

Toronto FC Media Conference

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Chris Armas

Media Conference



Toronto 2, León 1

Q. A famous victory given the circumstances. Can you give us your thoughts on your team's play tonight, and I know it's a small sample size, but what do you think this bodes for the rest of the season, given the performance?

CHRIS ARMAS: Well, the locker room right now is electric because there's a lot of belief that the players gain from experiences like that. If you were inside of the locker room, you'd see all the veteran players, Pozuelo, Jozy, rallying around the young guys that stepped up in a big way tonight.

Listen, how it bodes for the rest of the year, I can only say what I have said, that there's a togetherness, there's a playing style that players are sticking to, that they're believing in, they're experiencing some success, and I think it's empowering that we can be dangerous when we have the ball and when we don't have the ball.

Obviously we're just getting started, but there's also a no-excuse mentality in that locker room. It would have been easy to go to México and start making excuses about this, that and the other, but just really proud of the team tonight and to be part of this organization, and yeah, what an effort tonight. Whether we took it to them, what an effort.

Q. Big performance from a lot of players for you guys tonight. Alex Bono was a guy that didn't see a ton of minutes last year. What did you see from him, and in particular that big save late?

CHRIS ARMAS: Well, I think it was clear. He made some big saves, took care of all the moments he should have taken care of, and then makes a couple of big ones. But he looked really sure of himself in distribution, in crosses and all the handling. Just a real mature, solid performance, and you love when your goalkeeper can help the team and reward himself with some really big saves late. He was a big presence in there, did a nice job. I'm happy for him.

Q. Playing competitive matches as opposed to preseason friendlies is obviously going to get the team in much better shape, playing meaningful games. Do you feel this is going to give you a little competitive advantage now at the start of the season? I guess you won't know until you hit the pitch, but is that what you're thinking just from what you've seen from the guys, that they're a different level from what some of the other teams might be?

CHRIS ARMAS: Yeah, I think it's a good question, but you think about having to prepare for these types of matches early on, there's positives and negatives, right? We're forced to push the envelope, right? We're representing Canada in this tournament. We have that privilege, and we have to go to México with difficult circumstances. There's certain things that are working against us.

But as we've tried to push the intensity of training each day and each week, we've had some injuries along the way, right, so it just -- as much as you get this playoff-type mentality early on, which is a big plus, we've taken some hits, too, along the way. But we've made no qualms about we're going after it, so we were going to push. I think we prepared the team, and the guys deserve that credit. What an effort.

But yes, either way, we internally, from Bill Manning, Ali Curtis, we said we're going to go after this tournament, but as the head coach I'm in on that and driving that messaging and pushing it every day, I was expecting momentum after this, win, lose, the momentum that would carry into the MLS season, especially getting young players valuable minutes, this is going to help us moving forward.

Q. Of course with so many academy players there's a focus there, but conversely Michael Bradley was immense tonight, at least it seemed that way from afar. What has his leadership meant in these two legs? I know you're asking a lot of him. How have you seen him step up to this occasion?

CHRIS ARMAS: Well, listen, I think when you see that performance, that's a big player stepping up in a big way,



driving the team with the football, with the leadership, with the quality, urging guys on. He's a coach on the field, but urging guys on when their heads are going down. He's been impressive from the day I walked in the door, so this has started a few months ago.

But I'm -- it's another guy that I'm proud of because I see a big commitment for what we're doing, and he's really driving the message and committing fully.

Listen, this is Michael. He's a top player. I've said it weeks ago, that I think I'm not so sure people see the talent that we have in front of us. People are quick to judge and count him out, which I really appreciate that because it's just fuel. He's a winner. He's a leader. I've not coached a player with that type of leadership skills that's just -- it's just inherent, and he works on it every day. He's really thoughtful about how he shows up every day, and it's got, I think, a really nice balance right now of leading by example. I think that's the best thing he can do is play well, which this has been every single day, and imagine what these young players -- I reminded them that it's not osmosis, that you get better by just being here. We're encouraging them to watch. What a mentor to these young players. Ralph Priso stays close to Michael on the field with and without the ball. You can see he's being fast-tracked by a top, one of the best.

Q. When you look back at the last 90 minutes, how would you diagnose it? How did you pull this off?

CHRIS ARMAS: Well, there's a few things. We went after it in León. In doing so, yeah, we got to see and experience so many different things and ways they can hurt opposition. But they obviously switched the point of attack. They create over loads in wide areas. They have key players in these situations.

We wanted to make sure a few things happened tonight, and one was pressure on the ball. As much as teams like that, they need time and space, and to do that we have to launch more pressing moments up the pitch and in mid-block let's say. Too, when the ball got wide, then what? We're trying to keep it to one side in different ways.

And still now we knew where spaces would be in transition when we could win the ball. So we knew if we can launch more attacks of pressing, we can give them less time in space, we could deal with the wide areas, that this would inevitably -- we saw in the second half the other night and even in the first half that we were able to create transition because they commit so many numbers forward.

It wasn't if, it was when, like the second goal I believe yet, we're dangerous on the night when we don't have the ball,

and now if we're able to capitalize on that, that was the plan. We're going to create moments. Can we have enough moments where we can make them pay. Easier said than done from the head coach sitting on the side, but the guys committed to it, we trained it, we show it, we work it and we repeat it, and in a quick time I think the guys are understanding it, and as we say, it's empowering to players. Yeah.

Q. I see you so calm. You just kicked out the champion of the Mexican league. What are your thoughts for that, and are you concerned about the next bracket. I don't understand how you're not going crazy.

CHRIS ARMAS: Right now I'm smiling inside, of course, but I had my moment with the team. To see Jozy Altidore, the look on Michael Bradley's face, these are winners, they're team guys, to see the young players, for them to experience this, I was right in there with them out on the pitch.

At the same time, yeah, it's a special moment for us, TFC, and our supporters back home that they can feel part of this.

But now listen, it's back to work. It's back to work. This is only the beginning of the season. We're so proud that we were able to put León in a difficult two games, home and away.

So yeah, I'm really happy with the results. Now we have to quickly get back to work, and there's more. There's more for this team. There's much more for TFC here, the young guys coming through, veterans. We're getting healthy, we're getting strong.

Listen, my thoughts on the match, it's an incredible victory for the players, and I'm part of it. I'm really proud of the team, and yeah, we have another game Saturday and getting ready for the next round of Champions League.

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