

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Gregg Berhalter Press Conference



right now understand their performances will be directly linked to their call-up. If they're playing well, they have a very good chance of getting called into camp.

For Chris, for him to play well in the beginning of the season, all the games so far, to start getting these clean sheets. I thought building out of the back, he was very good against Columbus. You know, that's a good sign.

Obviously the final decision is going to come down to the coaching staff, but all players can do is put in good performances week after week.

Q. I know you're always game-to-game. You don't like to look ahead really beyond that, but do you have an outlook for the team? Some coaches like to look at a season in quarters in a sense. Do you have sort of a goal or baseline you would like this team to be at, whether performance-wise or standings-wise in the next month or two that you sort of set out a little bit of a longer-term vision?

GREGG BERHALTER: Well, it's a tricky question, because if I say, no, then I'm saying, okay, we don't have a long-term vision for what we're doing, and that's not necessarily the case. What we do is we look at our own KPIs. We look at our performance metrics, and we try to improve that week-over-week.

We know we want to prepare to win each and every game on the weekday. We don't get ahead of ourselves. The last thing we do is start saying, okay, we have this many games, we want to get this many points. I don't think that does any good. We focus on winning the next game in front of us, and we put all our energy into that while tracking the team performance and what we can improve on.

Q. Gregg, Tim mentioned obviously the addition of Tai Baribo, or maybe Joe mentioned Ty Baribo and the addition he's made to the team. He had a pretty good day the last time you saw him. How do you think the team learns from that? What do you want the back line to be focused on when it comes to neutralizing a forward like that who you guys know how dangerous he is and can be?

GREGG BERHALTER: Absolutely. We weren't happy

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Gregg Berhalter.

Q. Gregg, curious, D.C. is one of these teams that's needed to revamp themselves in a similar timeline as the Fire. What have you seen from Rene Weiler and his short time in charge in terms of just trying to get that team turned around, especially now that they brought in an established forward like Tai Baribo, who can really help any MLS club that he's on?

GREGG BERHALTER: Yeah, I think that as he continues to work with the team, the identity is becoming more clear with each and every game. Very good defensively, very good closing down the ball, very good putting pressure on the opponent, good with second balls, and very clear way to get goal scoring opportunities. Very good in offensive transition.

So they have some things that we need to be wary about. We know it's going to be a very competitive game on Saturday.

Q. Unfortunately, one of the stories for the Fire this year has been availability, losing a number of key players to injuries, two in the last one. We saw some guys out there training earlier. Can you give us the status this weekend for Andrew Gutman, Hugo Cuypers, and Leo Barroso?

GREGG BERHALTER: From my understanding, Hugo and Leo are questionable. Gutman is out. I think as we get more information tomorrow, we'll know more. That's where we're at right now. Barroso appears to be back and doing well.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Chris Brady. He was selected to the MLS team of the match week and second straight clean sheet for him. How much do you think this could help him to make the national team in the upcoming window?

GREGG BERHALTER: I think all players that are playing



obviously with the job we did on him in SeatGeek in the playoff game. I think other times we did have good performances against him, but certainly it wasn't that and it wasn't the game in Philly in regular season.

So we know he's an excellent player. We know he has really good strengths, and we need to be aware. Not only him, but we need to cut down service, we need to defend space behind, we need to defend space in the penalty box. It's going to need to be a group effort.

Q. Regarding the last victory at home, to keep that good momentum for this second game that is coming, even the players that are injured, how you feel about that?

GREGG BERHALTER: For us it's an important game. We're really focused for the game. We understand their strengths. We understand their weaknesses, and now we need to go out and put a good performance in.

We thought the crowd was amazing last time. The fans were into the game. We had a great result, and we would love to be able to do that again.

Q. To get that good result, something we've seen from the Fire this year, especially with some of the personnel availability issues, is the team play slightly different systems just based on who is available.

GREGG BERHALTER: Yeah.

Q. How do you manage that trade-off between having the system that you want, having the principals that you want and sticking to something where it's more like-for-like even if you are having to substitute a player, like a different striker in or something like that, versus adjusting to the strengths of the starting 11 that you are able to put on the pitch at the beginning of the game?

GREGG BERHALTER: I think in terms of our identity, we try to do similar things no matter what formation we're playing, and we try not to get hung up on what formation we're playing.

I think in the Columbus game we were able to create enough chances to score a goal. We limited the opponent to chances, besides that one chance that was a foul that they racked up a 1.3 xG on. It still bothers me. I'm going to keep bringing it up for at least another day.

I mean, that's the reality is we performed well. We kept a clean sheet, and we created enough chances. We always want to create chances. We always want to be able to

defend. Based on personnel, based on who is healthy, you know, we'll pick a formation and a line-up.

Q. Following up a little bit on that, as you mentioned, the team is coming you off from two straight clean sheets since three last home game. What's the next step to make a balance consistent with two weeks, especially in tighter games?

GREGG BERHALTER: I think when you can keep a clean sheet, you always have a chance to win the game, especially our team the way we create chances. So, you know, that is important, but scoring goals is also important. Our identity is about goal scoring.

I think at the end of the day, we thought we should have scored, and we want to put the ball in the back of the net. So it's something that we're working on. All week we worked on finishing touches and how to get goal scoring opportunities, so hopefully on Saturday we'll be able to create something.

Having said that, I know D.C. is a very good defensive team, and they don't give up a ton, so it's going to be a great battle I think.

Q. Coach, based on what you just said, United is also a team that can be dangerous when doing the transitions quickly after winning the ball. How important will Chicago's defensive organization be which the team is pushing forward?

GREGG BERHALTER: Well, that's always an important phase of the game, defensive transition. I think we've improved to a press after loss. I think in the beginning of the Columbus game it was excellent in terms of losing the ball, winning it right back. That's going to be a focus of ours.

We've improved with covering space behind the back line. I think if you look at our defensive transition numbers against, I think we're top of the league right now or really close to the top of the league.

Fortunately, that's been a strength of ours so far, and we want to continue that.

Q. Gregg, one guy that Fire fans are excited to see return, even though it won't be the case during the 90 minutes of the game, I know you have a positive relationship with him too is Sean Johnson. One of the guys who has really established himself long-term as a great MLS and a USMNT keeper. What do you think his legacy is at this point? Is he still going strong at 36 and proving he can still do it at this level?

GREGG BERHALTER: Yeah, I remember Sean in his early days. You know, he played in a game against us in L.A., and actually they won the game. I think he saved a penalty also. That was just the beginning.

I think Sean just stands for overall good guy. A good guy, a professional player, always willing to do extra for the team, team player, and he's won. You know, he has a title from winning in New York.

He's been an outstanding goalie in this league for years. He's probably going on, what, his 15th season, something like that. 16th season. It's been a while.

I have nothing but good things to say about Sean. Hopefully we can put a couple of balls in the net against him. It won't be anything personal, but he's a fantastic human being and soccer player.

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