

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Coach Frank Klopas

Press Conference



Q. Curious if we have an update on Andrew Gutman and what that will do to your left back plans for the weekend?

FRANK KLOPAS: I think with Andrew, he did an MRI late last night, and I'm just waiting to speak with our medical team just to see prognosis. And obviously -- I'm not going to say 100 percent, but I think for this weekend it will be extremely tough for him to be available. And I just hope, when I speak with the medical staff which just finished training a little while ago, it's -- hopefully the news is, it's not that bad where he doesn't miss a lot of time.

Q. Wondering, on Saturday, for the first time since, I think, late September, early October, 2019, you guys will be wearing red kits. What will that mean to you to see the Fire back in red for the first time in almost five years?

FRANK KLOPAS: For me, I love the red. It just brings back -- that's just the Fire for me. Fire is just a red color, and I think it just reminds me back of the old days, of the beginnings where this organization started.

So, I think, bringing that color, when I saw that jersey, I was extremely excited and happy. And it's just really powerful when you put that jersey on. And the players, when they saw it and put it on, they were very excited because it's just a great color, it's a great jersey, and obviously it's good to have that back. And I think our fans will be excited also.

So looking forward to that but also to our first match at home this new season in front of our fans. We're excited, and we're just focusing on the preparation making sure we come out with good energy against a very good team. We're all excited about everything, especially the jerseys, also.

Q. In Philadelphia, we saw Xherdan take the armband to start the game. I think some people were surprised to see the captaincy away from Rafa. Can you walk us

through what went into that decision?

FRANK KLOPAS: I think that decision of being a captain is something that every coach has to make. It doesn't mean that because you have someone that's a captain one year he's the captain every year.

I think, Rafa came to me and we spoke before the season and in preseason, and he just felt like it was time for him to pass that armband on to someone else. He came and spoke to me, and I respected that decision. But it's still, I think, the coach and the staff makes that decision. That's the way I've always looked at it.

And for me, I think we have a lot of leaders in this group. One might put that band on, but it doesn't mean that other guys don't step up to be a leader. A leader is not just the guy who puts that armband on.

I respect Rafa's decision when he came and we spoke. And I know in the past every time Shaq has had an opportunity to put the armband on, he takes that responsibility and he embraces that. And I think the more pressure you can put on him, I think he cherishes that and he steps up to those kind of challenges. I just feel his experience and he's a guy that's played at the highest level. I feel very comfortable in giving the armband to Shaq.

Q. I want to know your expectations and what can you tell to the fans? Is this the season that we're going to see the Chicago Fire at the playoffs? And how important it is to win at home; don't lose any points at home. What would you say about that?

FRANK KLOPAS: You're like me, I'm very excited. Obviously, look, you have only one opportunity at an opening match, an opening game in the season. And I think it's important for us to come in off with that big point on the road against Philly and to follow that up with a good performance.

We've talked about being consistent. And I think there's no better place not to follow that game up with this opening match at home. I think it also gives us an opportunity now for our fans just to see the new players, to see some of the changes.

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We talked about a team that wants to bring more energy, be more dynamic on the field. And being here especially at home in front of our home fans, like I said, there's only one opening match in the season. And I think it's an opportunity for us to really, with our performance, with the way we approach the match -- the commitment, the energy, the hard work, everything there that the Fire fans expect -- for us to come out and showcase that. There's no better place to do it than at home with our new red jerseys, which reminds us all of the glory days of the past.

Why not start looking forward to the new season with a great start in the opening match against a very good team. I think that we're all looking forward to that.

Q. Was curious what your feedback was to Brian Gutierrez this past weekend. Obviously you talked about in the offseason, a lot has been said about wanting to see him being more composed in the final third, we see him get that great goal as well as an assist. What did you say to Guti after that game and after the performance he had on Saturday?

FRANK KLOPAS: I think with Guti it's just working with him on a daily basis year to year. I think can you see his maturity level has grown. He was a player in the past where he had special moments in the game and very often then would disappear. And his ability to be more consistent over 90 minutes wasn't there. But he's grown into that more and more with him every year.

The big focus with us and with him coming also into the preseason is for him being a guy that really now in the final third has more of a bigger production, and his ability to take, at times, finish off plays by himself, take more risks, but also making those hard runs in the box where he puts himself in good spots and follows up the play and is very close to the goal.

When he does that, he's dangerous. He's got quality. He can take players on. He's very good in tight spaces. He has the ability to shoot with either foot. It's just putting himself in those spots and then making decisions like that where he can beat two guys and have the confidence to finish off plays himself.

He's continuing to grow. We're giving him confidence. The other thing also with Guti, I think without the ball his ability to help the team in areas where he's got to defend and track back. And that's also a big area where he's improved a lot.

He's continued to grow and mature as a player, and he's been more consistent now. We've played only one match, but you can just see his growth also in the preseason, in

the games. He's getting a lot of confidence. It's great now for him to go on the road against a very good team, help the team, contribute with a goal, assist, stuff like that.

It's only going to boost his confidence, but he understands how he's got to continue to work hard and prepare the right way.

Q. You've talked so passionately about the Open Cup and what it means to the club and to you personally. What's your reaction to what MLS is -- how MLS is trying to change its participation in the tournament and the strong possibility that the Fire first team won't be involved in the tournament this season?

FRANK KLOPAS: Obviously, look, we're still -- for me, the Open Cup is a historic tournament worldwide, and it's a great tournament. I know that the MLS -- I understand also their point with other tournaments that we play in and stuff like that.

But I think for us, I mean, we look at it -- and I look at it from a personal standpoint, it's the U.S. Open Cup. It's is a historic tournament. We're a team that has won it four times. We're still the only expansion team to have won it, won the double in '98.

I love the tournament. It is what it is right now. It's the league making a decision moving forward, and hopefully that can change in the future where I think, for me, we've got an opportunity and the first team to try to maybe be the first team to win five.

Q. Maren had a very nice game on Saturday. And seeing him come in with that new contract, bought in with Chicago long term, to see him come in with that sense of purpose once again, what did you think of his performance, especially on the right side?

FRANK KLOPAS: I thought it was very good. I think also, with any new player that comes into a league, it takes time for them to adjust, man. It's not easy. You can see just now being here for one year, he knows the league now. And he's come in stronger and for me and better, and you can tell he's worked a lot in the offseason. And definitely more confident player.

And I think he can play even much better. I think that was a good game against Wagner, a difficult, really good player on the left side against Philly. He gave him a lot of problems. He's a guy also in transition, with his pace and stuff like that, he can create a lot of problems.

But he's got an unbelievable ability to finish plays off, too. So I expect him last year was leading scorer. I think he

can continue to -- I think I can see the same production and even more this year. It would be great if he can get closer to 8 to 10 goals.

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