of. That's the one thing.

The second thing is, we're fighting for the playoffs. We put ourselves in a great spot. In a great spot in the sense that everything is in our hands. We don't need to basically rely on anyone else. This was a massive win against the Red Bulls, which just kind of lines up great with the Miami coming in.

So we have to look at that situation, also take advantage, and three points here, the win would put us in a great spot before our last home game of the season against

Charlotte.

So a lot to play for for sure: The big moment, big opportunities, and these are the moments where you've got to grasp and take advantage of as a team.

Q. Tomorrow and for Wednesday game, and also you have two games consecutive. I want to ask you specifically about Inter Miami. They have many good players, even if Messi doesn't play. Have you been analyzing how you're going to mark them, Josef Martinez, Sailor (ph) the young kid, if he plays, I imagine you have a plan for Inter Miami, and also different players will play on Saturday, am I correct?

FRANK KLOPAS: Yeah, our focus is on Wednesday, though. You're right, you mentioned obviously if Messi doesn't play but still I think another key guy with them is Busquets. He kind of runs the show for them. And then obviously Martinez is an extremely dangerous player who knows the league really well, excellent movement. Campana is a quality player; and Ruiz and Tyler, also two key guys for them if Messi doesn't play.

Like I said, you know, earlier, I think you have almost an analogy like I can say where if I go back because I grew up here in Chicago from a very young age, and if I look at some of, you know, I can compare, like let's just say the Chicago Bulls, when Michael Jordan didn't play, they still have a very good team. But then you had Michael Jordan, and they win eight in a row. So I think Miami is still a very, very good team with some excellent players, but you have icing on the cake that if Messi plays, he's that one player that will always give you that edge. At any moment, he can may a play and win the game for them.

Q. Following up with the Lionel Messi question, it seems like Messi coming into Chicago, there are so many reports he might not show up because of his engagement with the national team, Argentina. So is there going to be a different approach because we are not going to see him or in case he pulls out, we are going to see a different approach when Messi is on the field? And also, Doumbia is eight games in; how do you rate his performance for Chicago Fire?

FRANK KLOPAS: Yeah, two questions. Look, like I said, Messi presents obviously a different challenge, but I think, look, they have other really good players on the team. Even if Messi is there, Busquets is still the guy that always you have to rely on some players to get you the ball in the right spots, and Busquets is one of the best in the world at doing that. He was. I mean, there's a familiarity with him in Barcelona and doesn't change here.

So there's still, you know, if Messi is playing and Busquets is there, of course you have to worry about Messi but there's also, before the ball comes to him, you know, what do you do to address the situations like that. We'll be prepared.

But at the end of the day, it's still about our team and believing in and going on the field and playing with could have had. We have a very good team. We have very good players; we need to be.

Obviously without the ball, our organization has to be very good. We have to be disciplined. But with the ball, we have to have the confidence because we have players also that can impact the game and win games on their own. We have excellent individual players and as a team, we have proven that we can beat anyone.

So we need to go on the field with that kind of confidence. Doumbia for me, he's always a player that you can rely on. You know what you're going to get from him within every match. He's a very dynamic player, a two-way player in this league. He's got an incredible engine to cover a lot of ground.

So the I'm very pleased with Ousmane. He's developed to know the league and he's performing better and better within every game and he really knows our defensive organization. He's a smart player tactically on the pitch, which helps a lot. He's got a lot of experience but he's just a great guy within the group and the team and he will do whatever it takes for the success of the team.

Q. The younger players on the team, what's the experience going to be like for them to play in front of 40,000 or more fans in their home stadium against a really good team as well?

FRANK KLOPAS: Yeah, I think it's exciting. We wish that every game at Soldier Field would be sold out. That is our goal. We've shown in the past with big games that we've brought here, when national teams play, when international friendlies are here, you know, and in the past when we had the All-Star Game, I think there's a huge soccer following here. We've just got to get them out to the game.

I think it will be exciting, obviously, but for those guys, for me, it's putting that jersey on and representing the Fire, it's something special for them. I mean, all those guys have done -- not Koutsias, he's a young player, but he's been in the European environment and played in big matches and big crowds. But I think all three, I think those are moments where like I said earlier, where I think opportunities like this come and this is where you've got to take advantage.

All eyes I think in the League and maybe around the world will be focused and watching this game because obviously with the impact that Messi has had and some of the players. But I think those are moments where some of those young players, they are very, very talented, they can use these opportunities where they can showcase their abilities and talent, also, but also within the framework of the team.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports ...