

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Gregg Berhalter

Press Conference



Q. More rumors about incoming transfers, Kevin de Bruyne this time, not looking specifically at that player, but what is it about now potentially bringing in these big names to the club, and why that would be important not only as a soccer team but understanding that this club wants to establish itself as a top one in North America?

GREGG BERHALTER: I'm not going to comment directly on the player. But what I would say is we're ambitious, and we want to build a team and a squad that can compete at the very top with Major League Soccer.

When there are opportunities out in the market that represent our ambition, you know, we'll look at them closely.

Q. So speaking about one of the ambition of being a top team, the team's schedule right now, facing a lot of top teams, FC Cincinnati is next. Last weekend Miami, the offensive talent, they have got, some good defensive talent, too, FC Cincinnati have good attackers but looks like Evander will be back, best center back possibly in the League over the past few seasons. So what is that challenge going to look like and how is the team going to approach it?

GREGG BERHALTER: Well, you know, the way I see it, and I've said this a number of times, is every game is a top team. Every game is difficult. When you think about D.C., Montréal, they gave us very difficult games and we have easier times against other teams.

The way we approach each and every game is very similar. We know we have to prepare the best we can. We have to have a strong game plan coming in and these will be clear to the players, and then we need to go out and execute it.

And you know, we don't even get ahead of ourselves and start looking down the road because really, the only thing from us right now is FC Cincinnati, and that's who we're

focused on.

Over the last couple years, have been one of the better teams in Major League Soccer from a performance standpoint. You know, very robust center backs. Very physical team.

I think they added an element of high pressure, man versus man at times, that becomes very difficult. They added some quality with Evander, who, by the way, we expect to play, and Denkey, quality attacking players. They have national team players in their wide areas and their center back position.

So it's a good team. You know, we have to be prepared the best we can and we have to go out and have a good performance.

Q. After the match against Inter Miami where several players, especially on defense, gave that extra effort to keep the clean sheet, how do you work to maintain that same level of intensity and commitment across every match, and not only the high-profile ones?

GREGG BERHALTER: I don't think it's a question of added commitment against Miami. I think that we've been struggling trying to get players healthy and get continuity within the team, and you know, that always takes a toll, especially on the defensive end.

As we get guys back playing together, healthy, I think you'll start to see some more consistent defensive performances.

But from a data standpoint, there's been some good aspects of our defensive game. We are preventing opponents from progressing at a very high rate. So think about things, the performance on Sunday was the culmination of some good work throughout the entire year.

Q. Last year, the Chicago Fire played the Lamar Hunt U.S. Open with the second team. Knowing that you have a rival next month, my question is, will it be the first team playing this tournament, or will it be the second team or you haven't decided yet?

GREGG BERHALTER: Yeah, did they enter the second team in the Open Cup last year? They just played with the second team?



No, we've entered the tournament with our first team.

Q. Actually something I was curious about when Carlos was doing his press conference we heard firsthand how much his English has improved and how much he's worked on that. What have you seen so far this season as a coach, you've brought in not only a diversity of players but a lot of different language skillsets. After the first few months, how do you see the way the team communicates as the guys find their way to communicate within the team?

GREGG BERHALTER: Yeah, I think we're continuing to improve that. Some of the players are still working on their English but you see a guy like Carlos, he's improved tremendously. Even in video meetings, he's not shy to speak up, and he's always talking. He gets along with his teammates very well.

You know, you can see how he jokes around and really endears himself to his teammates.

On the field, he's a competitor. The issue for Carlos is always going to be, can he stay on the field and play with consistency.

I think he has the potential to be one of the top center backs in Major League Soccer, but that's easy to say and much harder to do.

Q. You talked about ambition earlier. Looking ahead to the summer window, what parts of the field do you feel like the team needs to show the most ambition? Where do you think you need to invest the most in terms of just positionally?

GREGG BERHALTER: Well, I think that in a perfect world, you'd be able to invest across an entire roster and say, okay, we can bring in world-class players in every position.

You know, it's not perfect. There's a salary cap. There's a limited amount of designated spot players. So I think the most sense is to bring in an attacking player. Somebody that can change the game consistently from an attacking end. Can work with the offensive weapons we already have to bring out more in them and had especially them continue and overall help the team, you know, both on and off the field.

Q. So Joe Mansueto said he would leave the soccer up to you, so whether it's Kevin de Bruyne or any other big-name player like that, what are the conversations like when you're potentially talking about an eight-figure salary? What are the conversations like

with ownership when you're talking about such a big move like that?

GREGG BERHALTER: You know, they are similar to all the conversations. We have great contact. We are in continual contact. I update him on all the player movement, and we talk about it and we have very good conversations.

What I would say is that he's very ambitious and wants to really build a strong and consistent performer in our club, and I know how much he wants to continue to improve our roster.

Q. Seeing Carlos talk here, this is such a good group of guys, legitimately, everyone is so likable, not only are they professional, but they just seem, everyone you interact with in that locker room, it's just such a good group. How important is it to you to have a good group of actual, not only football players, but people on this roster, and how much does that go into your thinking about chemistry and adding new players, and sort of harnessing what you have with this group now that you've kind of got to know them over the last few months?

GREGG BERHALTER: Yeah, it's a good question because working with them, you get to see just focused they are and how dedicated and how they have been able to build bonds over a short period of time.

The way we look at it is talent is only the floor; basically the ceiling is determined by your character and what you're willing to put in and how hard you're willing to work.

You know, we've seen that so far with this group. They have been working hard. Really focused on continual improvement, trying to get better every day, and competing. You know, we have difficult train sessions, a lot of competition built into the training sessions but they have been managing through that well.

Q. You've changed the dynamics of the team. I've spoken to some of the fans, and some of the fans and even some of the players, they love you here. So thank you for bringing the love to the City of Chicago, to the owner, and to this team. My only question is: Are there any injuries? I spoke to you after the game against Inter Miami, and you made mention of Guti, I wanted to see where he's at for this upcoming game on Saturday?

GREGG BERHALTER: Thank you very much for the nice words. It is a work-in-progress, and we're just trying to get better all the time. We think with the right mindset and the



right work rate, we can make the fans proud and that's what we're trying to do.

Who was the player you asked about again? Guti? No, Guti's back. He trained all week again. This is his second week training, and he's definitely available and it would be nice to be able to extend some of his minutes in this game.

Q. One of the questions about ambition that's going to come up, the team has been ambitious with its academy and youth development. The GA Cup is going on. What is your perspective on that?

GREGG BERHALTER: They have been doing really well. We are not necessarily focused on winning but we want to compete and we want to be, you know, playing each game to compete and show that we want to win. But really, it's important that we develop players that understand our style of play. And you know, the other thing about it is, both of the age groups are playing with very young teams.

So we're happy with how they have been performing. I think the U16s got a little bit unlucky in their game. Their winner missed the penalty and that would have went through.

The U18 is going well. Funny story, Christopher Cupps was on the bench against Inter Miami and goes down and plays with the U18, and you see how happy he is. He gets game time but he also knows what he means to that group.

It's a nice thing to see the guy move from the first team to playing U18 soccer in the GA Cup.

Q. I've got to ask about the right back situation going into this week. Jonathan Dean has been training the last couple weeks. Any updates on Leo Barroso?

GREGG BERHALTER: Leo is still out. He's on schedule. But he's not going to be available. Dean should be back. So that's good news. And you know, we still have Omari and Justin Reynolds, so getting some fullbacks.

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