

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Maren Haile-Selassie

Press Conference



Q. You got your four games under the belt with the Fire this year. You had an abridged preseason because of injury. How comfortable are you within this lineup at this point, and what do you think you need to do to get to that peak Maren within the system?

MAREN HAILE-SELASSIE: Yeah, you're right, I missed preseason, basically. Even the off-season, I was injured. So I was really, I was, in a had a slight injury. So it took me many time to feet back.

Yeah, obviously the fitness, I think it just comes with the games, and I mean, I'm trying my best in training. But it comes over the games. Just when I get the opportunity to get some minutes and to show what I can do, I think, yeah, each game by game, I will improve and can help the team more.

Q. The last time you got those minutes, it was in an unfamiliar position for people, at right back. Can you describe your experience in the role and how comfortable you are playing in a different position?

MAREN HAILE-SELASSIE: It was actually left back. It was Omar who came in right back.

We were chasing a goal, so I wasn't like really playing as a left back. I just came in for a left back. But you know, they wanted me to stay high and wide and create chances, to create overloads, which I think we did well.

But yeah, I mean, obviously I'm a player who can play multiple positions, have the qualities and intelligence for that, and I'm just trying to help the team wherever I can.

Q. Obviously you have some fond memories of two years ago taking on Miami, scoring two goals yourself in what was a pretty fun game for you and your teammates. How do you look forward to an occasion like this, another big stage and big crowd, how does that translate for you as a player?

MAREN HAILE-SELASSIE: I remember it was a big night for the team, for myself, for the club because it was a big victory against Miami.

But yeah, this time it's going to be completely different. You can't compare it to then. They are a different team. We are a different team. We have a new identity, new players.

And it's going to be very exciting, I think. Everyone is looking forward, obviously, because we know that there are some more eyeballs on us, on that game, and we can show everyone what we are about this year.

Q. You mentioned you were out for a few games. I want to know your opinion on how you see the team from outside, not being able to play, what you think the team needs to improve more?

MAREN HAILE-SELASSIE: Well, yeah, when I was outside, obviously you get to see the game a little bit different than on the pitch.

MAREN HAILE-SELASSIE: So, yeah, I saw that -- I would say as a team we improved a lot. We played better. We played more attacking, and everyone is on the same page. So starting with the coach, with the players, everyone is, like, basically agrees how we want to play. So then when I came back, it is fun to play in that way because we like how we are trying to play.

Obviously at the end, it's about results. We just think that's the best way to get results. Yeah, we are enjoying the way we play.

Q. In high-profile matches, usually execution often decides the results. What's been the focus in training when it comes to a staying sharp and staying together as a team, considering there's some injuries are on and off, and each week it changes?

MAREN HAILE-SELASSIE: Obviously we had to deal with some injuries. I think for this game, some guys are probably going to be back. But the focus honestly was more on us, how we want to play because obviously they are a very good team but like every team they also have their weaknesses.



So the focus was more on how we use the spots, the space that we're going to find in the game. And yeah, maybe the next days, probably also look how we're going to defend when they have the ball. Because they also have some, especially one big threat, and they are a good attacking team.

So yeah, the focus, I'm sure it's going to be on that.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Hugo, you've seen him last season and this year. I wanted to get your perspective on what you think is going well for him. He was obviously solid and respectable performance-wise this year but seems a different gear with the new wingers and Gregg's system. What is your obligation?

MAREN HAILE-SELASSIE: Yeah, I mean, he was also dealing with a slight injury, so also, his preseason wasn't easy for him and for the team. Right away when he came back, you can see the importance that he has for the team.

I would say what is good for him is the way that we want to feel like you mentioned with many attacking players, not just the wingers but also midfielders and fullbacks, attacking and trying to create chances, and also he, I think, himself, he always works hard.

I think he improved, as well, himself in his overall game. He tends to find the right spots to score those goals, even if it's maybe just one-touch finish, tap-ins.

A lot of credit to him, obviously, but I think he benefits a lot from the way we're playing and the players around him.

