

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Joel Waterman

Press Conference



Q. Curious, this weekend it's Philadelphia the road. Last time you played them in postseason, it didn't go the way you guys really wanted to. How much does it help to have those motivating factors pushing you guys forward this week?

JOEL WATERMAN: We've obviously talked about a couple things. But I mean there's motivation in winning just regardless. For our group, like you said, we didn't like the way the D.C. game ended, and we want to make amends for that game, and we get a new opportunity every week to win.

We want to get back on track here as soon as possible. We talked about it during the week, lots of video on things that we can do differently.

And then, yeah, like you said, you add the playoff performances last year and not getting a win against Philly in quite a bit. We're extremely motivated for this game but like any other game we are motivated to win. We are going to do our best jobs going into Philly and have a good performance.

Q. How was the work this week? What was coach telling but doing something different, what happened last Saturday?

JOEL WATERMAN: : Each week it changes depending on you who play, their setup, their tactical setup. But obviously we have an identity we want to stick to, and we looked at their press and how they want to play, and kind it kind of dictates how we want to play.

Each week, it's different, depending on who we play. We want to stick to who we are and our identity as a club and how we play. They have to match our threats and what we do as a team, as well. So it should be a good game in that regard.

Q. Congrats on your Canada call-up. I wanted to ask you about one of your fellow players on the Canada

squad who is getting his first call-up, Aribim Pepple. You crossed paths with him while at Cavalry FC. What can you tell me about it?

JOEL WATERMAN: Yeah, we know each other from our Cavalry days. Obviously it was a long time ago. It's been, what, six years since I've seen him.

But I just remember him having a lot of quality, a lot of athleticism, he could score goals, that's obviously the most important part of his game that he can score goals and put the ball in the back of the net.

It's going to be really fun to see how he's grown in six years, and he's obviously a fantastic player. He's earned the call-up to the national team and what a time to get his first call-up, obviously before the summer.

Hope he comes in and takes the opportunity and I'm excited to see him.

Q. Joel, thanks so much for the time. This has been a theme of a question every time we talk to anybody from the defensive core with the injuries that have gone in and out. Obviously this week you have Andrew and Viktor in training, but no Jack at the moment. And I'm curious given all the changes, even though you're relatively new to the squad as an elder statesman, what leadership role, do you feel you take on in these circumstances where the personnel is changing so much especially with not having Jack out there?

JOEL WATERMAN: Yeah, I think obviously the depth of our squad is huge this year. We have guys that are ready to come in and play really, really important minutes at any given time, and that's one of our strengths is that we can trust anyone who goes on the pitch.

Obviously you look at Borso against Columbus in his debut; he was fantastic. Even young guys stepping up, that's one way you can handle it. We have a really good core group of guys and leaders that know how to lead in situations like this.

And guys coming out of a lineup, that's the nature of a season, too. The 11 is going to change sometimes, and you'll have important players out.

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Obviously we miss Jack, wish he was with us. But he's working on his health now and that's where he needs to be and what he needs to do.

Obviously we're going to do our best to try to win the game for him. But there's lots of strength and leadership in the squad. And with the ups and downs of the season you have to keep your head and make sure you're even keel with all your emotions. And obviously the experience that I have and a lot of guys on the team, we'll be able to do that.

Q. First of all, congratulations on your recent call up with the Canadian national team. How does your time with the Fire prepared you for the recent international call up, and how does it feel to be called up to one of the last squads prior to the World Cup at this point of your career?

JOEL WATERMAN: To answer your first question, obviously my move here was really important to me to find a new motivation for football and to keep a really, really high standard going into the summer.

Gregg has showed me so many different things about my game that I have improved upon, even the age that I am at now, I don't think you can ever stop learning. I think learning from him, you know, obviously Jesse, my international coach, there's so many different things you can learn from different managers and just to make sure that your game is at the top of what it is and where it needs to be going into an important summer like this.

And yeah, to be called in, obviously, to the camp right before the summer, it's always ace blessing. I never take any call to the national team for granted. It's such an honor to represent your country. You ask any international that represents their country, it's one of the most special honors.

We're going in to win both those friendlies and get a good preparation for the summer, and then it's the real thing. I'm super excited to get back with the guys this week and it's cliché to say, but I'm focused on the daily stuff to do to stay consistent. First, I'm focused on Philly, and then I'm worked about the national team after that.

Q. How does it feel to lose a teammate such Alphonso Davies in this window?

JOEL WATERMAN: Yeah, Alphonso is obviously the captain of our team. He's an integral part of what we're trying to do, and it's so unfortunate with all his injury history, and what he's gone through the past couple weeks with his knee.

And we just want him fully back and fully healthy and fully prepared for the summer.

We just hope he's getting the best care he can, obviously in Germany, and making sure he comes back healthy and that's the No. 1 thing.

Then, you know, obviously what he can provide is massive for our team and the success we're going to have during the World Cup. We're wishing him all the best and we're excited to have him back soon.

Q. We see late last season you and your wife arriving...curious if you feel like your sister-in-law is on a one-woman crusade to increase the international population of Chicago soccer teams?

JOEL WATERMAN: Yeah, she's like that. It's so surreal and crazy to see all of us kind of end up in the same city, playing for both Chicago clubs, and obviously our representation on the national team, too.

And Julie and Jordan were over at our house for dinner last night and to see them.

Yeah, I think for anybody, any human being to have a community of people around them and people that they love, and can support, I think it's massive, especially for us being successful in our sports.

But obviously to be successful in life, you have to have good people around you and the fact that we are all close together and sharing this experience together, it's really special.

No more Canadian players I hear coming to either club in the near future, but yeah, it's really good to have them in the city and we're all just going to enjoy the process and enjoy being together.

Q. With the defensive partners you've been working with, it's been a couple months of them growing into their roles. What do you think they have done to show themselves well over this last month?

JOEL WATERMAN: Yeah, I think the first word that comes into mind is their athleticism, how young they are, first and foremost and how fast they both are, how strong they both are, when they are on their game, they are special, special players, especially at young ages.

So yeah, I'm just happy for them getting consistent minutes, staying healthy and getting accustomed to the League, especially Mbo, moving countries, how big of a



culture change that is. We're just trying to support him anyway and just allowing them to play free and do their thing.

Q. In terms of building momentum, this is a World Cup year for Canada. Having two games in Toronto, what do you think that does for the group to galvanize and get you guys excited for the summer that's coming?

JOEL WATERMAN: Yeah, it's everything, you know I was really happy to hear that we were playing both games in Toronto, and one in Edmonton and Montreal to we are make the journey across Canada before the World Cup. And that's what galvanizes the whole country. It's not Toronto's or Montréal team or Vancouver's team because of the host, it's all of Canada.

Obviously we have been to Halifax before, too. So it's like you said, it's galvanizing the whole country to come out and support their team.

We are going to do some special things in the World Cup we're going to need the whole team supporting us. To see the home fans wearing red, it's going to be surreal and seeing the new renovations in the stadium and seeing a packed house, it's going to be special.

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