

# Chicago Fire Media Conference

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## Gregg Berhalter Press Conference

**Q. Curious, looking at Columbus early on this year they've been really successful, or they've had issues defending transition moments. Looks like a lot of teams have had success against them in those moments. How much of an emphasis have you placed on that understanding that could be a major opening, and with Joe Bamba being healthy enough to play?**

GREGG BERHALTER: I think we're looking at the chances they create, the overloads, the balls in the box that they're doing good at, and we have to be weary of them. They scored four goals in two games. We know they have a good offensive team. It's something that we'll focus on trying to stop.

**Q. So Columbus is obviously going to be a special place for you probably for the rest of your life. You made a name in MLS as a coach there. The Columbus GM said in an interview recently that from the time that he came around the league he understood the crew, what their identity was, because they played a certain way and those were your crew teams. Was does it feel like going back there and to have still a lasting influence on the club that continues to this day? And also how does that relate to what you've been trying to build over the past year and a while in Chicago?**

GREGG BERHALTER: It's a celebration of sorts. I understand that they want to win a game, their fans want to win a game. I think it doesn't away from the fact that I had a lot of great years there, raised kids there, made a lot of friends, and really connected with the fans and the people in the club.

So it's always going to be a special place to go back to. I love the facilities, the stadium. I love what they've done with the club. Since then they won two Championships, which is amazing, so it's always nice to go back there. Always great to be competing.

I get to see a lot of friends and people that I worked with, so it's going to be fun.

**Q. Gregg, they say teams tend to learn more from defeats than victories. After coming off a 3-0 win, what adjustment have you worked on to maintain the momentum going?**

GREGG BERHALTER: I think it's two different games. Montreal was a very man-oriented defense. We got a red card so we had to play a man down for 47 minutes. It makes it complicated.

So it's really difficult to apply a lot of lessons from this game to the next. What I would say is that the mentality is the main lesson we're taking away from it. When we went down a man we didn't drop our level; we increased our level; guys did more; guys came together; we stayed compact.

We had the mentality to want to win that game. That goes a long way. For me, that's a great focus point, to see how focused the guys are on trying to get wins.

**Q. I wanted to ask you if you heard and Mauricio said recently. He said President Trump ask them if the USA could win the World Cup and he said that, yes, of course that was the goal. What do you think about it since you coach the team for a long time? How do you see them heading into the World Cup? Thank you.**

GREGG BERHALTER: I love it. That's the mentality we need. We go into any tournament and you believe you can win. I think that's the most important thing for the mindset of my group entering a tournament, because in reality, anything is possible, right? In theory, on any given day, we can beat any team in the world.

So when you get through the group, and hopefully we will, it's a knock-out phase and really is about the day, the form of the day.

So I'm excited that statement. I think it shows intension. The group has had World Cup experience, the majority of that group. They understand what a World Cup is like. We'll have the home fans behind us and it's a great mindset to go into the World Cup with.

**Q. The continuing influence from your days in Columbus, I'm curious, how do you prepare for a game**



**like this with a team under new coaching leadership but still has a lot of imprints of Wilfried Nancy, still has a lot of imprints of a midfield that was to built and Darlington Nagbe? I am curious how you prepare for a team when you have a sense of the bones, but are still learning a bit about what this new version of them will look like going forward?**

GREGG BERHALTER: I think it's great what they did with the new coach. You hire someone that has similar DNA to Wilfried. He was very successful there. Had a great period building a team, I think even adding to the complexity of the in-possession and overloads and what they're doing.

Columbus, what Columbus starts to stand for is a team that plays soccer. Any team that goes to Columbus knows they're in for a soccer game. I love that. I love that about Columbus. It was true when I was there and it's true now.

I think with that hire they have a very similar DNA. There will be slight differences to it, but they want to play soccer, they want to create chances, and they want to win games.

**Q. I need to know about the Leagues Cup. Now we have the schedule for Leagues Cup. It sounds like a big game, amazing rivals here in the stadium. We are talking about Cruz Azul, Necaxa, and Santos that are coming to town. What do you expect about these games and this tournament?**

GREGG BERHALTER: Well, I think it's a great opportunity for us to test ourselves against different competition. With Cruz Azul we had the leader in Liga MX right now. With Necaxa and Santos it's teams that aren't doing so well, but I'm sure will be competitive.

For us, it's how to you advance to the next round? The format is really interesting. You're playing against everyone else in the field basically. So we're going to have to get an understanding of that and how that pans out.

But just reading over it, we had a memo on it, it's exciting. For our fans it's a great celebration of seeing teams in look a Liga MX against MLS competition, and hopefully we're able to put on a good show for everybody.

