

# Chicago Fire Media Conference

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**Georg Heitz**  
**Hugo Cuypers**  
**Kellyn Acosta**  
**Frank Klopas**

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good morning, thank you for joining us. We'll start with a brief opening statement from sporting director Georg Heitz.

GEORG HEITZ: Welcome. Thanks for joining. It's been a busy off-season I think, and I'm very pleased today that we can present you officially Kellyn Acosta and Hugo Cuypers; I think two players who will not only help this team football-wise, but also as personalities, and as leaders of this group. Two players who had other options, and I'm really happy that they decided to join the Fire.

And I would also take the opportunity to thank our own Joe Mansueto and his family who keep backing us, who keep investing in the club, and provide us with the necessary resources to make this a successful project.

I'd also like to welcome Frank Klopas. Good to have you back, Frank. Thank you.

HUGO CUYPERS: Thank you so much, Georg. Again, thank you and the coach, the owner, Eddie and Sebastian, for the efforts they have put in to bring me here.

From the first conversations, I felt a level of trust and confidence and a really big project going on here. I just want to be part of it. Just felt right. The feeling was great, and yeah, I just can't explain but all those things I felt in the conversations we had the last few weeks were confirmed in those 48 hours I've been here, and I'm just looking forward to get started.

KELLYN ACOSTA: Yeah I'm super excited to be here, like Hugo said. I want to thank Georg, Frank, Joe Mansueto, the owner, Eddie. From the first days of free agency, it's

been a difficult process, but they have been super patient with me in making an important decision.

But just overall, the project, I thought this is exceptional. I think we are here at Chicago and we want to be back playing top football, being a top team, and I'm excited to be here and I'm excited to join forces with Hugo and put the club where we want to be.

FRANK KLOPAS: Thank you, good morning. Welcome to everyone. Obviously for me as a coach, it's a very exciting time to be able to finally present Hugo and Kellyn here. I think these were two players that were our main target in the off-season, two world-class players, and it's been incredible to finally present them here.

And when the day came, I came down in the morning. I knew Hugo had signed, but when I saw Eddie with a big smile. I said, "Something good is going to happen today."

And he said, "Thumbs up on Kellyn." So obviously that was a great day.

I want to thank, also, for me, I think Georg, our sporting director and our technical director, Sebastian have done an amazing job in the off-season. Really, not only with these two players but also the additions we've made, and also, go out of my way just to thank -- because for me, our DP in our organization, I always say it is Joe Mansueto, and this would not be possible without his tremendous support and his ability to say, "Guys, whatever you need, I'm here for you." And you know, the guys sitting here, it wouldn't be possible if it wasn't for his support and the hard work of Georg and Sebastian and also Eddie.

Welcome, thank you, and I look forward to seeing you guys in the season.

**Q. Hugo, if I may, coming to Chicago, Major League Soccer, was this something you always had a vision of, coming to Chicago, was this something Chicago really to had sell you on? Would you think Major League Soccer maybe even a couple years ago would have been something you were interested in?**

HUGO CUYPERS: Yeah, it's already something I thought would be really nice a couple years back, and then the opportunity came this winter for me, transfer window,

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because of the European calendar, to come here. And it was a very conscious decision. Because I think the league is growing; everybody knows it. Everybody sees it. It's also, I think, a league that suits my style of play, as well.

Then, yeah, I'm at a stage in my career where I needed and I was looking for not only a great project but also an environment where -- because I feel I still have growth potential, and I felt that Chicago was really giving me that environment to progress. And I mean, the efforts they are put to go make the franchise grow are just massive, the new training facility they are building, the staff that's growing, and their ambitions is just, yeah, really big.

**Q. Kellyn, for you, you've mentioned that it was a difficult process getting this over the line, but wonder if you can tell us a bit more about the early conversations you've had in free agency with the club and how those conversations went and how ultimately it all got settled that you're here in Chicago now and becoming part of this project?**

KELLYN ACOSTA: Yeah, I mean, it wasn't really a difficult process to get over the line. It was more so just the process of free agency itself. This is the first time in my career where I had kind of the ability to choose my destination. From my standpoint, it was one of those things where there's a lot of things you have to weigh in on.

But from the first minute, you know, just talking to staff here, the ownership, I mean, it was just an environment I wanted to be in. They have been super proactive from the first day, and as a player, you want to be in a place where you're wanted and celebrated. And for here, I felt that from the first day.

