

# Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Chicago, Illinois, USA

## Frank Klopas Kellyn Acosta

Press Conference



I think teams like that, they want to have the ball, they want to have easy days, and we have to understand there are moments when they'll have the ball and pick our moments where we can be aggressive and put them under pressure and yet play with confidence because we have quality players also.

In moments like that, I think in matches when you create opportunities, then we don't put those chances away, sometimes it just seems like -- it's not that it's a letdown, but when you create good opportunities and you're able to convert those, it gives the team a different kind of confidence. When you don't, something goes against you, and it just seems like maybe the energy drops a little bit.

But the team, I feel, has always, when they step on the field, has given always 100 percent. They put everything to try to win games. That's the one thing that I'm proud of this group. It's they've never, ever given up. That's the mentality that we have, a mentality that players like Kellyn bring with his experience, and they're able to push guys through.

You know, we make mistakes. That's understandable. We don't always make the best decisions. That's the case for everything, but the one thing is this team has never given up and they will never. That's not the kind of identity and the culture of our team.

### Q. Did you guys practice the penalties?

FRANK KLOPAS: We always do. Yeah, we practiced them. I mean, we practiced them. But it's also different. In the games obviously it's a different feeling, but I feel we have enough veteran players that have been in difficult moments that -- for me, I give credit to the players that take the ball and take the initiative to take it. That's the most important thing, to put themselves out there.

I feel really confident that we'll step up tomorrow and have a good performance against a good team.

**Q. One for you, Kellyn. You are one of the experienced players right here. How do you talk with your other players and the team, the young players, that these games are tough, that you have to be mentally and physically prepared for a tough game? Is it you talk with them and say we need to do this, boom,**

THE MODERATOR: We are going to begin the official press conference ahead of the Leagues Cup 2024 match between Chicago Fire FC and Toluca FC tomorrow, August 1st, at SeatGeek Stadium.

Joining us, we have Chicago's head coach Frank Klopas and midfielder Kellyn Acosta.

**Q. Let's talk about Leagues Cup, second game for Chicago Fire, first against Toluca. It seems that this has to be the game for Chicago Fire. It's a win or win, win or win tomorrow here. What do you talk with your players? I was talking with Brian, and there are some games that the Fire goes really good for 80 minutes, and then at the last minutes, 90 minutes, it's just like boom. It just goes down. So how can you prepare your players and your team to say, okay, we have to be focused a hundred percent for the 98 or 100 minutes of this game because we have to win? How to do this with your team?**

FRANK KLOPAS: Good question. I think the important thing is always for us to come out to every match and play with confidence. That's the most important thing. I think a big part in every match is coming out not only with confidence, but with energy.

I think we have to be excited when you play teams that are not teams like Toluca or teams in Liga MX that come here. It's always a great opportunity to play different opponents, quality opponents like Toluca. I think it's something that the players look forward to.

For us it's just being confident and really believing in our team and trying to implement our kind of identity and style and the way we want to play. We're playing at home. We need to come and pick the right moments where we can put the opposing team under pressure and make it difficult for them.



**boom, boom. How do you leave that with your team?**

KELLYN ACOSTA: I think it's a combination of a lot of things. I think within our group we have guys that are very even, even though we are young in some instances, but we have a lot of experience.

It's more of being a vocal leader in the locker room, letting the guys know that, as you said, the game is going to be tough in the first minute and beyond. It's also sensing and feeling the game. We can talk all we want, but going out there is a different beast.

For us it's about being concentrated and dialed from the first minute. Yeah, but I think it's about giving everyone reinforcement, confidence, and then just getting comfortable within the game.

In our system that Frank has implemented gives us a great foundation, but like Frank mentions that all the time, it's about us feeling the game and playing freely. I think within our system we have our baseline, and from there we can go on and create chances and beyond.

FRANK KLOPAS: It's easy when you have good players like Kellyn. I think the one thing for me always is that with the ball, it's about giving players that freedom. You have players like Kellyn's quality and stuff like that, and you never want to hinder that. You put them in spots where they can be successful, and then it's their individual quality where you have to give them the confidence and the ability, and I do.

Without the ball, it's a different thing. Without the ball defending, I think for me it's about organization and discipline and commitment. And with the ball, I never want to tell the player put your body here, put your body there because Kellyn could be square, but he can see a pass on the outside with the foot. I'm not going to let a guy --

**Q. (No microphone)?**

FRANK KLOPAS: 100 percent. We always want more as coaches, and I know he can give more, but he's been really positive for sure. He's made our team much better.

I know it hasn't been great at the start and where we are right now, but at the end of the day, we're looking forward to Leagues Cup. Also, I think we put ourselves as a team in a good spot with three points away with nine games to go. It's in our hands.

The most important key for us is to get everyone healthy and ready to go. That's the most important thing. When we do, I think we're a dangerous team.

**Q. Just news today that Xherdan Shaqiri is back in training. What are expectations for him going forward, and do you expect him to be a contributor tomorrow?**

FRANK KLOPAS: Not tomorrow. The guy has been away from the team for two months. I know he played in the Euros, but we can't expect the guy to be available tomorrow, just like Hugo that we gave him a week off, and Allan also. They've been training for us for a very limited time.

The good thing is we're getting some guys back healthy or available for tomorrow, but not those guys. The important thing is to have everybody, whenever our run ends, hopefully all the way to the final of Leagues Cup, to have, like I said, everyone 100 percent ready to go for that final push because we will need everyone. I think that's our main focus right now.

**Q. Kellyn, I'm curious for you, you talked about the openness within play. How hard is it, or how has the process been of getting this team to play with a more open style? When you're with younger guys who want to be making the team, wanting to get more minutes, it can be more tense. How do you tell them, yes, the expectation is this, but you've got to try to enjoy it as well?**

KELLYN ACOSTA: I think that's expected from all of us. As professionals, we all want to be on the field, but it's about training and being competitive there and giving the coach a hard time in terms of who can be on the field.

In the game it's about showcasing our qualities, but it's about what you put into the training field, and when you get the opportunity, it's about making the most of it.

For all of us, it's about the team and about whatever we can do to be as positive as possible and reinforce what Frank has implemented. I think it's been -- we've had our ups and downs, and that's obvious, but I think it's about being as consistent as possible.

Obviously we didn't get the result in Kansas City, but tomorrow's another opportunity for us to get back on track. Obviously we want to advance. I think getting a result tomorrow, the win is what I mean, it's going to put us in a good position confidence-wise. Obviously it gives us another chance to advance to the next round.

FRANK KLOPAS: We want to continue playing good games. This is what's going to make us better and keep us sharp all the way to the end. That's the important thing.



**Q. Frank, you mentioned the word, it's going to be a home game for us. The matches against Liga MX opponents weren't always home games in the last year, including the Fire against América. Do you expect the crowd to be -- what do you expect from the crowd, and how does that change the way that you talk to the players?**

FRANK KLOPAS: I expect to go out and wear all red because Toluca, their colors are red. That's why it's going to be a home. People watching the game, they won't know if they're supporting the Fire or Toluca. To me it's going to be all red and the Fire's red.

No, it's expected. The one thing, when you're playing teams from Liga MX, for me there's a big Hispanic community in Chicago that support the team. They come out and support us. They're loyal fans, but when their teams from Mexico come, it's understandable.

It's an opportunity for us to showcase our abilities. Let's not forget that, when you look at our team and guys that have come up through a homegrown system, guys like Guti, Javy Casas, Pineda, Sergio Oregel, these guys all have Hispanic heritage. So I think the fans also come out. The Hispanic fans, they support -- you come to the games, and you see when they announce Guti or Omari and this and that, they get bigger cheers than any other players. So it's great.

Tomorrow I expect a lot of red on the field. For me I'll tell everyone that they came out to support the Fire.

**Q. Kellyn, related question to you. Last year with LAFC you played both Liga MX opponents in the Leagues Cup as well as in the Concacaf Champions League final. Can you talk about the difference in atmosphere and the different challenges facing Liga MX teams at home versus having to travel in the Champions League?**

KELLYN ACOSTA: Yeah, I think every game has a different challenge and every opponent brings different obstacles as well.

I think any away game is obviously very difficult no matter where it's at, given the different variables, as you mentioned, with the travel, atmosphere, field, conditions. But at the end of the day, it was two teams on the field. Each of us have their own game plan, and it's about -- whether it's an away game or home game, it's the mentality.

It may switch in a chance. Sometimes you have to weather the storm if you're playing away. For our sake,

we're here in Chicago. Like Frank says, it's going to be a sea of red. For us, it's a place where we train out every day, a place that we call home, a place that we're comfortable in, so the opportunity for us to put our best foot forward and get the result.

**Q. Frank, we saw last time out, a lot of rotation in that lineup for the game against Kansas City. Does your outlook in terms of how you think about this next game change at all? Do you think anybody particularly stood out when given that unique opportunity this last time out?**

FRANK KLOPAS: I think there was a lot of rotation, not because I wanted to rotate so many players. We had, unfortunately, some guys that were under the weather a bit and not able to go and just always you make a plan, and then last second things happen and stuff like that.

I think it was also an opportunity for some guys to get some minutes, and they probably didn't have the ability to do so during the season. We had some players, a couple players from the second team that came up. I think Shannon, the center back, did quite well until he had to come out with some stomach issues.

The kid Koffi, I felt he came in. Omari, a guy we brought up also in preseason, he had some games with us. I thought Koffi also is a player that I like because I feel he's very direct when he gets the ball. The one thing for me with his first touch is the ability to attack defenders and put them under pressure.

So I think that's a bright spot and also an opportunity to get some guys who needed additional minutes or needed minutes to play to get some sharpness. Tobias Salquist, a guy out for two months, played 90 minutes. So you see the importance of guys like that, our ability to play these quality minutes, it's going to make them sharper, better when we need them.

I think we're getting some guys back. I don't want to say anything now, but we have at least 24 hours to go. I don't want to jinx myself, but we'll get some guys back, and I think it's going to look a little bit different tomorrow in KC.

**Q. Kellyn, obviously for a lot of reasons, must win games are rare. You can treat a lot of league games as if they're a must win, but you can argue this is the first true end of the season for you guys, particularly in this tournament. Especially as a guy who's a more veteran guy, who's got all that playoff experience, who's got national team experience, who knows what the pressures of such games are like, what are you trying to pass on in training this week to the guys, and how**

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

**do you think your experience can be useful in this kind of environment?**

KELLYN ACOSTA: Yeah, I think this is what we train for. For us, we train for the big games. This is a big moment for us. Yeah, it's about just reinforcing that. I think guys, we're excited. We're ready, playing against a team that we're not necessarily familiar with. A team from Liga MX that's done well in the season. I think they played four games so far, two wins, two draws, so they're undefeated in a sense.

It's going to be a good test for us. Like Coach said, it's important that we're getting everyone back, having a complete team. I think that's huge.

Like I said, it's been a roller coaster of a season with injuries and different things within the season, but for us, it's a great occasion.

We don't want to play do or die with our situation. It's a way we can dig deep and find out what we're truly made of. It's a great opportunity for us, and I think that can propel us in the right direction with a positive result tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. Thank you, Kellyn. We'll finish off the press conference with that question.

We look forward to tomorrow's match between the Chicago Fire and Toluca.

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