

Chicago Fire Media Conference

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Gregg Berhalter Press Conference

Q. Get this out of the way first so we saw Hugo Cuypers back in training and didn't see escrow Bamba. What are availabilities looking like for this Saturday?

GREGG BERHALTER: Yeah, Hugo is making progress, and we'll see about his availability. Today was limited training, and then tomorrow we'll see how we can ramp it up and get him going. It's still a little bit unclear. We're hoping he's going to be able to make it.

With Bamba, it's, I think, a different situation. He's dealing with a personal matter and he's in France. He will not be available for the game.

Q. Looking at Saturday's game, understanding we've talked a strength of this team being depth, how important is it to have that game Tuesday where a lot of those depth pieces got a lot of minutes to say, Hey, we've done this, you might need to be called upon this weekend when we need these extra points or extra moments against Cincinnati in what can be a tough environment on the road?

GREGG BERHALTER: I think first and foremost, guys have been waiting for a while for an opportunity. You know, some guys haven't gotten the rhythm and the game time they would have expected early on in the season.

So this Cup game was very important to do that, having to play in difficult conditions, after a lengthy journey. You know, the field conditions, the crowd, everything, it was a fun environment.

But you know, now the sights are on preparing for Saturday and we'll see what type of rotation we've put into the squad for the game.

But I think some of the guys did quite well and it's good to know that we can call on them when needed.

Q. Thanks as always for the time. Given that last year you guys didn't have the defensive record as a team

that you would have liked, how much confidence, in particular, have you seen the guys get out of these last two 1-0 wins, even if they weren't, as Joe said to Mauri, they were not always the prettiest, but curious if you've seen these two wins generate more team confidence maybe than your average game.

GREGG BERHALTER: I think the important thing is in both of those games, our XG was higher than the opponent, and that's a really about starting point.

So you know when you talk about confidence, resilience, you talk about a team being able to withstand pressure, it's really a good sign which you're getting shutouts.

You know, the other thing about it was when you look at the goals we actually did concede this year, all of them were avoidable. For us, we're becoming a good defensive team, and that's really important if you want to be successful in this league.

So, you know, against Cincinnati, we know it's a team that plays very well this transition. They have a really good play maker in the league with Evander. They have two good forwards. Unfortunately one of them will be out in the game and they will have to add someone else, which they have the quality on bench. I think the boy came in and scored last week.

So we know they are going to be a team that's ready to play and ready to compete.

Q. Curious, this sort of defensive identity, the way you guys grinded out these wins so far, is that sustainable for like an MLS season? I know you're expecting the offense to come back, especially when Hugo gets back but playing this sort of style and this sort of tenacious defense and focus on defending, is that sustainable throughout an MLS season in I'm curious about that.

GREGG BERHALTER: Well, you know, I just don't know -- I don't know like if I'm totally going to go along with the narrative. For us, when you score a 17 seconds into the game, it changes -- the score line changes how people play the game, and I think that was somewhat affected.

Against Atlanta, we had a 2.9 XG or 2.7 XG. So we are creating a ton of chances, but the most important thing for

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us is that we just -- we defend with characteristics that you identify with a good team. You get behind the ball. You put pressure on the ball. You close spaces. You make things compact. That's how it should be in top-level soccer, and that's what we are trying to get to.

If you ask me if that's sustainable, it absolutely is. It's about effort and intensity.

Q. With the team currently on a four-game winning streak, many games have been tight ask decided by one goal. How do you want the team to evolve in terms of controlling matches more comfortably?

GREGG BERHALTER: To me, I want to win matches. I know the team wants to win matches, and we want to play entertaining soccer. We want to create goal-scoring chances. We want the fans to come to the stadium and enjoy the way we're playing. If we could do all those things, that's great.

Q. A big topic with the team this year that you've talked a lot about that we've heard a lot from the players is the benefit of the increased depth that this team feels it has this year. I know these guys, in terms of the overall feeling of the club, if you're not able to have a guy like Joe Bamba or Leo Barroso on the weekend, how much does it save you and your team as coaches knowing you're going to get from guys like Maren and Jonathan Dean or whoever has to step into those roles?

GREGG BERHALTER: Yeah, I think it's important. When I think about how many times this year in our games have we played our best lineup, right, it hasn't been often, and that's why you need the depth. And I'm not complaining because I'm sure other teams are in the same situation.

I know Cincinnati is with their center back situation, now the forward is suspended and they have had red cards.

Everyone is in a similar position. That's why it is important to have depth, and it is really about Next Man Up mentality and compensating. We played without Hugo Cuypers the last two games, and we compensated and that's what we're going to have to do again on Saturday.

Q. FC Cincinnati for the past few years since Pat Noonan came in and start coaching, the team has established an identity as always being tough to play against, typically finishing towards the top of the table. This year, they have struggled. What do you think has been a challenge for them? Because you pointed out they still have a lot of quality and a lot of the same players that were here last year and before.

GREGG BERHALTER: I think Pat is a great coach. When you look at his record over the last years, it's probably top of the league, right. There's not too many coaches who have amassed that many points over the last five years.

So he's doing a great job. It's not -- I don't think it's my job to start pinpointing what's going wrong in their group. You know, Pat will have his own press conference and you'll be able to hear from him.

But I'm sure they are going to figure their way out of it. They usually do.

Q. Curious what the message was after the game in terms of getting confidence back for Puso Dithejane, after that late red card. Seemed like he played a strong game up to that point and you want to make sure that a young player doesn't lose confidence from one moment there?

GREGG BERHALTER: Yeah, but he also has to learn because it put the team in a difficult position. It was unwarranted. As soft as it might have been, there's some angles that don't look great, and just he's got to be better than that. And he's such a good kid, and he's put such great effort into everything he does that you know this is going to be -- needed to be a learning experience for him.

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