Q. So you've been here now a while, kind of the elder statesman of this team in a way. What's different about this team this season for you? Is this the most talented team that you've been part of with the Fire? And coaching-wise, what have you noticed different about this year? Obviously the results are much better early on, but what's the difference that you've noticed about your squad?

MAREN HAILE-SELASSIE: Obviously we've had many changes personnel-wise with the players, staff. We added much more quality, I would say, and overall, the level is higher than previous years.

But I think the biggest change is obviously Gregg, just his intelligence, the way how he wants us to play, the confidence that he has and that he wants us to have as well on the pitch.

Yeah, I think it's just we as players, we follow that, and he

sets the tone. I would say that's the biggest difference from the previous years.

Q. Circling back to Sunday's game, there's been two games that Miami has played on, Sunday and last night. Did you catch any of those games? Have you been studying what Miami does well, and in your words, what do you think they do well?

MAREN HAILE-SELASSIE: What's the last question? What I did well?

Q. What do they do well?

MAREN HAILE-SELASSIE: Yeah, as a team, we didn't really have a video on them yet. It's going to come, like usually the last two days. I watched the game on Sunday against Toronto. Yesterday, I just got to see the highlights.

Obviously we know what they are about. They have one main target and main threat in Messi but also the players around him, I think they support him well. They have quality, as well.

And yeah, I think they are especially attacking-wise a very, very dangerous team. Like I said before, like every team, they have their weaknesses which we think are more in the defensive way.

I think that's what we are looking to exploit for on Sunday.

Q. The team went to Vancouver across the continent and got a win against a team at the top of the Western Conference. How important is it mentally for the group to have a yardstick to get victories against teams at the top? Does it change the mentality of the group at all for you?

MAREN HAILE-SELASSIE: I wouldn't say it changed the mentality because our mentality and our ambition is to go into every game and try to win it, and knowing that we can win.

But you're right, especially against those teams who are doing well at the moment in the League, you know, you try, maybe, to make statement, as well, for the league and for ourselves most of all because we just want to prove ourselves, as well, that we can beat everyone, like we did in Vancouver against a very good team. That's going to be our goal against Miami, as well.

Q. We talked a little bit about how playing under Gregg's system is different. Curious from a soccer perspective, as a winger, what's being asked of you guys in training and in matches? What are you being

asked to do in this new system that maybe is different from the role that you feel like you were playing in previous years?

MAREN HAILE-SELASSIE: Well, I think it gives us more freedom. He relies a lot on our qualities and our intelligence on the field.

Obviously there are some spaces that he wants to be occupied. But it's not like, for example, the previous years, the coaches wanted us to be maybe wide and high, and he likes us to be also sometimes in the pockets, to be close to each other so we can have good connections.

But at the end, every coach likes when their attacking players produce and score goals and assists. Obviously that's what he expects of us as well and just to help the team at the end.

Q. Curious after last week's frustrating loss, it's a game where you guys had a lot of chances in front of goal and just weren't able to get more than one. You want to make that statement. How important is it, also, to bounce back and understand and turn that frustration into a productive week and result?

MAREN HAILE-SELASSIE: Yeah, very important, I would say, because we get the opportunity to, you know, learn from our mistakes and to get a bounce back win.

I would say, yeah, we did an analysis of our game, our previous game, and obviously we saw some things that we can and we have to improve for the next game. Because we have to be spot on on Sunday because they are, like I said, a dangerous team who can get use of our mistakes.

Yeah, we're looking forward to play in front of our fans again and to showcase what we can do this year, and just to entertain them and hopefully to win.

Q. You talked a lot about your team's approach to facing Inter Miami, but I'm more interested about your personal approach and how you're heading into this high-profile match. What's your mentality like?

MAREN HAILE-SELASSIE: Personally I don't try to switch things because I think if you think about how you want to change things in your approach and your ritual, I don't think it's going to benefit you.

I try to do my own habits and rituals, as always, every week, every day. Of course, building up to the game, the week, it feels different, and so everyone is a little bit maybe more, you know, tense and a little bit more on the edge, on their toes. I can feel that for sure.

Come game day, it's about staying calm, being confident in what we worked on in the week, and just trying to deliver.

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