

Toronto FC Media Conference

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Chris Armas

Media Conference



Columbus 2, Toronto FC 1

Q. Disappointing result today. Your team dug a hole in the first half, better in the second half. What was your take on the performance?

CHRIS ARMAS: You said it right there. You know, we dug ourselves a hole, so against good teams, it's hard to dig yourself out. And it's -- when you get played off the pitch, if you just get shelled with shots, then you feel one way.

But you come in, and it's three or four shots and you're down 2-0, when you're trying to push and you're trying to come in with optimism and you try to come in with belief and you go down the way we went down, right, we are about to score a corner kick and it's a break away and where structurally you have it sorted out. That's hard, right.

So yeah, the result, we're not going to ever get used to not winning around here. So we've got to keep doing what we're doing in many ways and stick to it if we truly believe we're doing the right things, and if the results aren't coming, we've got to stick to it. Get guys healthy, keep sticking to it and got to be better, though. Got to be better.

Early on it was set pieces. Today it's some transition moments, and it becomes hard to win games when we're giving up goals that are preventable. So yeah, it's a tough stretch but we are going to get through it and yeah, it's hard to handle right now but that's what it is.

Q. Pozuelo, can you speak to how great it was to see him back in action and what he meant to help turn the game in your favor today?

CHRIS ARMAS: Yeah, look, I think when he's on the field, he gives a lift to the team, just his presence, and then he adds the quality and he's always a guy that can find spaces and facilitate the attack. I think you all know that and we're able to see that.

So he was a big part of the push we make in the second half. Helped put some guys in some good spots, relieve pressure, the whole bit. Yeah, it's good to have him back. It's good to see Ayo get himself on the scoreboard and see

the guys come out at halftime to get a big push to get a result. We obviously fell short but we are happy to Alejandro back.

Q. Again you were missing some key pieces to your lineup, including Altidore. Can you say anything about what happened with him and why he didn't make the trip to Columbus?

CHRIS ARMAS: So the first part, you say we were missing some key pieces. Yeah, look, we are. There's no secret there. With Soteldo and Pozuelo, Osorio, there's a bunch of guys out, Chris Mavinga has got to come off at halftime. But despite that, despite that, it's out -- it's there for us and we are not going to start ever making excuses because it's enough there on the night. If we give up eight shots in 90 minutes, yeah, it's there for you, whoever you have, whoever you're missing.

And look, with Jozy, I know there's been some questions. For the sake of respecting all parties involved, we wanted to get through this game and use the next days to take a step back before something is said out there. You know, again, there's too much respect for all parties involved, so I'm not going to address anything with Jozy at the moment. Just that it's an internal situation that, yeah, that's it for now.

Q. You talked about the first half obviously not going the way you wanted it but it looked like a much different team in the second half, tale of two halves for sure. Pozuelo's influence was important but what did you say to the team at halftime and what adjustments did you make at halftime to spark a much better performance in the second half?

CHRIS ARMAS: Well, look, there's little things in there. Taking care of the ball better. Taking care of passes where it doesn't lead to transition. That was talked about last. But the main thing was just to go for it. You know, to leave nothing on the table. To use the next 45 minutes to push the game and to take some risks and to play in their end and to be the aggressors.

Now, we change the way we were pressing. We stepped

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up in a different way. We pressed out of a 4-1-4-1 to put more pressure on the ball, even before Pozuelo comes on the field, we got a grasp on the game and caused more turnovers and gave them less time. This allowed I think for some of that to happen, for guys just to not hold back and to try to play on the front foot. Like guys, I want to be on the edge of my seat type of thing, watching you guys go after the game, and they did. To be fair, they did, to the very last play. Michael I think almost scores at the end but there's some chances in there.

I think the challenge is to put that together for 90 minutes and to, you know, but listen, there is the reality of the game, which is when you are out there, you're trying to control certain spaces, you're picking moments to press, you give up a goal, it does, it hurts, right. That's the reality.

So we are going to come back stronger after this game and reset, recharge and be stronger for these first seven matches.

Q. Why didn't the club disclose Soteldo's injury and why did the Venezuelan Federation disclose his injury so close to a game for TFC?

