

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Mauricio Pineda Press Conference

Q. Looking back, this is now a four-game win streak in all competitions for this group. I would say maybe the games haven't been the prettiest but you found ways to win. What does it say about the group that maybe it hasn't been the perfect formula but it's still been four straight wins, even if it hasn't been the prettiest?

MAURICIO PINEDA: Yeah, I think that's always a good sign for a team when we know we can do better. We know we can play better. But we're still getting the results we want, positive results, wins, like you said.

So yeah, I think that gives us a lot of confidence, knowing that we should be doing a lot better in these games but we're still coming out with victories. So we'll look to improve every single day and every single game and continue to get those results, as well.

Q. With that four-game win streak, the team is off to a great start, second in the East. How do you make sure you don't let complacency set in and you always have that sense of urgency to get the next win, especially against opponents that are not off to the best start of their season?

MAURICIO PINEDA: Yeah, I think that comes within the group. I think since the beginning of season, we have always shown that we have something to prove this year. Like you said, we are second in the East right now. But I think we're striving for more and we're striving to be there at the end of the season. That's what really keeps us driving, approaching every game with the mentality to win, and yeah, having that edge to always want to be better and always have something to prove in this league.

So I think that's what's driving our group right now.

Q. Curious that now that we are a chunk of the way into the season, how do you think you've benefitted from the midfield group being a little older and being a little more veteran rather than it being you often being the veteran guy with a bunch of younger players

making up most of the group? How do you think it's made you better to have guys like Anton and Rob around the team?

MAURICIO PINEDA: Yeah, I think they have not only helped me but helped the group a lot. I think they bring a lot of maturity to our team. I think they help a lot in the moments that we really need. I think you've seen that in the last few games where we are coming away with results and late in the games, making big plays.

So that's something that's helped the team a hot and helped, yeah, like you said you said, our midfield a lot, as well.

Q. Sort of jumping off of that point, last year a lot of the guys who were starting in the midfield are now coming off the bench because the emphasis was that Gregg added a lot more competition to the midfield. Do you feel that internally, too, that there's more competition in the midfield and it's harder to break in this year, as opposed to last year where it was sort of a makeshift midfield?

MAURICIO PINEDA: Yeah, of course, I think it's good to have, like you said, these additions to the team because they help so much, but it also makes us better and makes us keep pushing to be on the field.

So, yeah, you know, if you are not performing, the next guy is up and he's always ready to play and I think that's healthy within our team and that's making us better as a group.

Q. Fire had the first midweek game of the year. Does that make preparation for this game against FC Cincinnati any harder or just with the travel, and then having to switch focus a little bit shorter with a quicker turnaround?

MAURICIO PINEDA: Yeah, in ways. I think like we've kind of mentioned already, we have a pretty deep and competitive team this year.

So we're able to make some rotations there and get some guys some rest, too. While also getting the job done in Detroit, which was not an easy task, as you guys saw.

But yeah, I think the commitment from everyone was good, and yeah, makes it a little bit more difficult to prepare but I think we'll have enough rest and be ready for Saturday.

Q. Another question about in Detroit, what are your reflections on that? That's definitely one of the more unique venues in American soccer, and especially when the crowd got into the game the last 15 minutes, seemed like one of the more fun environments to play in as you guys were able to hold on.

MAURICIO PINEDA: I think as a group, we all kind of agreed that we enjoyed that. We enjoyed that game. It was a fun game to play in obviously. Very competitive. It was a difficult place to play but yeah, we're happy we came away with three points. But definitely a good experience for the group, and it was an enjoyable place to play, too.

Q. Reflecting on that game, it's a big night for Jason, gets the brace and the goal to win the team game. As the longest-tenured player on this roster who has seen a lot of guys come through at this point, what does it mean to you to see a guy like Jason get that kind of opportunity and succeed on that kind of level? Just curious your reflections as a more veteran guy what it means to you to see guys that you've watched develop succeed like that?

MAURICIO PINEDA: Yeah, I think especially from a guy like me from Chicago, obviously Shok is not a homegrown, but he's been around group for a while, and it's good to see him break into the first team and make an impact, like you said, in the game on Tuesday.

So, yeah, that's also part of the group. Everyone's been edging to get on the field and working hard to get that opportunity, and he took that well.

So, yeah, happy for him, and looking forward for more.

Q. Looking ahead to this weekend, you started both games against Cincinnati last year. They always seem to be tight games against Cincinnati. What do you think you can learn from those games that can be used this year and what you can teach these guys, even without Denkey?

MAURICIO PINEDA: I think from last year, we learned that we have good players, good players in transition. So that will definitely be something that we'll be on the lookout for.

But yeah, like you said, too two very close games against them last year. They are a good group we're excited to play against, too.

Q. One of the challenges for the Fire so far this year has been that there hasn't been a consistent starting 11. Only the same starting 11 in one game so far. How does that challenge things for you when you're coming in and what's being asked of you, and how do you think the team has responded so far with not always having the first choice of personnel available because of fitness and health issues?

MAURICIO PINEDA: Yeah, I think it shows how strong the group is. Obviously there's injuries. There's different things that could happen in the season.

But yeah, I think we've done pretty well with all the situations. It's not always ideal, obviously. But I think everybody is training well and knows what we want to do and what we want to accomplish as a group.

So I think the coaching staff does a good job of having everyone on board, everyone ready when they are asked to perform, and I think we've done pretty well with that.

Q. Curious with the way the defense has improved this year, just year over year, looking at goals conceded, what do you think have been some of the reasons that have made you guys capitalize in such a way defensively?

MAURICIO PINEDA: I think as a group, we've been defending a lot better. There's different moments in the game where maybe we break down a little bit more but we hold on, and I think everyone is committed to that same goal, to keep them out of our goal.

Yeah, I think if you're looking for a shot for Mbokazi, I'll give that to you now. Yeah, he's been great, a lot of help, a good addition to the team, too. So yeah, happy for him to be here with us.

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