

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Gregg Berhalter

Press Conference



Q. When you look at a team like Charlotte, what are the points of emphasis for your center backs when you go against a team like this that wants to work it in behind but has shown the ability to score wherever they want to when they have a talent like Zaha?

GREGG BERHALTER: Yeah, I think they have a number of different attacking options with wingers, right-footed winger, Abada, who has a lot of quickness speed. Then we go to the left side, right-footed winger in Zaha who is very good 1v1 very good finishing; and Agyemang up top who runs behind constantly; and Biel between the lines who likes to get the final pass.

I think it's almost as good as it gets in the League in terms of the top four attacking players, and I can imagine that the coach is going to be talking a lot about how to play behind their back line. If you see some of the troubles we've had with direct balls behind the back line, I think it's good set up for them and we have to be aware of that.

And the other thing I'd add is that you know, I guarantee they are going to be ready to play. They are going to be playing at home. They are going to want to make a statement after a couple losses in league play.

Q. You guys got your first win in, I believe, seven games. How has the response and training environment and everything been different this week?

GREGG BERHALTER: Was it really seven games? Has it been that long?

Five games? Five games. So six games, seven weeks. Are we talking weeks or games? Let's get consistent. We'll call it games. Now, what was -- yeah, it was five. We had not won in five games. Is that what we're saying?

It's confirmed.

Q. Week 13.

GREGG BERHALTER: Okay. The point being, I think that we were happy with a lot of those performances that we didn't get the result in. In terms of, we thought we were right there. If we had done things a little bit better, we should get the win and happy with the way we played in most of those matches.

The outlier is the drumming that we got in Nashville. But that weighs on your team. What I would say is that the response from the group in the next week was outstanding. You go down, you play Atlanta, a very good attacking team. You shut them out at home. We had a number of chances to score, had a red card for 60 minutes of the game-to-game and the guys did well. And then you think about the Open Cup win.

Overall, positive, and something to build on.

Q. It was six matches without a win.

GREGG BERHALTER: Confirms.

Q. Win in the Open Cup and win again on Saturday. So two wins now, now undefeated in three, so that's a change in the trend. One of the things from last game, you talked about the solutions providing the win, making an almost immediate impact coming off the bench. What's the philosophy with just competition in a number of spots now in the midfield. Is it a question of guys losing spots or individual matchups against an opponent? How do guys get more minutes after the play that we've seen from guys coming off the bench?

GREGG BERHALTER: We have another three-game week coming up. So there's going to be plenty of game time for the entire squad which is a good thing.

But what I would say is by and large, there is competition for spots now, and as you get players healthy, that competition is going to help the team because guys know this they have to be sharp. They have to be at their best or they are in danger of losing their spot. I think that's normal in any type of environment that has to be top performing, you need competition for spots and the guys need to have the onus on having to perform.

Q. Following on Tim's question, most of the league played a midweek game last night. Related to the

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substitution impacts, how do you feel you might be able to make an impact leveraging that your guys will have a couple extra days of rest?

GREGG BERHALTER: I think that that plays somewhat of a factor. They played Open Cup last week, also, so they have two weeks in a row that they have three games.

I think the most important thing is that their coach is going to have them ready to play, and they are going to be hungry to get a home win. I know that for sure. You know, an experienced coach. He knows that home points are very valuable, and they are going to see this as an opportunity. You know, for us, it's really about matching that early intensity that they have, that early push that they are going to have to score goals -- inaudible -- I thought you were a stat guy. Okay.

So we're 30 in the League in XG and we need to show our offensive quality as well. We can hurt teams and create chances and that's going to be a very important aspect of the game, withstanding and actually going out and trying to hurt them.

Q. One of two players in the League --

GREGG BERHALTER: The goal per 90? Kouamé.

Q. Curious what you think after getting that goal, another goal for him last weekend, how much does he have to do to get into the starting 11?

GREGG BERHALTER: Yeah, basically he did his job right in the match and I think he did his job in the Open Cup. And that's what I meant by competition.

You know, there's going to be a lot of game time this week. We expect him to play a role this week whether it's on Saturday or Tuesday or next Saturday, Sunday. We think he's going to be able to help this group as will many players next week.

So you know, happy with his performance. Omari made a big impact. Maren made a big impact when they came in. Overall it's nice to get contributions like that from the group.

Q. Some reflections on the last week plus of the goalkeeper situation where Chris comes in for Open Cup and then Jeff plays another good match in MLS. What's overall thoughts?

GREGG BERHALTER: I think first of all congratulations to Jeff for making his first MLS start at his age and getting the win. That's impressive. And I think he played really well. When you talk about competition for spots, I think everyone

needs to feel that competition, and when you have a guy that the team trusts and can come in and perform the way he did, I'm sure Chris feels the pressure to perform really well.

You know, Chris is an outstanding goalie. He's had a good year so far and we want to obviously keep developing him and having -- putting him in position to perform well. But I think it's really positive with the goalkeeping group right now.

Q. One of the stories is that the Fire have been pushing up and getting caught out a little bit defensively and guys have had to rush back, which is run over the reasons why the difference in stats is different with goals for versus goals expected. Against Charlotte, is it a matter of sitting back and picking moments or is it about just trying to really take the game to them and get that lead early to take the home crowd out a little bit?

GREGG BERHALTER: I think it's about moments. You saw last week against Atlanta, they have a fast attacking group up top. They like to play behind the back line. I think they did really well with the high press and goal kicks and moving up the field at times.

The main issue you highlighted is balls behind the back line. We want to be a pressing team, a high-pressing team, but there's moments where the player has time on the ball. When the team has those moments, we need to be prepared for balls behind the back line.

Agyemang is very direct in running behind the back of the line. Westwood looks for him all the time. The center backs look for him all the time behind the back line. They play a huge quantity of long balls behind the opponent's back line and we have to be aware of that.

But in terms of game plan, I'm sure we'll see bits of both in the game.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Patrick specifically. What has he shown you over the last few years that have made him get to the place where he is now as one of the better strikers in the League?

GREGG BERHALTER: He's shown good development. His movement off the ball is excellent. He's strong. He gives the defenders a really difficult time. He's a decent 1v1 for a big guy and just really well-round game. You can see why he's making the impact that he is.

Q. Guti has a good chance of being part of that National Team when it's announced. How are you



preparing for not having him for a month of time in the near future, and if he does make a squad, is that a chance for him to showcase himself for some of the top European leagues?

GREGG BERHALTER: I think we're supportive of the National Team program, obviously, and any time a player gets an opportunity like that is a great accomplishment for the work they have put in.

Brian is knocking on the door for that roster and the Gold Cup is a great opportunity. We know what the expectations are for the U.S. in the Gold Cup and to be able to manage through that and play the friendlies and then go to the Gold Cup in official competition is exciting. It would be nice to have some of our players included.

Q. Three games coming up in a short respond. The Pope meek is going to be against a MLS opponent, rather than a lower division, changes things a little bit in terms of the competition. Does s there a question of prioritizing one competition versus the other? How does the team look at the Open Cup competition given it's a few games to be able to win a trophy versus needing to get points in the League to try to stay in a good place in the standings?

GREGG BERHALTER: That's a narrative you hear often, what are you prioritizing; only five games to win a trophy and this and that.

For us, it's about we want to build a resilient team. We want to build a team that can deal with fixture congestion. We have aspirations for playing in the CONCACAF Champions Cup and if you do that it takes a toll on your squad.

For us, you see how we approached last week with how we were able to rotate some guys, keep some guys in there and overall put a team on the field in all three of those games that can compete, and that will be our objective next week as well.

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