

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Chicago, Illinois, USA

Kellyn Acosta

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for joining us for our very first in person press conference at the Endeavor Health Performance Center. Thank you, Kellyn.

Q. It looks like there was kind of a formation shift from what the team was playing last year with a flat three in the midfield. Can you talk a little bit about it and how it suits your game and how you think it affects the performance of those around you.

KELLYN ACOSTA: I think for us it makes our positioning clear. We want closer connections to be able to possess the ball throughout the midfield and find guys facing forward and being able to attack the back line.

I thought in the game against Columbus, especially in the first 30 minutes, we were able to do so. Now the next step and next challenge for us is to continually do that and shore up the mistakes overall.

It was a step in the right direction, some progression. Obviously getting a lot of games in preseason and we know it's not going to be perfect at times, but I think we have a clear idea of how we want to break teams down and possess the ball and keep the ball and to move the ball forward.

We're just going to continue building and continue growing and continue just building those relationships in those different positions.

Q. How difficult has it been, Kellyn, to adjust to that midfield when you're a veteran that also needs to be teaching these young guys how this system needs to be played and understanding it will be a process?

KELLYN ACOSTA: I think part of it is just having that understanding, from my standpoint, is the ability to learn and be coachable and absorb all the information, but also being a vocal presence within the locker room and on the field with the other guys, putting guys in good positions, and then letting their characteristics and qualities come



out.

For me, it's about making sure guys are in the right positions because I think that's super key for us to unlock teams. It's all about repetition. I think we're doing quite a bit in training of learning and establishing that, and then games is our time to execute.

I think the more we get -- the more and more we play games, the more and more we get comfortable, it's going to be hopefully like second nature.

Q. I want to ask you it's almost about the same temperature you're going to play that you played in Columbus, but the rival, D.C. United, has always been a really tough rival for the Fire. I know you probably analyzed the team already, but what are your thoughts about having them and in preparation to play with them?

KELLYN ACOSTA: It's a longstanding rival with us and D.C., one of the original teams for sure. We know there's a lot of history there, but D.C. is a good team. They got a good result this past weekend. I know they would probably hope for more, but they played a similar formation that has Columbus and they have one of the leading goal scorers in previous years in Benteke, a guy that's clinical in the box, a guy we definitely need to pay attention to. They have a few additions, especially in the midfield.

But overall a similar team that we faced in the previous years, but it's going to be what fuels competition, especially for us it's a home opener. We dropped points the previous week, so this is a good opportunity for us to get back on track and continue within our season, continue growing and progressing.

Q. You talked a little bit about one of the earlier questions about being a bit of a coach on the field. I was curious, particularly what conversation you might have had with Sergio Oregel after that last game, it having been his first MLS start and making that start against a pretty tough opponent in Columbus.

KELLYN ACOSTA: I think it's definitely a deserved start. He's a guy that does really well, especially with the youth national team, a guy with a lot of talent, a guy with a lot of qualities. It's about continuing to build and continuing to



grow.

Obviously you can look at different situations within the game and experiences, but I think all of it's a learning experience. He's a bright guy, bright kid, a guy with a lot of quality. So it's about just continuing to be positive and continue doing what he's doing.

He showcases that each and every training, and it's about just building and growing. I know he's going to keep compounding good performances for us. He's a guy that we're definitely going to lean on this year.

Q. This being the home opener for the team, obviously you mentioned the team played well at the beginning, especially against Columbus, didn't get that result. D.C. did there. How important is it for the team to get a result on Saturday at home?

KELLYN ACOSTA: I think it's huge. We know within the season every game is important, especially home games. It's exciting times, especially the first of the season in front of our home fans and our home stadium, a place that we're comfortable with.

So for us it's about getting points back that we dropped. I think for us all of it is progression and growth. It's a huge opportunity for us to get back on track.

We're playing against a good side in D.C. United, but the focus is on us and what we can do, what we can get out of the game. From the first minute all the way until the end, we're going to give our all, but also we want to play our quality football and take it to them rather than be reactive. It's about being proactive.

Q. Kellyn, curious, D.C. likes to play really direct. How important is it for you guys to really emphasize winning those second balls, especially after they have these guys who really dominate in the air?

KELLYN ACOSTA: I think that's going to be the name of the game is second balls are going to be super key, especially with a team that does like to go direct at times. So for us as midfielders, it's about being connected and being compact and what we can do to win second balls and duels. Duels are going to be huge. We know, if we can be on the positive end of that, I think the rest will be helpful for sure.

Then about when we do win the second balls, what we can do with the next ball. It's about breaking the line of pressure. We know with their high line, it's about exposing the back line as best as we can. There will be spaces there.

But the first pass after winning the ball is super crucial.

Q. The players you played with in the preseason, Jonathan Bamba and (indiscernible). I want to know your opinion about how you think they did together with Hugo Cuypers at the top.

KELLYN ACOSTA: I think they're great additions to the team. Bamba has shown tremendously in preseason, even in the first game, a guy that we are demanding for more. Obviously he's a guy that's played at the highest level, but a guy that brings a lot of quality to our team, a different dynamic.

Phil as well on the other side, a guy that likes to play in the pocket but has an eye for the goal as well.

It's about finding those guys in good positions and helping them establish themselves within the system and show their characteristics. I think we've seen glimpses of that, but for a team, we all need to step up more. I think once we get to the level that we're at, we're able to get the results that we want.

It's about us, about growing, and using every single training session and game to be better.

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