

# Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Chicago, Illinois, USA

## Gregg Berhalter

Press Conference



**Q. It's in some ways just another regular-season game, and in others it's a bigger game. The crowd expected to be very large. And also just in a sporting sense, the team traveled to Vancouver got a result against the team at the top of west and Miami is top of the east on points per game. How important is it at this stage in the program to come in and have a good performance and get a result against a team like Miami?**

GREGG BERHALTER: You know, I think any time you get to play against a team that's close to the top of the table in your conference, it's some type of measuring stick, right. And for us, you know, looking at Red Bull last week, okay, a team that made it to the final last year, we're playing away, we want to measure ourselves and how we can do.

And so for Miami, it's no different. This is a group that has high aspirations, and if we have these high aspiration, we have to be able to compete against teams like Miami.

So we expect Sunday to be a good game, and we're looking forward to it.

**Q. Curious, a couple guys returning to training this week, Brian Gutiérrez and Jonathan Dean. How are you feeling about that back for against Miami?**

GREGG BERHALTER: Yeah, it's still going to be a little bit of work-in-progress. You know, Johnny won't be back for the game. So, you know, it's another defender down. But we'll make do.

You know, again, I think Miami, it sounds strange saying this, but it's really not about trying to shut them out. It's about trying to win the game. I think if you focus on the shutout, you can get disappointed very quickly.

Even with guys like Messi and Suárez, it's not trying to shut them down can completely because you see they are too good.

And so for us, it's about limiting the damage, and again, how do we hurt them when we have the ball. And that's something we need to focus on. They showed vulnerability last night. LAFC was unlucky enough to score a second goal and we have to take advantage of some of that but knowing that defensively we can be at our best, and we can still get hurt.

**Q. Obviously you look at this Miami team, these guys have been logging a lot of minutes lately. I think I saw it's the first time Messi has played three full 90s in a row in some number of years. How do you prepare for a team that at full strength is one thing, and even if one of their star guys are not out, there they are quite a different proposition?**

GREGG BERHALTER: I think obviously if Messi or Suárez, you know, when they don't play, the team's different, but it's not necessarily worse for them.

You know, they have the best of both worlds, almost, because the guys that come on are trying to show themselves and trying to prove themselves. And then when Messi and Suárez play, they have this amazing quality.

I expect Messi to be fully playing. He's a guy that wants to compete. He has done well at Soldier Field. Soldier Field I great stadium, an iconic stadium. Guys like that, they play. They play in games. That's what they do.

So you know we're expecting them to play. We know it's going to be a challenging game. And for us it's about doing our thing, having a clear game plan, executing it, and trying to make it as difficult as possible for them.

**Q. I don't know if you probably watched the two games in Miami the last couple years, but also closer to a sellout crowd, a lot of people, you know, wear the Inter Miami shirt or Argentina shirt. How do you think it's going to be this Sunday?**

GREGG BERHALTER: You know, it's funny because I was at the last two games that they played, and you see that there are a lot of people with Messi jerseys and expectedly, right. I mean, he's the best player in the world. We understand that.



But what I saw especially in the first game is the tide started to change. Fans start cheering for the Fire as we get the upper hand.

Unfortunately in last year's game, that didn't happen. Miami had the upper hand, and then the fans are louder. For us, it's how do we help change the momentum of the fans and how do we get them fully supporting us and on board. Because everyone likes to see the home team win.

**Q. Matches like this Sunday only come down to a few moments. What's your message to the players in terms of focus and decision-making throughout the 90 minutes?**

GREGG BERHALTER: Yeah, it's a really good question because, you know, that's the beauty of playing against players like Messi and Suárez and the rest of their group, is you know, you'll have things in complete control, and then one thing will go wrong and you get punished.

You see that, you know, time and time again. The Toronto game is a great example where Toronto has the upper hand, a guy makes one mistake, falls down, he doesn't clear it the wrong way, and falls to the wrong guy at the wrong time and they score. That's how it is with them.

It really is about being focused in the moments, being calm and being able to think through these moments. Responding, not reacting, are really key deciders in games like this.

It's going to be no different. It's going to be important that we're able to navigate through the game, and there will be ups and downs in the games and we have to navigate through that, as well, and just being calm and collected.

**Q. How do you assess the training sessions --**

GREGG BERHALTER: We have a good group. For me, I'm really not surprised but like I enjoy watching them train. Because there's some really good plays in training, really good combinations, really good understanding. It's just trying to continue to bring that all.

When you look at the Red Bull game, we had 2.7 expected goals away from home. Those are good numbers. Those are numbers you don't see too often.

You know, as a coaching staff, we want to really emphasize these moments because we're trying to build something, and it does take time, but there's really moments of brilliance that we see amongst the group that we want to highlight and get more often.