CHRIS ARMAS: It is a good question, it is. But we didn't know about his injury until the night after we did media. So I get messaged that evening of a hamstring, and they got the information and they just -- they quickly revealed that at almost near the same time that we did.

Let's face it, guys, this isn't intramural soccer. When you get information about a player, you don't rush to the media. You don't call for a press conference to let the opposition know one of our best players is out. So there's almost two sides of it. I know everyone wants the information but, one, we didn't have it when I did media, and two, it gets -- the next day, we were putting that out, you know, anyway, how it gets out there and then everyone -- like you're asking, like we are holding back the information, at least it sounds that way, but we didn't. We didn't.

So I think that almost should go without saying, but it's I think people expect us to run and reveal every -- should I call Caleb porter and let him know -- hey, just so you know, as you're preparing, Soteldo's out. Think about it.

Q. What broke down on the two Columbus calls, the first one in particular, and what did you see from Ayo on his call today? I thought he took it well.

CHRIS ARMAS: Yeah, look, Columbus is dangerous. We'll look back and we have some numbers there, and they are whipping a good ball, and they catch us on that one in a transition moment from a giveaway up the field.

I think more, you know, a strange one is the first one where we have a structure set up on a set piece and it's a corner kick and it looks really promising on one level and the way we defend our corner kicks is a structured top of the box which three players that help control transition. I didn't see the goal back but it happened quickly where the ball shoots out and yeah, he gets on the run. It happened quickly, the first one. The timing wasn't great, and just before the corner kick that we ended up having, it looks like a big moment. I think Nick DeLeon is going on the end line, it's a big moment to score and seconds later, we give up a goal.

I think it's one we look back on and a few that we have numbers around and we have people there. Yeah, we just have to put out those fires.

Q. You guys decided to start Auro Junior at the center of the park for the third straight match. With other options that are more natural central midfielders in the squad, was he the best option at centre mid and why did you adjust 20 minutes into the match after that?

CHRIS ARMAS: I mean, we would need like a half hour to talk tactics, and -- starts all midfielders and it's brilliant, when you have Aguero, Jesus, no strikers, only midfielders and that makes a lot of sense. Like there's a lot of thought that goes into the lineups and where, how we are best and I think when you have a few players like a Richie Laryea, like Auro, instead of having them compete against each other, you say, hey, how can we get them both on. That's one part of it.

Then we had to make shift a little bit, the first time we used Auro there was almost like necessity was the mother of all invention. We needed someone in that part of the field to play 90 minutes, so he got the nod instead of Ralph Priso, let's say, and we thought he played really well.

So if you just think about a player like Auro who has played that position in his career, not for Toronto but in his career, and he's a intelligent and he's smart and he plays with real passion. Those are all qualities that make for a good central midfielder. So we think he's followed it up pretty well there, and then we shifted it into the game tonight where we put him back at light back and pushed Richie up and we saw Richie, we think that's something interesting, too.

Again, listen, it's a fair question but it's not one that -- the thought behind and makes some sense behind in a lot of ways.

Q. You touched on it earlier with Chris Mavinga to be subbed off. Luke came in, how do you think he



performed in the second half?

CHRIS ARMAS: Yeah, I think Luke stepped in in a difficult game, and you know, won some aerial duels, connected some passes, defended, some pretty good attackers fairly well. So you know, Luke is coming along and he's a young player and he's had some big experiences already in a short season for him with Champion's League and even tonight getting thrown out there last second, we had to make that change quickly.

We like Luke. He's got a good physical and athletic profile and he's a good passer and he trains well. We thought, again, in a difficult game, he came on and helped us make a push in the second half.

Q. Your players are going their separate ways now on the break, international duties, some going elsewhere. Do you think it may be a chance for them to reset, refresh? And on a personal level, will you get to go home, spend some time with your family? What will you do?

CHRIS ARMAS: Appreciate it. Yeah, it will be a time that we all use, yes, myself included for a few days back just to see my family.

