

# Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Chicago, Illinois, USA

## Gregg Berhalter

Press Conference



Sometimes there's even more of an impulse for the team because they know that they need to take care of it by themselves.

For us, nothing changes. We're focused on what we do and how we do it, and we're looking forward to a good game against Atlanta.

**Q. This will be a short week. On Tuesday you will be playing against Detroit. What are your expectations about the U.S. Open Cup? How much importance do you give it this week given that there's Atlanta first?**

GREGG BERHALTER: It's just one game at a time, so right now our focus is purely on Atlanta, and then on Sunday, or Saturday night, at 9:45 we'll be fully focused on Detroit. We know them well from playing them last year. It's a good side, physical side. I think the big difference this year will be in Detroit, and that's exciting.

I always talk about how this competition is really about soccer and really about all different communities being able to showcase soccer in their environments.

Looking forward to the game against Detroit.

**Q. What have the first six matches of 2026 taught you about this team's character and ability to adapt to game-time lineup decisions and unfortunate circumstances?**

GREGG BERHALTER: You know, every season has its story to tell, and every game and every week has a story to tell. It's been interesting, some of the adversity that we've had to go through so far this year. And having said that, we still picked up 10 points and won three games and had three shutouts. So there's a lot of positive going on. I think it shows the resilience of the group, the mindset of the group. These guys are fighters, and these guys don't give up.

I think about the training sessions, us having a deeper squad this year, and really improving the level and training, and that's what's really been a standout to the staff thus far is how focused the guys have been in training and then translating that to the game.

**Q. What's your take on the early portion of the**

**Q. It seems like possession is going to be a big emphasis this weekend. After last weekend's game where there were the successes defensively, you get the goal early, how important has it been to focus in, again, on trying to control the game when you are at home and maybe the weather isn't as much of a factor as it was last weekend?**

GREGG BERHALTER: Yeah, I mean, I think it's always part of it. The most important thing, I think, is to create goal scoring chances and to prevent goal scoring chances. Ideally, we can do that, both of those, be at a high level. For us, you look at last week where I think the weather played into the game. The game state had a big effect on the game.

Then also, I think last week we dealt with the internationals coming back and trying to integrate everyone with no time.

This time we've had time to train. The guys have been training well. For us, we're looking to put in a strong home performance.

**Q. One of the challenges, I think, last week was guys were getting in a little bit late. One of the challenges for Atlanta this week is their head coach Tata Martino will not be there after getting a red card in the last game. How does that change the game? He's obviously influencing their planning throughout the week but not being able to make those in-game management decisions?**

GREGG BERHALTER: First of all, I'm sad about that because I always love coaching with Tata. I think he's a great human being, great coach. It's been fun to see his impact on Major League Soccer and the Mexican national team and his long and storied career.

But for us, nothing changes. We expect him to still have a heavy influence in the game. If he travels, he'll be able to potentially communicate what's happening on the sideline.



**season? There's some really interesting things going on around the league. LAFC hasn't given up a goal in six games, which seems pretty wild. But a lot of the Supporters' Shield winners are obviously bottom of the table. What sort of surprises and observations do you have so far of this season that seems to be where the west is really high competition and teams are already with 16 points plus? Just sort of your initial impressions of the season.**

GREGG BERHALTER: I mean, I think it's great what LAFC is doing so far. Six wins -- sorry, five wins, one tie, no goals against, doing well in Champions League. It's nice to see Vancouver has also been strong this year. Our teams from MLS have been performing well in Champions League, Nashville, LAFC, Seattle.

I think overall, it's been a fun year. I think it's really too soon to tell. I mean, the one surprising thing would be Philadelphia, how they haven't won a game yet. You feel bad for them because they lost some personnel, really haven't shown to replace them yet, and overall we know that they had such a strong season last year.

But again, as any season, it's competitive. It's going to go down to the wire, and there will be a lot of changes from now until the end of the season for sure.

**Q. What is your expectation for this Saturday, Atlanta United? You probably know Almirón and Latte, but how do you expect to get those guys covered?**

GREGG BERHALTER: You know, they do a good job. They have three high-quality designated players with Almirón, Latte and Miranchuk, really good players. They put a good supporting cast around them. For us, it's about how do we make them work on both sides of the ball: Closing the spaces, making it difficult for them to play in space, getting pressure on the ball, covering space behind, and then with the ball, how do we move them around.

Every game is different in Major League Soccer, and this is one with some top-end offensive quality, and it will be a good test for our collective defending.

**Q. The Fire have struggled with keeping everyone healthy and available for every game. Last game Hugo Cuypers wasn't available, and there was the late scratch with Joel. I wanted to know how they were both doing through training this week.**

GREGG BERHALTER: You know, it's all part of it, and every team will go through this at some time during the season, and we happen to be going through it now. We have a lot of non-contact injuries, and we have a lot of

sometimes non-soccer related injuries that have been popping up, and that's part of it.

For us it's about next-man-up mentality. With Hugo and Joel, it's going to be a wait-and-see type of thing. We know that Joel has been available in training. With Hugo, he hasn't progressed so far to that stage.

But there's still a little bit of time, and we'll see what happens.

**Q. Chris talked about prioritizing focusing on the first five minutes of the first half, the final five minutes of the first half, first five minutes of the second half, final five minutes of the second half as points of emphasis entering the season after last year. There were some goals that were given up that were sloppier than you would have liked. How much do you think it's helped him and this group to have this new emphasis on these moments early and late in games where those are kind of the X-factor moments where things tend to happen where things are more chaotic than your average soccer moment?**

GREGG BERHALTER: When you start with a team, you have to prioritize what you emphasize, and for us it was really focused on attacking, scoring goals, understanding the identity of this club and what we want to do offensively when we're playing.

We realized that part of it needs to be improving on the defensive end. So really being focused on how do we improve our collective defending.

With that comes moments in the game and important moments of the game. That's start of game, start of halves, end of games, when you score a goal, when you concede a goal. These moments that we're just more focused on, bringing more attention to. I think the guys have done a good job of embracing that.

Overall, you can see that we're a much stronger defensive team than we were last year.

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