And then just seeing the project, how Hugo mentioned as well, from the ambition of the club, what Joe has put in, Mr. Mansueto, to help build up the club from the training facilities, moving back to Soldier Field, Chicago as a community, the fan base. I mean, from the first minute, everybody is just super excited, and you can feel that energy and you can feel it with the team. Just being part of the group for the last couple weeks, there's something special brewing here.

Like I said, I think I've made the best decision for myself, best decision for my family and I'm just super excited to kick start it with a huge game this upcoming this weekend, and I can't wait to just be on the field, and not only represent the crest and the team but represent the city.

**Q. Coach, now that you have Hugo and Kellyn, and not to give anything up, but do you have an idea how you will set up your attack now with Shaq and Brian**

**and Maren?**

FRANK KLOPAS: Of course, that's why we brought them here. Obviously with Hugo, he came the other day, so I think with him integrating with the group this week, it's going to be very, very important.

Kellyn has been with us towards the end of our second phase in preseason in Palm Springs. So it's been great to have him there.

I think the thing is, it's easy to work when you have excellent players. I think that's what the coaches wants. I think they are great players, and wherever you put them, they are going to have an impact. So we have a good idea but I think it's also important for them now to start integrating a little bit more with the team.

**Q. You're now entering the fifth year in the league for you. You've had a very big off-season with the number of signings and the quality of them, but how has your understanding of the league changed over those past years, and how did that influence the plan going into this off-season?**

GEORG HEITZ: One of our main objectives was to get a core group of players who know the league, and you could see this by we signed Andrew Gutman, we signed Tom Barlow, we signed Kellyn Acosta. We get -- we got, finally, Chris Mueller back, who is an important pillar of this team I think and who progresses every day. We signed Chase Gasper. So that was one main focus that we had this off-season.

The other thing is, it is clear how the turnover takes a bit of time, when you make a mistake, and we've made a couple of mistakes. I've made a couple of mistakes. It takes time to correct the whole thing.

But I am very confident that this year we will have a really strong side.

**Q. Georg and Coach --**

FRANK KLOPAS: Where your Fire hat? I've got to bring you one next time.

**Q. Yeah, I will change it. Georg, you've received massive criticism from a section of the fans this off-season. To me, you've done an amazing job. How will you rate this off-season especially from the front office perspective, bringing in excellent players like Acosta and Hugo? And for Coach, are we going to see this duo this weekend against Philadelphia Union in action?**

GEORG HEITZ: Of course, I'm delighted and excited. But this is not only about me. It's a whole team that has done a great job. Eddie Rock, who is in the room, Sebastian Pelzer, all the people who helped to convince Kellyn, for example. You can't imagine, we had former players who went to dinner with him. We showed him around. We had Paul Cadwell who helped to get this one over the line. We had tremendous support from everybody. So it's not only me.

I'm excited. It's definitely -- I think it's been a good off-season, but a good off-season doesn't bring you any points.

So we also have to now prove in the regular season and in the League games that we can win. Because all the wins we have now in preseason, they are good. It's good for building confidence, but doesn't bring you anything for the MLS table.

FRANK KLOPAS: And to your question, I think it was important to have Kellyn out there with us in preseason. Like I said, Hugo just came the other day. So this week will be very important.

But they are both players that are fit. Hugo hasn't been out from playing for a couple weeks, two and a half weeks; he's been training. So that's important. So I think this week is really crucial. The next three or four days, just to integrate them within the team, they will be ready to go. You'll just have to watch the game and see and come out next week.

GEORG HEITZ: Let me add one thing. Frank had a busy off-season. He flew immediately after the last season, he flew to Europe. He watched games. He met with Allan Arigoni. He spoke with Carlos Garcia, one of his new assistant coaches. I think we also have great people in the coaching staff.

**Q. Kellyn, just wondering, what was the perception of the Fire around the league, and how much did that change at all before the free agency process and during the free agency process?**

KELLYN ACOSTA: Yeah, if I'm going to be completely transparent, I think if we're going to be honest, where the club has been in the last few years just hasn't been where we want it to be. I mean, I think that was the initial and most transparent approach.

But as I was going through the conversation with the coaching staff and front office, and seeing the additions that they are adding and how much ambition the club

wants to go and where they want to be, this is a project that I wanted to be a part of; and put the club back where it needs to be and should be.

If you look back from the previous years, you're looking back at the early times, the Blancos, the Bocanegras, the Beasleys, the McBrides, that was a huge time. I think right now, we need to be back there.

The team last year was just a point off the playoffs, and I think we want to be in an environment where we don't want to just participate. We want to compete and we are going to do ourselves an injustice if we don't compete in every tournament that we are in. There's a chance for four trophies, and I think with this group, we have the ability to win all four.

