

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Chicago, Illinois, USA

Joel Waterman

Press Conference

THE COURT: Thank you everyone for joining us and thank you for everyone who joined us on Zoom.

Q. Clean sheet last week, got a goal, safe to say that you're pretty well established now on the Fire roster. How do you feel going into a huge week?

JOEL WATERMAN: Yeah, huge, myself personally, the team, a week of training and we just want to take that consistency from Minnesota and bring it to Columbus. I know it's cliché to say, one game at a time for us, one training session.

We're solely focused on what we can do against Columbus and get a win at home. We built up some good chemistry and connections from the last game, I think, and hoping we can do the same on Saturday.

Q. How rejuvenating has it been for you just jumping right into a playoff race where every game does matter?

JOEL WATERMAN: Yeah, I love it. I want to play in big games, I want to play in big environments. I want this team to do really, really well and compete for an MLS Cup. That's why I came here, and that's one of the main goals of the squad and something that was, you know, told to me as soon as I got here, what the expectations are.

The guys laid a great foundation, and I'm just trying to add to that. Just add my kind of personality and character to the team and obviously helping on the pitch is something I want to do, as well. So it's been good so far.

Q. The Fire had two goals off set pieces last week. Kind of thinking about that from the other side as a defender, how much does it complicate things knowing that the team you're facing can really be dangerous in those moments like the Fire have been?

JOEL WATERMAN: Yeah, I think the more ways we can score, the better. The more ways we can be dangerous,



the better.

So for us set pieces attacking and defending are important. I think we can actually do better on defensive set pieces, just getting to the first ball and that mentality of getting the ball out and not letting teams get contact.

But on the attacking side, you know, obviously we've been set up in spots where we can be in good spots to score goals, and obviously that's not our main job. We prefer a clean sheet. But any time we can help in the score sheet and be dangerous in different ways, that's huge. That's the most important thing for us.

Q. How important is it for the group to see that you can adjust to that back three, back five, like you did and also play with that back four to get that proof of concept?

JOEL WATERMAN: Yeah, I think it adds some problems for other teams to face. I think going against Columbus, they have to figure out playing a back four, back five. We can change mid-game, we can change at halftime if we see different things happening. It's a huge advantage for us to be able to play in different systems against different teams.

Against Minnesota we know they play back five so we try to match up in every position so obviously it worked. For us being more dynamic in our tactical set up is huge and we have the players for that, too.

Q. You mentioned when you came here that Gregg had a message for you and the goals of the group. Can you share that, what he did mention to you and sort of what the expectations are, especially for someone incoming from a new organization?

JOEL WATERMAN: Yeah, I won't share all of it. Some of it's personal. But I think it's just the standards of the club and what he wants to do with the club and how he wants to go about his business and having that same mindset with the players, too.

We all know why we're here is to win games, get into playoffs first, take that next step, and be very, very dangerous and very hard to play against. I think he was very clear on his message when I first came in and we

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have obviously had discussions throughout my couple weeks here or month and a half here so far.

You know, it's been very transparent. That's what you want as a player, just a clear vision on what the club wants, what the players want and we all want to win. We want to be in these big games and we want to get into playoffs and we'll see what happens there.

Q. Obviously it's a World Cup year and Canada is really trying to take advantage of it. I saw you were speaking at an event earlier this week. What was that like? What was the idea of that, and what do you see your role as on the ambassador side of this World Cup? This is a massive moment for Canada especially at a time of transition for the federation as a whole.

JOEL WATERMAN: Yeah, it's a good question. I was at an all-state event just for soccer in Quebec and soccer in Canada as a whole and what the World Cup is going to mean for the whole country, and seeing the kids with all the jerseys on, and seeing the way the sport is shifting in North America as a whole I want soccer to be the No. 1 sport. In every country, I think that's the goal.

A lot of steps to get there and a lot of teaching opportunities, I think, for fan bases and for us to kind of interact with them and to just tell our stories of where we came from and how to ambassador that the best we can I think is my goal. And obviously handling our business on the pitch, too. We actually can't wait to get started in the World Cup and to face these countries already having been through one World Cup, we have a lot of lessons that we have learned.

We want to put on a show for the country and North America and really progress this sport forward, and it starts with the next generation of kids who want to play. Now they see guys like Alphonso Davies, Jonathan David playing for the biggest club in the world and we want to inspire the next generation to do the same.

Q. Back to Columbus for a second. So Minnesota really likes playing without the ball. Columbus are playing the exact opposite if the game is going their way. They want to have a lot of possession. How important is it for both you and your center back partner as well as -- or partners, as well as everyone else on the pitch to really maintain structure and know that Columbus are trying to pull you guys out of position to create space?

JOEL WATERMAN: It's one of the big things we worked on this week, just being super tight and compact and hard to play through. We know they like to have the ball and we

love to have the ball, too. So it should be a really good game in that aspect. Just obviously I won't tell the whole tactical plan. We don't know who could be watching.

Yeah, we know they have good players on the ball and how we can hurt them in offensive transition is going to be huge. Obviously when we get the ball, keep it, too. It should be a good tactical match. But first it's about winning the ball, our duels, something we don't deviate from in our own game plan. It always second balls and how we can hurt them and I'm really looking forward to the game.

Q. Dje has been taking steps forward. What have you seen from him as a teammate? And you had to compete against him in Montreal a couple times, just seeing his growth from a close perspective, we have seen him take some major steps.

JOEL WATERMAN: Yeah, he's calm in every aspect of his life. That's kind of how he goes about his business, and he plays exactly like he is off the pitch. I feel like any time I get him the ball, he's not going to lose it.

So he's been fantastic, and obviously the goal, first scoring with his head. So he can give us stuff in different ways. And obviously his athleticism and size, he's a special midfielder to have on the team, and we want to put him in good spots to succeed.

You know, he's one of our guys to keep the ball in the middle along with Andre or whoever plays there, Kellyn, any of those guys are top, top players. I just hope it continues on his progression, and yeah, he's been really good for us.

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