

Chicago Fire Media Conference

Thursday, February 20, 2025

Chicago, Illinois, USA

Gregg Berhalter

Press Conference



Q. With the big game this weekend, it's Columbus Crew; it's you against Wilfried Nancy; you're going back to Columbus. Emotionally what is your expectation going into such a big game that I think a lot of people are going to be watching?

GREGG BERHALTER: Yeah, it's basically two teams against each other. That's the storyline. All the other stuff doesn't matter. It's just a game of soccer, and it's two teams starting their season. We want to go there and compete. We've been doing a good job.

Got a lot of respect for Columbus. Been watching them. I think Wilfried has been doing a fantastic job with the group for the last three years.

But for us, it's going to show what we can do, as well.

Q. Going back to Columbus, I was there for the game against Costa Rica where the crowd received you very well. What kind of reception are you expecting from the Crew fans this time?

GREGG BERHALTER: I have a great relationship with the Crew fans. It was an amazing five years of my life and my career, and I still talk to a lot of people from Columbus to this day. It's difficult to say this, but it is a club that I care a lot for.

It's going to be, obviously, different than going back with the national team. Now I'm a competitor of the Crew and I'm sure they want to win the game.

Still going to enjoy the experience, and for our team, again, the most important thing is to continue to build on what we've been working on.

Q. On the field, what are you expecting from more of a new look Columbus Crew side? Obviously some big changes in their attack this off-season. But it's the Columbus Crew; you always have to have high expectations for them. What have you seen preparing

for the weekend?

GREGG BERHALTER: Very dynamic attacking team. Was able to see all their games so far, and it's a good team. You can see that it's the result of work that's been done over multiple years. It's not a team that's just been put together this season. They have good cohesion, dynamic attacking, good variation in their attack with different players and different positions.

Overall impressed with them. I think Columbus is going to be one of the teams that's there at the end of the season. It's a very strong team.

They lost Cucho and Christian Ramirez, but what they've been able to do is plug in other players that give a different dimension, and they're vertical when they need to be, they're controlling when they need to be. Overall a solid team.

Q. We've had the chance to talk to a number of players in preseason, and there's some similar principles to how they've described what you expect of the team to what Wilfried Nancy expects of his in terms of being a possession-based team in terms of trying to control the game with the ball. How does that present a challenge for you because they've been playing that system for a couple years and you're just coming into it over basically this preseason. How does that present challenges tactically?

GREGG BERHALTER: Something has got to give, right? Columbus, I think, led the league in possession last year and also a huge amount of chances created. They didn't lead the league, but a lot of chances created.

For us, we have to value the moments when we have the ball. We have to be difficult to break down. We have to be dynamic both offensively and defensively. But it's a great challenge for this group.

For us, we're not shying away from it at all. We realize that it's the first game and that it's a great challenge right from the onset, and we'll be up for it.

Q. Obviously you're gearing up for this first game, but it's been a while since you prepared for an MLS game. You've been preparing for the last decade for

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international games. Did it feel a little bit different entering this game and sort of the preparation back into the MLS league versus what you've done, or do you have a same system that sort of translates? If you could just speak on the first prep for being back in MLS.

GREGG BERHALTER: You know, the opening game of the season is always interesting. We're going off a lot of footage from preseason, so it's not an exact science.

I think as you get more of the footage throughout the season, you get a real better read on the teams. There is a little bit of unknown.

But it's back doing what we do. We analyze. We prepare. We game plan. Then we repeat. That's how it goes in international soccer and club soccer. But it's certainly exciting to be back.

The league is a different league than when I was in it last night. 30 teams, best player in the world, great coaching in this league. I think it's some great teams.

Overall I think it's going to be a great challenge for our group as we navigate through this year.

Q. What difference do you see in the league compared to the last time you coached in the MLS seven years ago?

GREGG BERHALTER: You know, Messi wasn't in the league. That's the first difference, the best player in the world, so that's right off the bat. There's six more teams now. The facilities have improved when you think of all the new stadiums in the league, Columbus being one of them.

Overall I think what you see now is I know for our team is there's a lot of younger players in the league now. We've been playing in preseason 16 year olds. The age is getting lower and lower. The quality in the top end is getting higher and higher. It's a competitive league.

One thing I've noticed right now is there's been this, I think, move to build up with three in the back, three and two in buildup. A number of teams are doing it. Last time when I was in the league, it wasn't so common. I think that's a trend that you're seeing throughout the league that is permeating through a number of teams.

Q. If we could look ahead a little bit, as you mentioned it a couple times already, the third home game, like you said, the best player in the world. You must feel excited about the challenge to get to prep to go against him. What are your thoughts on that?

GREGG BERHALTER: You know, I've got to be honest; I haven't even thought of that yet. The focus is purely on Columbus. We'll cross that bridge when we get to it.

We know that we have a lot of territory, a lot of games to play before that, and we'll get to it.

But what I'd say is you saw them yesterday in the Champions League and still a dynamic team, still have two really high-quality players up front with Suárez and Messi, and then the rest of the group is geared to play for them and help them be successful in games.

So it's going to present a nice challenge for us, and when we get there, we'll surely enjoy it.

Q. Any updates on the injury report, or everyone is available for this Saturday? My other question is how long do you think it takes to wake up the sleeping giant that you already have all the pieces together, all the plays that you need so far?

GREGG BERHALTER: Yeah, we're working on building that, and it will take some time. But I think in the meantime, we want to be competing. I would do the team a disservice if I said that this is just a work in progress. We're a team that wants to compete from day one.

Although we have a lot of injuries right now, and preseason was very difficult for us in terms of injuries, we'll still be able to put together a team on the field that will compete, and that's our jobs. We know what's at stake here, and we're excited about it.

Again, we want to be a team that goes on the field and plays a certain way and competes from day one.

Q. Greg, we had Sam Rogers on beforehand, and I'm curious, I know when he initially signed he kind of fits a profile of what you wanted in a center back, but I'm curious what you've seen from him from afar the last few years and what you've seen from him now that he's with the club that made you want to have him on your squad.

GREGG BERHALTER: Yeah, I think, first of all, he's a great kid. Really open to learning. Really competitive. You can see he's played at a good level and really made big steps in his career from when he's left to now.

We want to continue to help him develop. We think he can play a role with us this year, and we're excited about what he can do for the club.



Q. One of the players who impressed me the most in preseason starting most of the game was Sergio Oregel. I know this is someone who's been really highly rated by the club for a long time. What can you say about his preseason?

GREGG BERHALTER: I agree with you. I think he did a really good job, and for us it's continuing to challenge him on his limits because we think he's a really high-potential player. It's really good putting him in positions to compete each and every day, him understanding the need to be 100 percent fit, 100 percent focused on each and every play.

But he is, in our opinion, a difference maker, and I think he's had a great preseason.

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