

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Chicago, Illinois, USA

Gregg Berhalter

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much for joining us for today's press conference with Head Coach Gregg Berhalter.

Q. Curious, what are kind of the points of emphasis moving into this weekend against D.C.? Obviously a very different direct team than Columbus, but what are you kind of looking for dealing with the opposition, understanding that this is still a transition time for your squad?

GREGG BERHALTER: I think the first thing is to continue to focus on what we're doing. That's the most important thing. We're playing at home. We want to establish ourselves in the game. We want to be able to hurt the opponent.

Taking some of the really positive elements from the Columbus game, how we hurt Columbus, and now continuing to develop them throughout the week.

I think looking at their strengths they obviously have the leading goal scorer, the Golden Boot from last year. So we know that he's a weapon. We know that he's really good inside the penalty box. We know that he is able to get goals out of relatively nothing. So we have to be aware of that. But they have other good players as well.

So for us it's really just about keeping our shape, keeping our compactness, and really focus on what happens in the penalty box.

Q. On a similar note, we saw the team play with I think a more distinct identity than I think it's felt like the team has played with from a lot of positions for a while against Columbus. With D.C. playing like you mentioned, a much more direct style, is it going to be a question of the Fire continuing to build on that identity, or are there going to be some tweaks and shifts based on the fact that D.C. really likes those long balls, likes getting things to Benteke as quick as possible in a different tactical setup?

GREGG BERHALTER: We are who we are. We have to be comfortable with our game and what we can do well and then give the guys belief.

For us, it's really, again, highlighting who we are and how we can hurt the opponent and what our strengths are. We're going to continue with that. You still have to be cautious for some elements that they do exceptionally well, whether that's second balls, whether that's transition after winning the ball from pressing.

So they have some really good elements that they do that we have to be aware of. We're a good team. We think we're better than what we showed last week in the total of 90 minutes, and we need to show that this weekend.

Q. I know you probably have two more days, but do you have any updates on the injury list, and Brian will not be in the game. I wonder if you have an idea who you're going to put on the field?

GREGG BERHALTER: Guti is out. We know that, he's suspended. None of our players that were injured will be back. That's just something we have to deal with. That's part of it. It is what it is.

We think Hugo has made some progress from last week, so we expect him to be able to play longer than he had last week. Then we go from there. Someone's going to need to step up in Guti's place, we know that, and we'll make that decision as the next couple days go.

Q. Obviously the result is not what you wanted, what you expected, but what did you see that gives you hope to the style of play that you want to implement on the pitch for your team?

GREGG BERHALTER: I think it's the group working together, both offensively and defensively. I think you saw that for large stretches of the game against Columbus. Unfortunately, there were a couple really bad plays that affected the game.

We think we can hurt any team anywhere. Whether it's in Columbus or wherever we play on the road, we think we can hurt them. We showed that. We showed a lot of high pressing, a lot of good mid-block stability moving to high

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press, which I really liked. So overall some good elements.

Then with the ball, I think moving the ball through the different midfield areas to open up space to then attack behind was also a positive.

A lot of positives to take from the game, but we're in the results business, and we came away with zero points. That's not a great feeling. So we need to improve on that.

Q. I wanted to ask you about conversations you had with a couple of your young midfielders after last week's game. Obviously Guti starts the game on fire, gets those two goals, is suspended for this week. How do you kind of balance those two things, those two sides of that coin?

Then Sergio Oregel making his MLS debut against a really tough opponent. What's your message to a guy like him, who that was a tough assignment for his first game?

GREGG BERHALTER: It definitely was, but we have high expectations for Sergio. We hope he has the same expectations for himself, and he knows it has to be better. It's as simple as that.

There's some elemental things that he did that can be improved, and we showed him video of that, but it's really about giving a young player like that confidence. He's going to play again on Saturday, and giving him the confidence to say, okay, you didn't have the best game, you made some errors, but we still trust you because we think you're a fantastic player, and you're going to get an opportunity to go again.

Good players respond in really good ways, so we're excited to see what he can do.

With Guti, it was a conversation. As he went into that challenge, he didn't understand how the player was going to duck and go down, and it looked a lot worse than it actually was. I don't think there's any intent on his part to hurt the opponent. It was an unlucky play, and we talked to him about just being careful in situations like that. But there's not much else to say about that.

He had a really good game. We think he can be an excellent player in this league, a top midfielder in this league, and it's just about getting him back so he can do it.

Q. I wanted to pick your brain a little bit regarding the back line, the defense, that allowed four scores. How did you manage that this week so that the team is more in sync defensively for the game on Saturday?

GREGG BERHALTER: When you look at the goals that we actually conceded, the third one was really an error of maybe back line plus midfielders, the positioning on the cross, but other than that, it was examples of our offense actually giving them easy chances.

So we lost the ball, Sergio loses the ball inside the penalty box, and Phil loses the ball at the top of the penalty box that gives him easy chances. That's what I was most concerned with. I felt really comfortable for large stretches of the game against Columbus that we weren't giving up big chances. I think, if you actually take those two chances away, our expected goals were probably above Columbus.

Again, we want to continue to improve the whole, entire team. I wouldn't target the back line for giving up four goals in this game.

Q. I've got a two-part question. With the first part, obviously with the midfield, it's very thin right now. There were just three midfielders a hundred percent for the first game, and Guti is out for this game as well. Would you have any hesitation to put someone like a Sam Williams or Harold Osorio into the team?

GREGG BERHALTER: That's a great question, Alex. That's exactly what we're working through right now. It's not ideal, obviously the situation we have with midfielders, but we have to make the best of it. It's something that we're working through.

Mauricio, we don't think is ready to start the game, so it's going to be a toss-up on who we go with.

Q. Second part is about -- there's still a very long time left in the primary transfer window. You have three slots open on the senior roster. Are you looking at potentially bringing in another midfielder in the next couple weeks?

GREGG BERHALTER: We're looking at potentially adding to the squad, strengthening the squad. I won't say exactly what position, but there's a couple different opportunities, some really high impact players that we've been looking at and positioning for.

Q. Home opener, didn't get the result, and it's just like a tough schedule with the team playing a number of games on the road where points are traditionally harder to come by in this league. How important is it for this team to get a result as opposed to just playing well in the home opener on Saturday?

GREGG BERHALTER: I think results are always important, but I also know there's a lot of soccer to play. I



also know that you can't predict what happens in games. I wouldn't say, okay, we're going on the road. We have to do this, or we're playing at home.

For us, it's really about our performance, reaching our standards. If we do that, we'll be happy.

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