

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Gregg Berhalter

Press Conference



Q. We just talked to Joel, and he spoke about the importance of using last week's game as a proof-of-concept that you can adjust between multiple systems in the back line. Curious how you feel about that success with the team and what it can do for you guys down the line now that teams have to worry about two potential defensive systems?

GREGG BERHALTER: I think it's more for us being able to adapt. We have a way we want to play. It doesn't change based on the formation. So the guys need to get confidence in that, and it helps us with alternatives.

Every team I've coached, we've used two systems interchangeably. I think it's important to be able to play a five-back system if you need to. Each game dictates something different. Having that in their repertoire could be important.

Q. Over the past week, the Fire announced three more new deals for Dean, Gal, and Mueller. That takes care of 20 percent of the team's roster with new deals going into the future. How important is it for the team to be getting some of these deals done early and get that out of the way as players are being asked to lock in for the last couple games.

GREGG BERHALTER: Yeah, I think when you look at the deals that we have announced, you know, it's all guys -- our team guys are in it for the good of the group and have dedicated themselves to helping the team succeed. We think guys like that are extremely important.

So for us, it's how do we do two things: How do we make the roster better and sustainable. MLS has a salary cap. That's really important to us that we can fit within that and still improve. I think these three signings help us achieve both of those.

Q. I wanted to specifically ask about bringing back Chris Mueller next year. With everything he's been through with his health, what was your thoughts from

the front office as you look to help this guy rebound in his career when he's still a very young man.

GREGG BERHALTER: Well, that's exactly what it was. We needed some flexibility around it. We needed him to compromise a little bit. But the idea was just to put him at ease and really give him the opportunity to focus on his recovery and getting back and having a place that he can count on being back and trying to make a go of this.

You know, it's still uncertain if he can, and it's going to be a day-to-day thing. But we wanted to support him during this time.

Q. So this is a huge week for the team. Three of the four games are happening between this Saturday and next Saturday. How important is it to start off on the right foot with a win in Columbus, and how much are you worried about the team having a game less than 73 hours after this one kicks off?

GREGG BERHALTER: Not too worried about that. That is what it is. You know, talk to Miami about the schedule they are going through. Doesn't seem to stop them. Talk to New York City. They have done a great job of playing games. This time of year, you want to be playing.

For us, it's just about -- and I know you get tired of me saying this but I'm going to say it again. It's really just about the game that's in front of us. We are not getting ahead of ourselves. We're focusing on Columbus. That's the first opponent we have. When we are done with that game, we will focus on Miami and then Toronto.

But it is what it is. The guys are focus asked the guys are training well and now it's about putting the final touches in preparation for Columbus.

Q. A few games remaining. When you sort of look back at the beginning of season and sort of the vision where you want the team, is this where you were hoping you would be in the season, sort of in your destiny and control to make the playoffs? At this point, is this sort of where you were hoping the team would be and sort of maybe envisioned early on that you would be at this point with a few games left in a season?

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GREGG BERHALTER: You know, I think that as you start the season, as you start working with a group, there's a lot of unknowns.

What I would hope for is that we compete and we're a team that can go on the field and can compete and hurt other teams and play attractive soccer and get the fans excited about the Chicago Fire and at the same time put ourselves in a position to make the playoffs.

You know, so would I like to have some more points along the way? Of course. But this is the way it goes. The points that you have you have earned. For us, it's about looking forward. We have a game against Columbus. We remember the first game really well, first game of the season. Maybe some questionable referee decisions on their first goal.

We played well. We have to continue to focus on things that we know can hurt them.

Q. Going back to the first game of the season, how much do you think that you and the players are thinking about this as a way of showing the progress that you've made over the past 30 games, the changes and the growth that players have experienced, and as people have gotten more comfortable in the system and everything else?

GREGG BERHALTER: At this stage, it's about -- where we are at this stage of the season is just about winning. It's about progressing. It's about getting into the playoffs. I'm not sure the guys minds are on the first game, and let's show how much we have improved. It's, okay, we are here. We're this close. Let go. The guys are confident, and that's a good thing to have at this time.

Q. Curious about Columbus. They are dealing with a couple injuries. They haven't had their best run of the season right now but they are still the Columbus Crew coached by Wilfried Nancy. What makes them such a tough team to deal with even when their roster is changing at this point of the year?

GREGG BERHALTER: You have get comfortable being uncomfortable. They do a great job running behind the back line. They go a great job loading players in the penalty box, overloading wide.

So there's going to be times where you're under an extreme amount of pressure, and you just have to be okay with that. You have to stay organized. You have to stay communicating, and then you have to compete. They do a good job of competing.

You know, there's a reason why they have been a top team for the last, you know, three years, is because of the coaching and because of the personnel they have and the roster they have, and even with a couple injuries, they can still perform well.

Q. Columbus have been on a skid lately, one win in their past seven games. In a way does that almost make them more dangerous knowing they are going to be desperate for getting wins and staying in that spot just a little bit out of reach for the Fire to reach if they keep on winning?

GREGG BERHALTER: There's virtually no team you want to play this time of year, right, or every team you want to play, right. It's all the same. Every team competes, D.C. against Miami last week, they are eliminated, and they go out and push Miami to the brink.

No game is going to be easy. The teams that are already eliminated are trying to prove a point, are trying to play spoiler. The teams that are not eliminated are fighting for position. You know, so there's really no easy game at this stage, which is great, because it prepares you for the next stage.

Q. Last week the news about the U-20 World Cup roster, no Sergio Oregel on that. I would imagine he was disappointed but still a crucial part of your roster. What were discussions with him like when you still need him to perform at this time of the year but understanding that any player would be disappointed with that?

GREGG BERHALTER: Yeah, he takes everything in stride. And for him, you know, he understands the importance of these games for us, and he was -- for him, it's about finishing off a great season. He's had an amazing season beyond all expectations, and now he gets the opportunity to stay here and finish and hopefully a good ending to the season.

Q. The team recently made the deal official for the Fire acquiring Owen Pratt. We saw him playing with Fire II. Can you talk a little bit about what you expect him to be bringing and what you're hoping to get from him as he grows and matures?

GREGG BERHALTER: It's a good, young goalkeeper with a lot of potential. You know, we have a record of producing good goalkeepers on this club, and we want to add him to the roster and continue to work with him and hopefully he develops into a first-team goalkeeper one day.

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