**Q. So you've had a couple injuries at center back, Jack Elliott out, Sam Rogers still not back with the team. How do you feel about the prospect of Omar coming back in for his first start and how close is Christopher Cupps to getting some minutes?**

GREGG BERHALTER: That's decision we have to make as a coaching staff. Do you go with the veteran who could make his potential first start, or do you go with a really young guy who can get thrown into the fire.

Either way, there's positives to both scenarios. With the veteran, you get some calmness. You get leadership ability on the field. You get a guy that's been through it and seen it before.

On the other hand, with the young guy, you get opportunity, and future. Chris is a guy that we really believe in, and it's really interesting to think about him playing in this game. You know, even if he fails in this game, it's a wonderful opportunity for him to be out there.

So these are the things we're looking at as a coaching staff, and you know, that's if Jack and Sam aren't available, which we don't know yet.

**Q. I'm writing a piece about Hugo, and I wanted to get insight into what it's like to work with him, and if you can connect back with your experiences to other great strikers you've brought up over the years.**

GREGG BERHALTER: Hugo is an interesting one. He really is. He's one of the most focused players I've ever seen, I've ever been around. Really just laser focused on getting better, on improving, on taking care of himself. Helping the team. A tremendous work rate. You know, he's got a lot of really, really special qualities, and it's been interesting to work with him.

You know, sometimes for me, I'm amazed watching him in the penalty box, how he finishes, how he's able to put the ball on target with no time under a lot of pressure of the.

To me, there's a lot of upside with him. He's different than a lot of the strikers that I've coached before because it's not really about aerial crosses. It's not about putting the ball in the air with him. It's more about the finer detail with his movement, smaller movements, getting open in the box. You know, breaking free from opponents on the weak side. He does a lot of things extremely well but it's been, so far, a real pleasure to work with him.

**Q. This is your first game on a Sunday. Do you consider it a benefit to have an extra day to prepare for Miami? Having seven days to prepare, is that a**



**benefit?**

GREGG BERHALTER: It's great. It's strange how the season has been going so far. It's basically Saturday, Saturday, Saturday, and now Sunday, mix it up a little. It's always good to mix up the rhythm a little bit at times. We actually gave the guys an extra day off. Then you come in and they are recovered, so you can do more on that first day back, which was good.

The training this week has been outstanding. Really good intensity. The guys will be ready. I think the one benefit is Miami having to play yesterday. They will have some of the game in their legs, which will help us a little bit.

But they also have the ability to rotate players. They have been doing that throughout the course of the league, and they have a deep squad.

So they know whoever plays is going to be difficult and motivated to win.

**Q. I wanted to ask about Javier Mascherano, not an experienced coach at all here in the States. What have you seen from him?**

GREGG BERHALTER: You know, I think, first of all, outstanding player when he played, and you can see kind of the attributes from him as player how they are translating to him as a coach. The team plays with ton of intensity. He's laser focused on making sure the team plays to the rhythm that he wants them to. So far, he's gotten good results.

So I think, you know, it's not easy to adapt to new leagues, and it's not easy to take your first step as a coach in the professional ranks, but I think he's been doing a really good job.

**Q. So early in the season there was a lot of issues in the midfield and now it's the back line. Looks like Brian Gutiérrez is back in training. Can we hear about his availability, and Dje D'Avilla, how is he integrating with the squad, what do you expect from him, and will he be available on Sunday?**

GREGG BERHALTER: D'Avilla has had a second training session and he's looking good. He's integrating to the group well. Gives us a different dimension in the midfield. So it's definitely nice to have options.

And then with Guti, he's been training full all week, as well. So we expect him to be able to play some role. For us, it's really about how much can he play.

**Q. MLS owners are meeting to discuss possibilities of a lot of things. One of the discussion points is the possibility of changing back to the European-style calendar for soccer. Curious how that would impact your job and any thoughts you have on any potential changes?**

GREGG BERHALTER: I think the beauty of Major League Soccer has been its ability to pivot and change direction at any time. You see the playoff structure has changed throughout the years. Conference structure has changed, teams going back-and-forth. Basically they are going do what they think makes the most sense for the long-term health of this league.

I'm sure they will come up with the right decision. As far as we're concerned, we're ready to take part in any type of season that they present to us.

I really like how it's being looked at. We should always be asking questions of how to make this league better; how to make this league comparable with the top five leagues and eventually go beyond the top five leagues.

**Q. In big matches like this one on Sunday, sometimes leadership makes a big, huge difference. Who have you seen step up in the locker room or training this week?**

GREGG BERHALTER: You know, it's an interesting question. Because to me, it's not about who steps up this week. To me, it's really about the sum of actions throughout the course of the season, and that's what we're looking for. Real leaders are there day-in and day-out. Real leaders are there when things aren't going well and when things are going well.

We are not asking these guys to lead any differently than they have all year. It's about doing our jobs, and if each and every one of us do our jobs every day, we'll be okay.

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