And from my standpoint, I want to be the player there to help lead that team and help the team be where we want to be. I thought that was a crucial time and I thought that was a turning point for me to be part of this club.

**Q. My question today is for Georg. It's been a very successful off-season as we've discussed with the players coming in and leaving but it's still possible that there is mounting pressure as you're the only MLS team to miss the playoffs six straight seasons. What makes you specifically confident that this year's group is going to succeed where previous teams came up short?**

GEORG HEITZ: Well, I was fortunate that I could attend preseason, full preseason. I saw the intensity of the trainings. I saw very good things, also, in the scrimmages that we had. I see the quality of the new players; that we have the quality of the players who stayed with us.

We also have, we should not forget, we have players who also performed in the past I think who are still with us. But Chris Mueller coming back, for example, as I mentioned before, I see the whole -- for me the whole atmosphere is different. The mindset is different.

This is also why we got, for example, these two players here. They are proven winners. They will bring a winning spirit to this team; a mentality that maybe in the past we lacked sometimes, and the additions that we made to our coaching staff including, also, for example, a set piece expert, because I think there, we have room to improve. Frank obviously agreed and this is also why we got a set piece expert, for example.

I think, yeah, we have many ingredients, but again, now we have to also prove it in the regular season in MLS games.

**Q. Could you go into a little more detail and share the decision to why Hugo was the striker you needed and was worthy of the investment, the substantial investment? Was there a data package involved? Was there a league comparison? Why did you settle on him?**

GEORG HEITZ: On who? I didn't get on who.

**Q. On Hugo.**

GEORG HEITZ: Yeah, I mean, many, many reasons. First of all, his numbers are amazing, I think in a very competitive league. Also the data, the metrics, when you compare how he covers a lot of ground. He is a very speedy player. He knows -- he's a very -- highly intelligent player. He knows where to run. He not only runs but he knows where to run. He can score goals with both feet, with headers.

He's only 27. So he should be in his prime, and I think he can also handle the pressure because the Belgian league is not an easy league.

**Q. I guess to follow up on that, as somebody who won the Golden Boot in Belgium at age 26, that's the sort of season that we generally see open up opportunities in top-five leagues in Europe. When you think of the opportunities you've had, I know you spoke to this a bit earlier but wanted to follow up on when Georg and Frank talked to you, when they sell you on this project, why did you feel that for you personally, this is the right next step for your career, given that you probably had no shortage of options?**

HUGO CUYPERS: Exactly. I had some options in the assumer. But for a transfer to go through, you need the three parties to agree, which was not the case last summer, and this winter was an opening.

And then speaking with the people here at Chicago, like I said before, the investments they have made are huge. I think when you hear someone as Kellyn speak about the club, for someone that has been and is a proven player in this league, it's just a confirmation of all the things that's been said to me. And for the rest, I mean, at this point in my career, I felt like this is really an environment where I can win.

You mentioned the Golden Boot in Belgium, but that's an individual prize. I want my goals to contribute to winning collective prizes, and I really feel that everything has been put in place here to make it happen.

**Q. Kellyn, if I may, legacy, as you go through multiple**

**teams in this league, you've won what you can in this league. Did legacy come into this decision here to come and try to build it up?**

KELLYN ACOSTA: Yeah, like you mentioned, from my standpoint, I've won I think every trophy in the League besides Champions League. I think, yes, for us as athletes, you always want to build a legacy, and being here is an opportunity to do just that.

I've been in different environments but like I said, there's something just truly special here. I've never been part of a team where there's a collective voice of really wanting to drive the sport forward this the city.

And I know the city is eager to have a winning team, right. And it's one of those questions, why not us, right. And like I said, from the first minute of free agency and talking to everyone, it's just an environment I just want to be a part of, and I want to help be that driving force to help bring the club to the top and to compete and to win.

Like I mentioned before, there's trophies out there for us to win, and it would be a disservice for us if we are not putting our best foot forward and competing and doing just that.

I'm excited, like I said, to be part of the club, an ambitious club, ambitious owner and now it's about putting all the pieces together and going out there and putting our best foot forward and hopefully doing just that. We talked about in the past where, missed out on playoffs. I think for us playoffs should just be the baseline. That's something that we need to be a part of every year.

The last two years, I've spent time in two finals in MLS Cup, and I had a taste of that. I'm eager to get out there and be back there.

This year there's a lot of stuff that goes in between to get to that part, but I think we have the right group and the right players and personnel from -- from the staff to the players at the front office to do just that, and I'm excited for the opportunity. Excited to get out there and excited for the season.

