

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Zach Thornton

Press Conference



Q. It's been about two months since we last spoke. That was right after it got announced you were going into the Ring of Fire. In the last couple of weeks and months, who has been reaching out to you to congratulate you before you get inducted this weekend?

ZACH THORNTON: I think Frank said Jesse Marsch I think called today. Obviously Lubos, who is in. I see CJ a decent amount. Just a lot of people that left messages on that video that you saw on the day that I found out have all reached out and congratulated me and wished me the best.

Q. In terms of you've been around this organization for a long time, I don't want to make you feel old, but I was 2 when you first arrived here. So just your longevity with this franchise, with Major League Soccer, you are a fixture of this sport and this league. I'm curious how you're feeling over 20 years later since you started just being a part -- you are a part of history and a positive part of history.

ZACH THORNTON: Yeah, my first team was the New York New Jersey MetroStars, '96/'97, the beginning of the league. To be back in Chicago in 2024 to see the growth of the league is amazing.

I'm guessing the biggest things would be infrastructure. We trained at Kean College in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and now every team has an amazing training facility, amazing stadium. The quality of coaching has grown tremendously. The league is only going up and only getting to a higher and higher standard.

Q. If I may ask about your own higher standards, bringing it to the higher standard and elevating the level of play, how important has it been for you to give back to the players in this league because we can look at the roster of players you've worked with. They've all gotten better and become very good players after working with you.

ZACH THORNTON: Once I got done playing, I coached a little bit. I volunteered at my alma mater, Loyola University. Then I was an Associate Head Coach at Villanova University, and then I was at D.C. United for seven years and Houston last year and back in Chicago.

It's great to see the growth of players and goalkeepers when you are working with them over the long haul. You don't get too up; you don't get too down. You stay the course, and you trust the process. It's really satisfying to me to see the benefits and the growth of keepers that I've worked with.

Q. Frank talked about leadership and the leadership that you provide and how you're able to get the most out of the goalkeepers that you work with across ages. I was wondering how you think something like having a Ring of Fire as part of the organization, sort of like a team Hall of Fame, is useful in helping you kind of shape and mold the values of the organization in that next generation that you are working with?

ZACH THORNTON: I think it's more like a feather in the cap, a little cherry on top because the way I view it is I first have to earn the trust of the goalkeepers so they trust me. It's a group effort. We work together. It's not a dictatorship. That's kind of the process that I take when I'm working with goalkeepers.

Then maybe some of the younger ones that are a little too young obviously don't remember me playing, and they can see that, Oh, wow, Coach, he might know what he is talking about. He's done this before, and he's done it at a high level. I think it's definitely helpful for sure.

Q. I wanted to ask a little bit more about Chris Brady in general because this season there's been ups and downs, of course. I want to know what growth you have seen from him since the start of this year since it's his second season now as the number one?

ZACH THORNTON: I say it all the time when I'm talking about Chris. Chris's ceiling is -- there's no limit. Chris can go and play wherever he wants to do in the sport.

What I like about Chris this year is his presence and maturity. He's definitely matured. His presence in the



goal, the shot-stopping, all the goalkeeping stuff, that stuff has improved as well. I like how he handles himself on the field.

Q. I have to ask you more about yourself on this one, but I'm curious, when you get these life moments, you get these honors, who do you think of that helped you get to this? Was it a family member? Is it coaches from growing up? Who is that first person that comes to mind when these amazing things come in your life?

ZACH THORNTON: First I thank God because without him, none of this is possible. Then I think about my parents. My dad was an athlete. My mom is tall. She wasn't an athlete. She just wanted to make sure I was having fun.

Yeah, those are the first two people that come to mind. All the sacrifices they did to get me to this point and driving me to games and always supporting me, always being behind me. At first I always think of my parents.

Q. Are you comfortable saying you were right to not play football as your dad commanded?

ZACH THORNTON: I think so. I think everything worked out all right.

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