**Q. With the increased depth added this offseason, how do you approach making positional adjustments so players can move into different roles without the transition becoming overwhelming or interfering with chemistry building?**

GREGG BERHALTER: You know, I think it's through injury we've been forced to play certain players in different

positions and have to adapt that way, so thankfully we have depth that we can put good players in different positions.

Thankfully we have the squad size that we can bring players on. In the last game Robin comes in for a short period and was able to make an impact right away. All that I think is positive. As we get into the groove and it becomes routine for the guys and patterns start to set in, we'll be able to rotate the team a little bit more and get 100% fresh guys on the field.

**Q. Coaching profession question. Obviously Wilfried Nancy was the identity of Columbus. We lost two premier coaches this offseason when Eric Ramsay and Wilfried going overseas in a sense and it didn't work out. Very short stints. What do you think about the jump coaches are making and maybe not the lack of time that they didn't get in Europe to prove themselves even though they had elite teams here and elite coaching at the MLS level? Curious your thoughts on MLS losing elite coaches and them not getting a chance overseas when they go there.**

GREGG BERHALTER: I think it's about anywhere. Anywhere in life, any job you take it's about what does that opportunity entail and the stability of the opportunity, and then do you have control of the situation. Are you going to have time to do your job and do you have resources to do your job.

Those things don't always line up, and in European soccer it makes your job very, very difficult. I know with Wilfried the expectations of Celtic are very, very high. They have to win every game. It's a squad going through a lot of transition, so it becomes challenging.

Personally I think he wasn't afforded enough time.

With Eric, similar situation. Goes to a very turbulent club. I think that was their third manager this year if I'm correct, so they don't have a lot of patience. But the reality is do they have the squad to compete at the top of the championship? We know it's a difficult division.

So I don't think it speaks to what type of coaches they are. I know them to be good coaches. I've known Wilfried longer than Eric and Wilfried I know to be a very good coach. It's more about the type of environment he was put into. I'm sure he could be successful when given the right opportunity.

**Q. Gregg, in year two with Jack Elliott as the team captain, what have you learned about him as a leader and what has he maybe shown you over this 14-month**

**period that has enforced that he should be that guy wearing the captain arm band when he's available?**

GREGG BERHALTER: I think it speaks volumes to Jack as a leader, how he affects his teammates. We have a leadership council vote and every player on the team voted for him. One of the very few players that got the recognition of every player. So really shows how he affects the group.

I think he does it by his professionalism, leading by example each and every day. He competes really hard. When you have Jack on the field you know he's going to give absolutely everything to help the team win the game.

I think that's an important statement.

**Q. Gregg, following up on the Leagues Cup, how early can you start scouting your rivals since it will be pretty much after the World Cup break and Mexico will be the beginning of the new season? We know how much you love playing against the Mexican teams.**

GREGG BERHALTER: Exactly. Really looking forward to that. You know, I think you raise a good point. There is not going to be a lot of data on these teams. We're going to have to see the roster turnover. We will get early looks at them now to see what they're doing, see the coaching, and then we can really start lining what they can potentially look like, but the personnel will change, and that's something we need to account for.

But it's still exciting and a great opportunity for the club. You know, trying to make our mark in the third tournament that we would be in this year is exciting, and we have a deep enough roster to be able to play guys and really try to compete in that.

**Q. Talking about Columbus, first team that you faced when back in MLS a year ago. Home opener again this time. The squad here feels very different than it did in the first game. A lot of the players are the same but I think there has been maturity. What does it say about the team now having guys like Robin Lod who started one game, came off the bench and made an impact in the next one. Mauricio Pineda, his ability to start in the second game after not starting the first and then and have a solid game. How much of that is a reflection of the team's growth and does that put pressure on getting a result where the team showed a lot against Columbus last year in Columbus but didn't ultimately get the win?**

GREGG BERHALTER: Yeah, that was an interesting point for us because it was, okay, this is your first competition

game. What are we going to do? How are we going to show up? The guys caused them a lot of problems.

Now the expectations are a little bit different. We are more confident going into this match. We have a deeper squad. Really what you mentioned with Mauricio and Robin is really comes down to competition. We need competition for starting 11 spots and guys need to feel that if they don't perform well in the game and training they're not going to keep their starting 11 spot.

That's how you get and that's how you maintain that high standard and high level. It doesn't mean we give up on players. Doesn't mean we don't give players some leeway. We want guys pushing and competing every single day and in the games to make their impact.

I look at Columbus and it's their opening day. All that does is add to an atmosphere. Every player wants to play in great atmospheres. I know Columbus. I know the stadium, and I know when the fans get rocking it becomes a really great environment.

Who wouldn't want to play in an environment like that?

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