**Q. Hugo, what are the profiles of forwards that you looked at when you were young, and how do you correctly pronounce your name, please?**

HUGO CUYPERS: It's Hugo Cuypers. It's a little bit different in French but for the English pronunciation, it's easiest.

But I never really had one striker I was looking up to. It's more that I try to analyze the top strikers that are out there



in the world, and try to take and implement each of their strength individually. But I would not say that I have one particular one.

**Q. Frank, Kellyn mentioned competing for four trophies this year, with just four days to go until the season starts, there's a lot still up in the air including whether or not the team will be able to participate in the U.S. Open Cup. Has that uncertainty affected your preparations for the season and do you expect the team to compete for that trophy that is so important for this club's history?**

FRANK KLOPAS: I think that every time we enter a tournament we enter to win it. That's the mentality we have always had. I can't speak on that because I'm not the one making those decisions. I think once a decision is made regarding the Open Cup -- but like Kellyn said, and I believe if it's Leagues Cup, if it's Open Cup, the U.S. Open Cup, we enter and we play and we play to win. And we're here for that reason.

The one thing I just want to touch upon is my ability to come back, and on the coaching staff. I'm not here just to sneak into the playoffs. If that's the case, you know, I'd be on the sideline enjoying family time with my wife and summer times in the Greek islands. I came back. I love the club. I will do whatever it takes to help this club and I'm here because I want to win.

I think that's the same -- what I say egos through what Georg is saying, Sebastian, Eddie and our owner, and you can tell by the commitment we made by bringing the players that are from us and the other group of players.

So we are here, and our mentality is we will do whatever it takes for this club to have success. That's the only thing I can tell you. The other stuff is just words. We are working very hard. The group is committed. We have laid a really good foundation. We have a long way to go, a long way to go. This is the preseason, and we've got to have this kind of commitment throughout the year in order to reach our goals. That's the only thing I can promise you from us.

But we are here because we want to compete and win, not just to sneak in in the playoffs.

**Q. What are the things that you can take out of the preseason? You have a very good preseason with the team, and you told us about the next matches that you are going to face, the Supporters' Shield champ and also Columbus Crew, another champ of the MLS?**

FRANK KLOPAS: I think the preseason has been pretty good. Obviously after you have 64, 70 days off with the

group, it's just bringing the guys together and just really laying the foundation. Trying to create a clear idea of the kind of team that you want to be. How do we want to be with the ball; how do we want to be without the ball.

I think that's very important. I think kind of create an identity for the team, who we want to be; the kind of values we want to have because I think that's also very important to our owner, and bringing not only quality players on the field but quality human beings off the field. Of course, that's very important to us.

And I think the second phase, I think we looked really hard and we wanted to get -- to be somewhere with we get really good competition, and I think that's what Palm Springs has done, to prepare us the best way we can.

But now we play three games, we won some games and we still have zero points on the board, so the real thing starts now. But I think in the present, it's mainly that; get the group together. Create a really good identity. See how we want to work together. It's about respect and the hard work that we want to put forth, and really, you know, more than anything, get the guys really match fit and sharp so they are ready to go come this coming week.

**Q. My question is for Frank and Georg. First of all for coach, you've got Philadelphia in a couple of days, that's a tough game. How close to 100 percent ready do you feel the team is? And you still have an open DB slot. How close do you feel this squad is to being able to compete for trophies like you said?**

FRANK KLOPAS: I can go to the first one. I think the team will be a hundred percent ready to go. Yeah, Philadelphia is a good team. I think we have always played them really tight games when we have gone there, and we will be 100 percent prepared and ready to go this coming weekend. And we're going there with a mentality to get a result and get points.

It's all about the preparation. I feel that's what gives the players, really, confidence, when you are very clear about the game plan. Train sessions have been very good. They have been sharp, and we are going there with that kind of mentality. We are ready to go. They are a good team, but we also believe in our group and we are focusing on that.

**Q. Welcome to Chicago, Kellyn, as well, Frank, glad to see you again. Mr. Heitz, I'd like to ask you, I'm curious, are you confident with the team that you have right now, or can we foresee some additional pieces added in the future?**



GEORG HEITZ: I think we have made a lot but in this business, you never know. Anything can happen. Every day, something could happen. You always find a market that is still open.

So I would not -- I would not say that nothing will happen anymore. But it's difficult to predict. We feel comfortable with the group that we have. We are happy to have the players here, and that we have them here on time. I think that's also crucial because we all -- we got them all before the first game and we got them all in training before the first game. But the rest is difficult to predict. Anything can happen.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, everyone.

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