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Frank Klopas

Press Conference



Q. I'm curious, the transfer window closes, Shaq departs from the club, the announcement that Georg is stepping down at the end of the season and then Ariel comes in at the end of the window. I'm curious how you've processed these announcements and moves since we've last spoken?

FRANK KLOPAS: Yeah, obviously it's three different kind of questions all rolled into one. Obviously the first one with Georg and the announcement, you know, that's never easy because I've been on a different side, then you guys come to the games and you see -- and you follow the team, obviously, but me being here every day and working closely with Georg for the past four, four and a half years, I really have seen the changes that he's made.

When he first came in, I felt that there was so much work that needed and structure to be put in place with this team really to be where all the other MLS teams were at that point, and I think a big part of that was when Joe took over the team. He made big investments in the club that were necessary at the time, and a big part of that was bringing Georg and Sebastian and they worked extremely hard to put a good structure in place, with the academy, with the scouting department, with the first team, the staff that we've hired to bring it up to speed and where it needed to be as a professional team.

From that standpoint, I really know how much he's put in and the hard work, and so it's always an emotional side because at the end of the day you build relationships with people that work here, and I've seen that commitment. That part of it is never easy, never easy. I understand his decision, though. It's a family situation, a personal matter, and I wish him all the best, but those relationships and friendships that we built here are going to last a lot longer than the four and a half years that we spent here.

That's one part of it.

Obviously with Shaq, I wish him the best. He's moved on. For me, I have a lot of respect for Shaq, and I wish him

nothing but the best in the future.

Then with Ariel, it was an opportunity at that moment that we were all a little surprised because of the amount of games -- he's played almost every game with Montreal. I've watched him. I know the player and the league. He's been in different teams, but he's a solid player, and he kind of fits really the way we want to play and also to provide some good depth with Andrew on that left side. When he was missing to injuries, we really didn't have another left-foot the player that could come and play that spot, whether it's a fullback or wingback that Ariel plays. So he's an experienced player, he knows the league well, and he's played games. He's fit well coming in, so I think he's a good addition to the club now as we look to -- in this last final nine games to put everything into it so we can be in the Playoffs, in the postseason.

Q. Xherdan Shaqiri leaves the club. That leaves the captaincy vacant. We've seen Kellen wear it a couple times, Gastón, Fabi. I'm wondering is there a new captain that's been appointed going forward the rest of the season, and if not, will we find that out soon?

FRANK KLOPAS: No, I think in his absence, Gastón has put the arm band on, Kellen times and Fabi, and I've been able to rotate. I think those guys are on the leadership committee that I have and I'm comfortable picking any of those guys. They're leaders, they're captains, and there's no need to appoint someone else right now. I think we have those guys that at any point can step in there depending on who's on the field and can fill that role.

Q. For the game against New York City this weekend, it's been a while since the last game; we saw some new faces in Leagues Cup. Are there any players we can confirm with Chase Gasper will be out for this game?

FRANK KLOPAS: I mean, 100 percent Chase. Everyone else -- I think there's some minor stuff with Fabian Herbers and then it's day-to-day, but everybody else is healthy and ready to go, which is really positive for us.

Q. During this break, I know you guys have been doing some practicing and all, but you've had some time obviously that you wouldn't in regular during the season. What have you been able to do personally

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and with the team maybe to maybe reflect or relax or get away from everything? Is there anything you used that time for, this time off, to maybe help out the second half?

FRANK KLOPAS: I think a little bit of everything. I think that finding the right balance with the inability to play games comes with a little bit of a longer break than we wanted to. We tried to get some games, obviously, with the teams to get a really solid game in between that, to get an MLS team, but some of the teams were not able to play. So we did an intersquad scrimmage. But it gave us time to do a little bit of a break but a little bit of -- a lot of good time to reinforce the principles that we've talked about from the beginning of the season, with the ball, without the ball, that we wanted to reinforce those things, how we want to defend, how do we build pressure without the ball, and then obviously our ability with the ball and putting guys in positions where they can have success.

But also it gave an opportunity to get some guys healthy, which was really necessary for us. We were having a guy like Gutman back and Tobias now ready to go and Carlos, we had guys with little things that were out, in the Leagues Cup they were sick a little bit and they've been able to get healthy. So that's a good thing. A little setback with Fabi but I think it's nothing serious, so I think this break came at a good time.

Now we're back at it with this nine final games that we have, and we've talked about having nine finals, and we're playing a really good team, a really good-coached team. They're playing really good soccer at the moment. We look forward to this challenge.

Put all pressure and expectations aside, I think where he need to be prepared, which we are, and this break has given us an opportunity to really work on that and also the little small details. But I think we need to go and play the game, not to overthink things and be focused and organized without the ball, but I think we needed to go and just play the game and enjoy the game and look forward to the match, which we are, because we haven't played for a while.

Q. I want to ask you an open-ended question. You look at your results throughout the season, and maybe not even result-oriented, what is the game or games that you felt you have done the very best in terms of how you want to go about things, how you want to play and why?

