

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Frank Klopas

Press Conference

Chicago Fire FC 4, Toronto FC 1

Q. I just want to know, looking at this game, I know Toronto had some injuries and you had some injuries as well but what went right on the night to have such a convincing performance?

FRANK KLOPAS: It all starts with the preparation. That, for me, I felt coming into this game with a break, and I know there were a lot of questions after the three games and coming off that win at home, how the break would impact us. I felt it was a good break. It was a good break.

We really worked extremely well leading up to this match, the attitude of the players, the mentality was great, and so I felt really positive coming in. Then obviously, look, I think it's important when you go on the road to have a good performance, I need the guys who start to have very good games and the guy who is came in were excellent and that's what we needed tonight. There was unity and belief and the team continued to show a lot of character, and for me, we were a team that we're going to be, I believe, a difficult team to play against.

But we have a long way to go, and I told the guys, we have to enjoy this moment. We have to take a couple days now and regroup. Take care of ourselves. The important thing is not only what we do on the training pitch but make sure that we take care of ourselves off the pitch and continue to work. It's all about work and effort and being together that's going to get us out of this.

There's nothing else to say. We've got to stay grounded. It was a very good performance. But now it's about consistency. We know what we can do but I know that our ceiling is much higher. The players can give a lot more. That's my belief.

Q. Looking at the goal scorers, it was a good day for the Swiss guys, not only did Switzerland win but Maren and Allan getting his first goal. I wanted to ask about Allan and what you've seen from his growth

since he came into the team and what he meant tonight as well.

FRANK KLOPAS: Allan, physically, he fits in extremely well in this league. He's fast. I think the changing formation and I think you saw him as a wingback, I think he has that ability to cover that whole right side. You know, let's not forget, also, with Allan, that he has not had a break, so at some moment, we need to find an opportunity where we can rest him because he came from Lugano into preseason and here.

He's getting adjusted into the league. He's fast and can cover the whole right side and get quality crosses in. When he gets in good spots like you saw tonight, he has the ability to finish chances off. He's been a great addition. Yeah, that's about it.

Q. The high press tonight, seemed like Fabi used it well to create the first goal right after Hugo did, and then Hugo did well to fight off Long on his goal. Talk about the way your team was presenting against Toronto tonight because it seemed like they had them on the back foot, despite possession being in Toronto's way?

FRANK KLOPAS: Yeah, I just think we are a good team when we can counterpress and hit teams in transitions. There were moments I felt we could have stepped higher, especially with our midfield players, especially they were overloading that side with Insigne at times but they were able to find their pivot at six and go to the other side. I think our midfielders could have stepped, which leaves you moments in the back where you have to defend in 1v1 situations. We got comfortable with that but we are still a very good team when we press or when there's counter press opportunities where we can regain the ball and hit teams in transition. I think we are very effective. It's things we do in training. We have players with pace that can break quickly. It's it worked really well tonight.

But there were also good moments where I felt the second half, we were able to manage the game really well, also, with the ball through possession.

Q. Hugo seems to have really turned a corner, or at least is starting to really produce. He's one of the most expensive transfer acquisitions in this league's

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history, and that comes with pressure at times. What have you seen from him?

FRANK KLOPAS: Yeah, I think you're right. I think he probably felt pressure in the beginning, not getting the goals. He was getting opportunities but I think that, you know, maybe overthinking a little bit at times.

But I think now, his ability to get goals in games and opportunities, you can see he's not overthinking things. I keep telling him, you're fast. You get a lot of opportunities and moments where you can press. You're a link-up player where you can get it and lay it off. Your strength is not get the ball, turn and try to beat three or four guys. That's not your game.

And also he's getting adjusted to the League and we are getting more used to him. Players on the field, how to best play him. And I think, look, when you score goals with anyone, the confidence goes up. You don't overthink stuff.

