

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Chicago, Illinois, USA

Gregg Berhalter Press Conference



Chicago Fire 2, Philadelphia 1

GREGG BERHALTER: I think we set the stage for what we thought this game was going to look like during the week. We stressed that the first thing we needed to bring to the game was intensity and battle, and really happy with the guys to embrace that mindset. And as the game went on, you can see when our qualities start...

Q. Curious the way the team came out in the second half. It seemed there was a lot more intense and a lot crisper passes. Did you see that after the tough goal to go into halftime?

GREGG BERHALTER: The way I would look at it is, yeah, you had to earn the right to play today. Philly is very aggressive against the ball. They close you down very quickly. They thrive on first and second balls, and you know, it took at least 35 minutes to get there.

I thought the end of the second half -- sorry, end of the first half, was exactly how we wanted to start playing, and we did and we got the goal. And you know, unfortunate goal to give up on a strange play but the guys didn't waiver. Though stayed resolute and they stuck to the game plan, and you know, strong second half.

And then at the end, just proud of the group for the way they fought and held together under some pressure.

Q. Very different challenge than the last two times you were in this room. Any satisfaction in beating them, finally, after four attempts, even though maybe not the same team they were last year?

GREGG BERHALTER: Definitely. You know, it took a toll on us losing four games to Philly last year, and we want to make it right. And today was a good opportunity to do so, and we did. And that's the most important thing. This is never an easy place to come play, and it was good to get the three points and bring them back to Chicago.

Q. What, if anything, stood out about their players? What's different?

GREGG BERHALTER: I've watched all of their games this season, and I have to say that they have gotten unlucky, and they haven't been playing poorly. I think today wasn't a great performance by them, but you know, in most games, their XG was high. Their chance creation was high. A lot of good set pieces, a lot of crosses, a lot of near misses, and that's how it goes sometimes.

I think that you can see the travel had a little bit of effect on them today. You can see it starting to take a toll on their confidence a little bit. It's a good team, a well-coached team, and you know, I'm confident that they will play themselves out of this.

Q. The longer approaches --

GREGG BERHALTER: It's a way to play that is very specific, and they stick to their guns a lot. And for us, it was having a clear game plan, really understanding where the spaces were that we could exploit, and then doing it.

Q. The other thing, Toni Jiménez from US Soccer was there to watch Chris. Did you talk with him at all?

GREGG BERHALTER: Yeah, Toni was on a club visit this week, visiting Chicago, seeing Chris train. We have really a lot of open dialogue about Chris's performance, his strengths, his weaknesses, what we can keep training with him on.

So we knew he was going to be here, and Chris didn't have a ton to do. I think with the ball, he performed well, and overall had a solid game.

Q. Viktor finally got available, and now he's going to the National Team. Your thoughts on his performance?

GREGG BERHALTER: Yeah, I thought Viktor had a strong performance. I thought he was aggressive defensively. He gave us the bite, the anticipation to win balls and a terrific mindset on the pitch.

Q. Talk about bringing Sandmeyer in.

GREGG BERHALTER: We are predicting, if we are going to need a center back, there was going to be a lot of crosses, a lot of aerial duels, a lot of balls into the possible. That is one of Sandmeyer's super strengths is defending crosses, and that's the reason why.

Q. When you take a team up against a team that their guys -- what do you tell your guys --

GREGG BERHALTER: You gave a lot of "your guys," "their guys." What question am I supposed to answer?

Q. When you're coaching your team.

GREGG BERHALTER: Okay.

Q. And opposing team win is looking for a win.

GREGG BERHALTER: Okay.

Q. What do you tell your team to expect?

GREGG BERHALTER: Danger. Danger. We were concerned with the game. We didn't think it was going to be an easy game. Their backs are high against the wall. They have higher expectations for their own performances; I know that. They won the Supporters' Shield last year. We knew it was going to be a dangerous opponent, and turns out it was. The first 30 minutes of the game was very complicated for us.

Q. Are you wonder if you can talk about the performance of the midfield group specifically. Seemed like they were really active in winning first balls, winning second balls and controlling the game in a way that in stretches they haven't been able to do so far this season.

GREGG BERHALTER: You know, they had a lot of work to do. D'Avilla and Anton covering on the ground, winning tackles, first balls, second balls, as you mentioned. And I thought in the beginning of the game, they were a little bit sloppy on the ball.

But as the game went and they started to get better, but defensively they were solid all night. And they had some good interceptions, good battles, good duels, and it helped our team get the win.

Q. What did you make of Viktor's defense performance today? Is?

GREGG BERHALTER: We thought he was strong. I talked about it before how anticipation was very good. Commitment was great. And I think he had a strong

performance on the ball. Gave some good passes that helped us start counterattacks. Overall, I'm really pleased for Viktor that he was able to get on the field and help the team.

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