Yeah, it will be important for everyone to take a step back for just a couple of days, which isn't always easy when you're sitting on some results that don't go our way and you say, well, if you can get a few, you feel much better about enjoying some time. But that's part of it.

So yeah, the players will get some days to get back to Canada to see some of their families. Some of them will stay in Orlando and do some different things out of there. The extended staff, same situation.

But for sure, take a step back, reset things, recharge the batteries, and all of us, we come back with a vengeance. No one is happy with a 1-4-2 start. There's some points we leave out there. But on the inside, things are strong. On the inside of these walls over here, things are getting stronger, and things haven't been easy for this group. But we are going to come back and reload.

Q. In the buildup to this one, you talked about how you felt you had not seen a complete 90-minute performance from the team in MLS this year. Fair to say it wasn't a complete 90 minutes today. Can you diagnose what the problem is? Is it mental errors? Is it players switching off? How would you diagnose it that you can't seem to get 90 minutes out of these guys?

CHRIS ARMAS: Listen, I see effort. I saw effort in Orlando. We can talk about certain games and we can talk specifically about today where you see a team that is pushing and probing and fighting and sticking together and relentless to win the ball back and to attack again and to counter press and to repeat that, and as the game goes on, we're ramping things up. On one level, I see that the team is fighting and pushing. On the other level, it's where we have to really improve is moments of transition. You know, can we, you know, be better with the ball in certain parts of the field. Can we have an ability to put out fires when those fires come. And then, you know, so you think back to some of the goals that we've given up, or many of the goals this year, yeah, it's certain moments of concentration and focus. That's often times at the highest level with teams in any sport it's how long can you endure those moments of total focus, which just leads to execution, a clearance, a final play, defending a set piece, a cross. It's often a game of inches.

Listen, the way the guys are sticking together, the way they pushed this game, and we have a big chance late; if it's 2-2, you feel really good about this. Yeah, it's not just one thing. It's everyone pulling a little more weight, all of us, to get the results that we need.

Q. I wanted to get your take on how Ayo took his goal today. You talked in the past about him being a bit of a rhythm player and wonder if you're seeing that after a couple straight appearances from him.

CHRIS ARMAS: Yeah, I'm happy for him because oftentimes it's about confidence and for strikers, it's about goals. So what I've seen from him, I'd say in the last few weeks and then few days where he is staying after training, working on finishing, hitting the back of the net, taking chances well, working hard in training, defending, pressing, I've seen a real hunger and focus in these last days, and Bill Manning, told him yesterday he's going to score a goal. He's right, you can feel and sense that it was coming.

We hope, and like always, he'll build on that. He'll come back from the break and he'll get more opportunities to put it to work. But he's confident and sharp and I'm happy for him that he gets on the scoreboard.

Q. Understanding that the loss is very fresh and you're going to go home and take a few days, but moving forward, what are the steps that you as a coaching staff need to take to, as you said, come back with a vengeance and kind of right the ship here?

CHRIS ARMAS: I think you have to recognize where you can improve. So where is the opportunity and then what are you doing well.

Again, if you come here and give up five shots, zero shots -- the guys didn't have a ton, eight or nine shots on the day but it's not easy with a team has a Santos, a Zelarayan, a Zardes, a Diaz, a Wright-Phillips coming in. It's a big task.

So I think it's just really important to be able to look clearly at things and be very honest and say, where are we giving up goals, where are we giving up chances, how did we tighten that and is it structural, is it intensity, is it focus, is it personnel. And then we move forward.

On the flipside, it's important to take a real hard look at some good performances and the way we can move the ball fast and as much as they are trying to prevent, we are still able to get through at ease at moments and to create chances and how can we turn some of those good buildups into goals. Some little movements in the back, some final passes and decision-making. And if transition is something that's getting us, can we just organize training and have guys be put in situations where they can slow down a little bit, stay on the ball, decision-making.

So yeah, we know that we are not an easy team to play against but we have hurt ourselves a bit, and it will be my job to take the hard look with my staff and put the guys in situations to succeed because we will. We will, partly because of what evident -- what we have had with some of the guys and partly of who is coming back and who is healthy. We'll take this time off in the right way and come back in a real way.

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