He always helps the team with his work rate but obviously you're right, he's here to put the ball in the back of the net. He's doing that and I think that he's playing more free right now, and I think that's good to see instinctively. I think strikers need to have that. I've played in that position in games and I think sometimes when things don't go your way, you over think and try to do a little too much. I think when things are not going your way, you know, instinctively, just everything is just sharper, and that's where he is right now. I think he's going to continue to be sharp because he's adjusted to the League and he's learned the players, also, and that's a positive for our team.

Q. There seems to be a narrative out there of this run, ironically, probably not the right word but coincided with Shaq being away from the team and you guys finding results. Curious how you square those two things and how you would address or perceive that narrative. Is it fair? Is it right? How do you kind of evaluate that, because it's out there a lot right now about this club.

FRANK KLOPAS: Yeah, I think that, also, changing formation I think has helped, for sure. And I think players are taking a lot more responsibility and accountability on the pitch.

Look, we have good players, and I think that maybe at times when you have players of Shaq's quality, and at times players expect more from him in certain moments. But I think now, I think guys like Guti, Fabi, Kellyn, I don't want to single guys out, Hugo, I think that they have just raised their level.

And in the end, for me, I'm going to put the best players that help us win on the field, and that's the most important thing for me. The game is a deciding factor but also in training, and guys who continue to perform well in games and continue to work at training, for me, they are going to be on the field playing. The most important thing for me, and I made it clear to the players, is the team. If you're not performing, you're not going to be on the field.

Q. One other question, we often hear coaches, not just in MLS but sport overall talk about this idea of earning respect and saying, okay, we are going to let our results back it up, and you touched upon it in your first answer, we've turned a corner but we still have a long way to go.

FRANK KLOPAS: We do.

Q. Can you elaborate? It's a good moment but still a big rode ahead?

FRANK KLOPAS: No, 100 percent. I think we put ourselves in a big hole. You see the amount of points and games that we dropped, especially at home for whatever reason. I think -- I feel in the short term, we found our way. I think the team for me is united, has good mentality, everyone is working for the team, and I've been working extremely hard.

And I told the guys, before even this four-game run, whatever you call it, I've told them that our mentality has to change in every game. We have to approach every game like it's a must-win. You know, like we are fighting to stay -- to survive. There's no relegation battle here but we have to approach every game with that kind of mindset.

You're right, we're still fighting to get to the playoffs, and we've got an uphill battle, and we have a long way to go. We are not going to get there if we don't continue to work hard, be together and put a lot of effort. You know, because tonight is great but I told the players, look at the mentality and effort that you put in, and everybody did that. Everyone has to pay that kind of price in order for us to reach our goal and that's the kind of mindset we have to have.

I'm grounded. We need to enjoy moments like this. I think it's important, also, but you have to understand that we have a long way to go and what it's going to take to get there and efforts like tonight and a mentality like tonight, and the ability for every player that stops on the field to leave everything for the team, it's what's going to be needed. Whether the result, we get it or not, if you have that kind of mindset and mentality and a fight, it's the kind of team that our fan base can be proud of.

Q. So we saw a lot of players that are getting opportunities they have not always gotten this season: Wyatt, Javier, Mauri, Souquet had his first start as a center back. What does it mean to get contributions from players we don't always see?

FRANK KLOPAS: It's huge. I said it's more difficult with this change of formation, I think it's benefitted a lot of players. Carlos, I think also Mauricio, Souquet. When we play in the backfield, especially tonight, the way we pressed, I wanted Allan in moments when we were shifting to be almost like a 4-4-2. And when you have third center back like Souquet, at times he has to be very wide to cover the wide channels. And you almost need like a center back, right back, that hybrid in between to be able to do that.

He had an excellent game. And if he performs like that, they stay on the field. And you have to -- you have to do your talking on the pitch. Guys are grasping this opportunity and Maren has been a good addition playing along with Hugo. He has the pace to run behind. He can come in between the pockets and creates really big problems for teams because it's difficult, does the center back follow him or who picks him up.

With the change, the players have taken advantage of it, and I think it's important to judge the players out on the pitch. I give a lot of credit to them because they have worked hard, and with the chances came, they grabbed them.

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