

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Gregg Berhalter

Press Conference



GREGG BERHALTER: All right.

Q. Homes.

GREGG BERHALTER: Okay.

Q. Chris just talked about how the locker room is embracing the pressure of this six-match run, this eight-match run of this last stretch of the season. How important is it for these guys to understand the pressure that they are going to be under and that they want to be a part of those high-pressure situations as the season winds down?

GREGG BERHALTER: Yeah, I think it's a good question. It's definitely a position that we want to be in that we've worked hard all year to go to, and now it's about finishing it off and getting into position to play in the playoffs.

But I was watching the U.S. Open, I don't know if you guys watched the US Open, there's a quote -- I don't now if you saw it, but right before you go into the Arthur Ashe arena that says, "Pressure is a privilege."

Q. Chris just literally said that to us.

GREGG BERHALTER: I told that to the team last week, and basically that's what we've worked for. We've worked to get into this position to play games like this, and this is the best time of year.

When you are playing in November, you're doing something right, and that's what we're trying to do.

Q. On that note, the team finally has a winning record at home after some struggles there early, but that's including games --

GREGG BERHALTER: A hole we have to dig ourselves out of.

Q. Well, still one game behind at Soldier Field after the wins at SeatGeek?

GREGG BERHALTER: Oh, now you're breaking it up?

Q. Well, look, it's two different homes.

Q. But look, beating a team that you effectively took out of playoff contention last week and now a team that's immediately above you in the standings before facing some of the top teams in the League in the next couple week, ratcheting up the difficulty match after match, how important is it to get a win in this game at home to preserve that momentum and secure the three points and leapfrog NYC FC in the standings?

GREGG BERHALTER: It's the same focus as every game. But now as you get toward the end, you start to understand the implications and there becomes less room for error. That's the way I would look at it.

And when you look at us head-to-head against New York, it's a big game. It's a massive game, and they are telling their group the same thing.

So for us, it's just about preparing like we always do, and you know, and trying to give the group the understanding of what we are about to encounter because it's going to be a good game.

Q. Hope you don't mind me changing the theme a little bit. The change with the design of the academy, instead of a one-year registration, now a three-year at U-13, I guess you re-up if they stay with the program. Can you talk about that concept and what it means to the club?

GREGG BERHALTER: Well, I think more importantly, what does it mean to the families and the players, right. That's the important thing. And I think it gives them security.

You know, this is a cutthroat business but they are still kids, and we want to put them in an environment where we challenge them but they know they're supported because they have three years to develop and to grow and to improve as players.

I think the hard work is done in the front end of the process

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where we're identifying the players. You know, we looked at thousands of players to get to this group of U-13s, and now it's the fun part. We identified them. Now it's about working them and working with their families to help develop not only great soccer players but great people.

Q. Being in this crucial time of the year, does the message change in a way? Because you have guys that have been here previously that haven't experienced winning. You have guys that come over from different countries that might be newer to this MLS format and playoff chase. Does the message go individually to different sort of guys based on potential experiences and what it means to be in this sort of race, or is there a universal message to everyone that no matter what their experience is or sort of history with being in such a position?

GREGG BERHALTER: Well, I think the fortunate thing is the way we prepare because every week, we prepare to go out and win a game and every week we give it everything we have.

And when you do that, week-after-week, you know, you get to this point and you're not reinventing anything. You just continue to do the same thing.

So that's important, the continuity. You don't want to put the players out of balance by all of a sudden doing different things at this time of year. That's the first part.

The second part is, you know, people, sometimes you hear people complaining about no promotion relegation. And the way we're looking at this as a group is we have -- how many losses do we have, ten losses or something like that? But the beauty of what we're doing and the beauty of MLS and the way the league is set up and the postseason is set up is you still have a chance to win a championship, and that's the beauty of it.

So we worked so hard, and we are still in position. Yes, it wasn't a perfect season, but we're in position now to qualify for the playoffs and potentially win a championship, and that is the exciting part of it that really you can see guys start to dial in.

Q. My question is about David Poreba. I know he's the reigning MVP, 2024 MLS NEXT Pro Golden Boot, he went back and scored and helped the team qualify a little bit in the last game this past weekend. My question is -- Joel Osorio, you follow him closely in the qualifiers, what is your thought about them on the Fire?

GREGG BERHALTER: I think we are extremely happy for

both of the players, David, in particular. We got to see him work every single day on the training pitch and how much work he's put into it, and it's really great to see him get to this point where he makes his return.

And then to make a return and score a goal and the team win and to come back is really special, and those are the moments where you're really happy for everyone, for the staff for all the hours they put in, and for the player and his commitment to the rehab and to getting better.

Q. One of the fun things when watching NYC FC is the ageless Maximiliano Moralez. What has made him stay at this level throughout his career in MLS? He's 38 and playing like a young guy still.

GREGG BERHALTER: I don't know him personally. He always gave us a hard time when I was in Columbus with New York City. He's a fantastic player, a fantastic competitor, and you know, he's got to be doing something right and I'm sure -- first of all, he's a really smart soccer player, very smart soccer -- very second any Cal soccer player but you can see that he takes care of himself and he's still in good shape, and he means a lot to that whole organization.

Q. He's been kind of the tone-setter with NYC FC sometimes clogging up opposing attacks and also one of the best defenses playing behind him in the League. They have conceded the third-fewest goals in the League. Does that make it additionally challenging for the offense to get goals in early and to try to make it a more open game than NYC FC want to, knowing they are a one-by-one-goal-game as part of their game model?

GREGG BERHALTER: For us it's about organizing each phase of the game, understanding their strength, understanding their weaknesses figuring out a way to take advantage of that.

We know every game tells a different story. You can look at all the past statistics and data but then when you play the game, you have no idea what's going to come out and what approach they are going to take and how they are going to execute, how we're going to execute.

For us, it's about having a clear understanding of what we want to do and going out and doing it.

Q. Joel and Leo coming back, any restrictions for them this weekend?

GREGG BERHALTER: No. They are both back healthy.



Q. So we saw the Chicago Bears playing on the same surface on Monday that you're going to be playing on on Saturday. There were comments from reporters before that game that the pitch -- well, turf, which had been previously laid didn't look great and obviously an NFL game didn't do much to improve it. Do you change the strategy knowing it's probably going to be less than an ideal pitch condition?

GREGG BERHALTER: We are going to get our eyes in it today or early tomorrow and figure it out, what we need to do.

Again, I go back to, it will be the same for both teams. We'll both have to deal with the same condition and we'll do so.

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