

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Chicago, Illinois, USA

Gregg Berhalter

Press Conference



Q. Gregg, curious, with it being a home opener on Saturday, early afternoon game, how much do you think that energy around a home opener can help the team after a tough second half last weekend?

GREGG BERHALTER: I think it's really helpful. The fans want to see good soccer. They want to see entertaining soccer, and it's up to us to put on that show, and when we do that, you see the reaction of the fans.

I think for us, we know the fans give us a ton of energy, and we know we need to hold up our end of the bargain by giving them something to cheer about.

Q. On that note, one of the storylines last year was despite the team's awesome road form throughout the season, it took them until I want to say mid-May for the team to get a home win, despite some strong performances along the way. How important is it for the team to try to change that early on in the season to show the team is making progress?

GREGG BERHALTER: Well, I think it's always important to win your home games. I think it's important to win every game. We were bitterly disappointed last week that we didn't win the game.

For us, home, away, no matter who we're playing, we think we should be in position to win the game. For us, this will be important, as well.

Having said that, we know there's a variable in it, and it's the opponent. We know they do some good things, and it's going to be a difficult game for us.

Q. Gregg, last game you said fatigue showed up in the second half. What's the adjustment this week to keep the intensity up, especially for the second half?

GREGG BERHALTER: I think we got caught off guard. When we're getting high press, we need to be more reactive. We need to have more movement, and we didn't

have that in the second half of the Houston game. It was relatively easy for us in the first half, and when it got more difficult, that's where we really needed to be moving more, and we didn't do that.

For us, going into this game, we want to focus on what we can do, and we want to focus on how we're able to attack, defend and play a solid game for 90 minutes.

Q. Can you tell us, how do you prepare your 11 starters? How do you decide? Is it going to change from the first game, or how does it impact that it's going to be a home opener?

GREGG BERHALTER: So a lot of it is based on how the guys are performing. When we set a lineup for the week, it's not guaranteed for the next week. It's based on performance, both in the game and in training.

Having a deeper squad this year gives us more options. So we're very aware of what's happening in training, the performance of the players. We're aware of their game performance, and we make decisions based on that.

Q. With all the noise that's going on in the stadium, next weekend is going to be the groundbreaking for the Chicago Fire, and in two years there's going to be a new stadium. I want to know your opinion about this coming groundbreaking and this new stadium for the Chicago Fire.

GREGG BERHALTER: Well, it's monumental. It's a huge, huge opportunity for the club. It shows the support of our ownership, of our owner, Joe Mansueto, who's always wanted to build something impactful for the city of Chicago.

We already have this training ground, which is magnificent, but it shows his commitment, I think, not only to the team but to the city, to the supporters, to the game of soccer, because if you think about it, if you have a soccer-specific stadium that the fans can call their own and they enjoy coming to every weekend, it creates a special bond between the team and the supporters and the city.

I think it's a big moment.

Q. I know we saw that Robin Lod was training in the gym today. Curious about what his status is, if

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Jonathan Dean is expected to be back integrated after the birth of his daughter, and curious about the status of the guys we've seen training separately ahead of the Montreal match.

GREGG BERHALTER: Yeah, Dean is back. Robin is TBD. We don't know. I'd say Bamba and Elliot are TBD. But we'll see. I think they have potential to make it into the squad, so we're going to have to see tomorrow how it ends up.

Q. I'd love to ask you Prince Owusu. A lot of what we're expecting Montreal to do this season is centered around feeding him. So focused on one player like that, how does that affect your preparation and approach for this game?

GREGG BERHALTER: We think he's a good player, talented player. I'm not sure I see it the same as you. I think that they have talented players in other positions. I think they try to play a team game. They try to work together. It's a collective effort from all the players in the field.

So I think overall, Montreal is a difficult team to play against. They posed some problems for San Diego. It was a strange game. When you look at the first half of that game, Montreal was actually playing well, getting some chances. They gave up a set piece goal, which puts them behind, and then they gave up a goal on the last kick of the first half, and then all of a sudden they're behind the 8-ball and then they get the red card in the third minute of the second half and then things unraveled.

Up until then, they were in it. They were playing a good game and showing how they can be difficult.

Q. I have to ask you about the two South African boys. What has impressed you most so far about Mbokazi and Dithejane?

GREGG BERHALTER: I think that they've both adapted well so far, and they both bring different qualities. You can see Puso has been shy, and he's really coming into himself on the field. It took him a while to be assertive on the field and shows his personality but he's coming along and doing a good job in training.

With Mbokazi, he's shown right from the beginning the strength, the determination, the skill to fit right in. We know there's a lot of pressure on him to perform at a high level and to win with the team and to keep a starting 11 position, but he's been doing a good job so far.

Q. Talking about preparing for Montreal as an

opponent, is it more difficult at this point in the season? They had one game, there was that red card, it ends up being 5-0, not a lot you can get from that, and then limited availability to watch the team in preseason? Does that make it a little bit harder to know what to expect from Montreal?

GREGG BERHALTER: Not really. We have all their preseason games on tape. We watched the first 47 minutes intently of the game. We watched the rest of it, also, but there was a factor to consider.

What I said is they have a very clear identity of what they're trying to do. They want to force turnovers. They want to transition quickly. They do have the big man up top, who they play into well, talented wingers, inverted wingers that can come inside.

So they have some good pieces. Again, the way we look at this is no different than any other team. Every team is difficult to play against. Every team you can lose on if you don't focus and play your game, no matter who it is. This is a good opponent and a good test for us.

Q. Gregg, I wanted to ask you about the fullback position for this weekend. It's looking like Maren and Leo and Jonny Dean this week. What do the three of them provide for you in that they're slightly different profiles but especially Jonny and Maren have also shown the ability to play on the left; even if Andrew can't go there is a little bit of versatility with those three?

GREGG BERHALTER: Yeah, don't forget we're missing Victor, also, so missing two fullbacks. Both happen to be left-sided, so presents somewhat of an issue.

But Maren has done well there. We're comfortable with him. He's a very good soccer player, very smart soccer player, and Dean can play left or right. So for us, it's interchangeable. He works hard. He's a good 1-v-1 defender. He's got a lot of positive attributes that help the team.

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