FRANK KLOPAS: That's a good question, but I think even when I look at games, even though we've dropped points, I just felt for me the consistency over 90 minutes hasn't been

there. That's a big part of it. I think that we've had really good games, really good moments. I can even tell you the game that we played in Miami, I think that we were in the front foot the second half, we scored the goal, and then we just make this mental errors and mistakes really that kind of hurt us.

I think more than anything for me, I look at just the consistency, and a big part of that -- look, I'm not going to -- I don't even want to say it, but I think for 20 games we played without a normal wingback left back, and I think we have to move pieces around in order to make the best of that, but you put guys in positions where they're not most comfortable.

I'm just happy we have everyone back. I think I'm looking for more consistency over 90 minutes. I think we have really good moments in games, but we need to be more consistent, and hopefully now that we have the guys healthy, we can finish strong, which that consistently hasn't been there. We've kind of been a little bit up and down. We've had good moments, even in games that we've lost.

But I don't want to pick any certain games, but I think for me the one word is "consistency," and this has to be here, now this consistent way the guys are playing together, lineups being consistent and the same without the injuries, and one or two players are always going to be question marks depending how we approach the game, depending how in form they are, how they've been training. But I think that consistency will come, I believe, now that we have almost a full team back.

Q. I want to ask a little bit more about Ari Lassiter in terms of -- obviously there wasn't a lot of time to get that deal done once the roster spot was open. In addition to his positional versatility, why was Ari the guy that you felt was the best fit to come in and be that guy in that final roster spot?

FRANK KLOPAS: We looked at options within the league. It's not just one. You know we've had an issue on the left side with Gutman being out and also with Chase Gasper and stuff like that. We tried different options in the league, and even with Ariel they were not available at that time. It's not just only one option that we had. But when you look at him, Montreal plays in a 3-4-3, he can play as a wingback on either side, he's got really good ability, he's got pace, he can get behind. You can put him on the right side. But then he's an inverted guy that likes to come inside if you have a fullback or a wingback that can get forward and up and down depending on what you have. But he's an experienced player. He knows the league. He fits in the system if we play with a back three with wingbacks or even in a back four as a winger.

For me, I know people that worked with him. He's a guy that takes care of himself. He's a super good guy in the locker room.

It just clicked all the boxes. But we've tried different options within the league, and we wanted to make sure that we had the right guy, and sometimes when you put a list of guys that you want, teams are not going to let them go.

So this was a little bit -- seriously for me, was a little bit of a surprise because he's a guy that if you looked has played almost every game in Montreal and also in a spot where they're fighting to make the Playoffs. When the opportunity came, we took advantage of that.

Q. Building on that, you mentioned with not having that left back position filled, it really affected the way you wanted to play. How would you describe how Andrew has recovered from the second injury, how would you describe where he's at right now --

FRANK KLOPAS: Yeah, this break gave us a really good time because you remember we played in the Leagues Cup and I put him -- I tried to give him some minutes but realistically his lack of training with the team, that really scared me a little bit to put him now in this game situation where he's sprinting. He played a little bit in Kansas City and a little bit with Toluca, but now we've had a little over two and a half weeks where he's training every day, sprinting and stuff like that.

He just needs the games now. I think with the games and the sharpness is going to come, but it's different. You have a love for the player when he receives the ball, his body shape is open, he gets forward, he can play the ball down the channels. He's good at getting forward, his ability to cross the ball. It's just a different dynamic.

We played at times with Allan Arigoni there. It's not the same. He wants to cut inside on his right foot. Sometimes it's a little bit more predictable for teams.

We played other guys there also, Jonny Dean, but it's not their strong side, so sometimes it's hard to evaluate and judge players in games when you put them out in positions where they're not most comfortable. The guys give everything, but it's different what we have now. At least two, we have good mean. Ariel can play there, Lassiter. A good surprise was when even in the Leagues Cup when we were able to play some of our younger guys that were able to step in and perform well.

Q. For the second straight year, the Leagues Cup is

going to finish with a champ from the MLS. Your point of view, what does that say about the league as far as this tournament is concerned?

FRANK KLOPAS: I mean, yeah, you see it yourself. I mean, it's really good games. I think that the teams have all stepped in. We take the tournament really serious. Even for us, I think last year we had a really good run. This year I think that that consistency, again, we played a really good team. We played Kansas City away, then Toluca, obviously, and I think we had moments in the games where we played really well, but I think you can see the strength of the league constantly improving, the quality of players that are coming in, the level of play.

It's great when you play outside in tournaments like this really to test yourself against the top Mexican teams. It just shows you how far the league has come. We have a long way to go, but it's incredible nowadays when -- and it's clear to say, you see all 14 teams are MLS teams in the final. It speaks for itself, where the league and the level of play has come in a really short time.

Q. Is Ariel Lassiter fluent with Spanish?

FRANK KLOPAS: Yes, he is.

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