

# Chicago Fire Media Conference

Saturday, October 18, 2025

Chicago, Illinois, USA

## Joel Waterman

Press Conference



New England 2, Chicago Fire FC 2

**Q. Joel, what's the feeling after that game, you get to host a wild card game but it was a bit chaotic. Is there a sense of relief considering it took you awhile to get on the score sheet?**

JOEL WATERMAN: Yeah, it's a weird feeling because we weren't good in the first half at all. We loved our second half and our fight but we've got to start games, especially now in the playoffs, it's a whole different mentality. We are not happy just making playoffs. We want to make a good run, and obviously the ultimate goal is to win a MLS Cup. Our mentality has to change in that way and making sure we keep the Cup as the main focus and the main goal.

Yeah, the last couple games two, couple ties against good opponents but we kind of let our foot off the gas after we kind of clinched and making sure we stay on opponent of things. Now we have tonight to get past it, and tomorrow we're back at work and we're focused on Wednesday.

**Q. 99th minute goal to secure the home wildcard game. What did you see in that moment there?**

JOEL WATERMAN: I appreciate you giving me the goal, man. Just like you said, chaos, a little bit of chaos. I'm trying to put myself in good positions where I think the ball is going to go and Hugo did a really good job of getting a shot away at the defender, similar to the Minnesota one, but I'll call it my goal, too. No, at the end of the day, we still didn't win. It was a tie-in goal.

Like I said to him, I think bittersweet, knowing that we're still in the playoffs but again a game I thought we should have still come away with the result and then obviously we could have finished higher in the table.

But we can't look back now. It's all looking forward and stay in the present moment and focus on what we need to do.

**Q. Last two games obviously at halftime, you switch from five in the back to four in the back, can you talk to me about some of the difference for you personally playing four, three and five?**

JOEL WATERMAN: Yeah, I think it's a little bit different on the ball. Having two center backs near me so I can play right left instead of just having Jack on my left or Sam or who are plays there, and we just get more pressure higher up. Hugo is a bit by himself sometimes in a 5-4-1 pressing by himself, and we thought they had too much possession. And we gave them too much respect in the first half, and we wanted to get close to the ball ask put pressure on them and being down a goal we had to change that, too, and get higher numbers.

When you have guys like Guti coming off the bench, Maren, all those guys are quality and they can change a game. So we have guys off the bench that can change a game, too, and allowed Guti to come in and do his thing. Got our skillful guys up near the net where we want them.

It's really good as a team that we have that flexibility that we can play both formations, and it's definitely dangerous having both those formations going into playoffs.

**Q. You guys were aiming for the win but it looked like it could have been a loss which meant the team wouldn't have had that home game. How critical is it to get that late -- own goal, which you assisted, I guess, but to secure the home game midweek rather than going to Orlando for it?**

JOEL WATERMAN: It's massive. We talked about it before the game. It's hard to not look at where other teams are and where we could have finished; it's natural. But we tried to just stay fully focused on playing New England today in that present moment. Making sure we handle our business.

And like I said these guys in here, it's almost bittersweet because we made playoffs and we get a home playoff game but we know what we could have had in skipping this step.

But again, we're excited play in front of our fans on Wednesday. We love playing there, and obviously a good opposition in Orlando. Now we have to be fully focused on

**ASAP** sports . . . when all is said, we're done.®

that.

Like I said tonight, we'll think about it and think about what we can do better, look at some video and tomorrow it's back at the facility for recovery on Wednesday and we go after it on Wednesday.

**Q. What was the mood like during halftime in the locker room, and then what was it like after the game? Did it change? Was there a shift and difference about how the boys were feeling at the end of the night versus what was going on at halftime because clearly I'm sure you guys were not feeling good.**

JOEL WATERMAN: Yeah, weren't happy. We weren't happy with our first half like we said. We came out flat and gave up an early goal, and we didn't do what we planned to do, and obviously sometimes that's credit to the opposition, too, and how they are playing.

But yeah, like I said, we can't have these sloppy starts in the playoffs or else those are games that we're going to lose if we play like that. So like I said, we want to make it as far as we can. We want to make sure on Wednesday that we start strong, especially at home in front of our home fans, get them into it, make it hard for Orlando and see what happens.

For us, it's about the process and it's about taking each play at a time and just doing our job and even today we weren't sharp in a lot of areas but we still came out with a tie. That's obviously a positive as well. We were not good on the day but we can still come away with a result, but a tie is not going to be good enough in playoffs.

Yeah, now we're just looking forward to Wednesday and we're excited for it.

**Q. Congratulations on the goal. You touched upon it a little bit, but so many permutations, calculations, possibility, coming into the game, you knew you were in the playoffs but you could have finished anywhere from sixth through ninth. How difficult is it for you being a player that's on the pitch for such a big game to block out these distractions and just focus solely on the game at hand?**

JOEL WATERMAN: I've had practice at that, and obviously guys in the room have played at other places and been in big games before.

I still think as a team that's somewhere we can get better in, in just shifting our mentality to closing out games and being ruthless at times. And we have been in certain moments, for sure. But can we do that over 90 minutes?

And I think that's the biggest thing for us.

We love to play in big games. I love to play in big games. We're going to be playing many, many big games coming up here and obviously that's part of changing the culture of this club and making sure that us being in the playoffs is a yearly thing, and then obviously shooting for the MLS Cup, and those are the ambitions that we have and those are the ambitions that the coaching staff has. We have the team and the players to do it. So now it's just kind of up to us.

**Q. A lot has changed in your life in the last couple weeks. Two months ago you were still on Montréal's roster. Do you have any reflections, given how much has happened in the last period of time, that you are going into the playoffs with this new team?**

JOEL WATERMAN: I'm not really focused on where I was a couple months ago. I'm fully focused here. Like I love my life here now. I love Chicago. I love the club. The club has been amazing.

Obviously I felt really comfortable again and felt like myself again and my performances, and I want to keep that going. All my job is to help the team. They did an amazing job before I got here and we're going to keep doing an amazing job while I'm here. It's been amazing and all I want to do is help this team lift an MLS Cup and win games.

Yeah, do something special for the city.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports ...