

Toronto FC Media Conference

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Javier Perz

Media Conference



Atlanta United 2, Toronto FC 0

Q. It's been a strange, difficult season and this game seemed to somehow fit that with a strange, difficult ending. Seems like things lost control toward the end. How did you see it?

JAVIER PEREZ: Yeah, I think you are absolutely right. I think it's been a weird game. I think we didn't deserve to lose the game. We didn't deserve to be 1-0 down at halftime. I think they score down there right at the end and I think that we stayed in it the rest of the game and we tried different things, but we couldn't really find the right opportunity. I think Omar has a very clear chance towards the end to find the tie, but in the end we don't score and we get with a loss tonight, which I think doesn't reflect really what the team did on the field.

Q. Alejandro and Jozy both saw action for the first time since the summer. What did you think of their performances, and how important was it to get them back into action considering their lengthy absences?

JAVIER PEREZ: Excuse me, what did you say at the end? I didn't understand.

Q. Just how important was it to get them into the game considering their lengthy absences?

JAVIER PEREZ: Yeah, I think it was obviously very important for them to get some minutes. I think they came on a difficult game. Both of them they are very experienced players, and they are used to these kind of games, but unfortunately they have been out for a long time. So it wasn't really the purpose to change, really, the game, because I think if they can get the extra minutes, that's already a positive for the team and stay healthy.

But I'm very positive and I'm very happy they contribute and they were on the field. I think they will have more minutes in the next few games towards the end of the season. Hopefully they can speed up in the game.

Q. You guys are officially eliminated from the playoffs now, but are you proud of the way this team has

played and how the club's fortunes have sort of turned around since you took over?

JAVIER PEREZ: I am. I think the team really fought. The team really fought the all the way through. Never gave up, and I don't expect them to give up now. I think we still have to fight for points, and it's not a team that gives up easily.

So I think I'm proud the way we went down. I think it's been an extremely difficult season for us. Many of the games, they didn't go our way. I think it reflects, as well, the characteristics of the season, and I think it will make us stronger.

I think we still have our Cup, a championship to play for, the Canadian Cup, and I think having that objective towards the end of the season is going to help us to stay strong, stay motivated, and it's going to make us strong, the whole experience, to be a team to come back and fight for titles.

Q. Things got contentious towards the end, Auro and Ezequiel Barco, both getting sent off, and then tempers seemed to flare. What was your perspective on that situation? What happened there to really get that going?

JAVIER PEREZ: Yeah, I saw that in first -- very, very close, right, because it was on that side of the bench. And really it was some confrontation in the middle of the field, and then I think Barco was rediscriminating the previous play to Auro, and they get close in the face but nothing really happened there.

The linesman, the assistant referee interpret that was enough to send him off and he communicate that to the main referee, and that was done. I think my opinion that probably wasn't enough to send them off, but I respect the opinion of the referees. They consider that way and I respect it.

What I think is not acceptable is just us, the players, they go towards the tunnel outside. I know exactly the part of the staff that they partner part of the confrontation, but I

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don't think the staff should be involved. I think the players, if they get in a confrontation, it's their story, and the staff, they are there to support, not to recriminate anybody. So one of the staff from them, he got into the tunnel to -- I don't know what was his intention, just to have an aggression on Auro or then to recriminate in something, and then is when everything get difficult. I think it was goalkeeper coach.

But I think it's not acceptable that the staff recriminates anything to the players. I think that's the job for the referees and the staff, we are there to help our own players and that's the end of the story. So I think some people, they should know better where their places are.

Q. To go back to the first Atlanta goal, what did you make of that one and how much did it remind you of the last meeting between these two teams where it took a bit of a deflection to be the difference?

JAVIER PEREZ: Yeah, I think the team, our team, has improved a lot, actually. Defensively, as well, we have the back line, but we are missing kind of the midfielder in front. Obviously we cannot cover the whole ground but reminds me -- it's not really the same goal, right, because as well, we are in transition but we have the back four line. I think it's just an unfortunate goal. We get out of position maybe in midfield, but I don't think we deserve to be 0-1 in the end at halftime.

So I don't want to read too much in between. I think it's one of these nights that we have to forget and just focus on our next game, which is Miami.

Q. Despite the result, there seemed to be some positives out there. I thought Kemar Lawrence played really well, and Gonzales looked much fresher than he had in the past. What did you think of their performance on behalf of the defense?

JAVIER PEREZ: As I said before, I'm very happy. I think the way the back four and they have been playing the last stretch of games, I think we are playing well. We are competitive. The defense looks solid again, even if we conceded two goals today. But it's a game that you have to watch it in order to realize why the two goals, they come from.

On top of that, I think Kemar is doing an amazing job as a center back, and Omar has been playing really well in the past few games. He has even that opportunity to score. I think Guzan makes a terrific save.

But yeah, overall, I think our defense is doing a great job, anticipating, playing a little bit higher up on the field, not

giving time and space, and I think it's only in that transition where they are extremely dangerous that they score a goal, and we conceded that goal right before the halftime.

Overall, I think I'm pretty happy with the way we've been working together on the defensive.

Q. You subbed on Jahkeele at the half-hour mark after Achara was injured and you brought Jahkeele off as part that double substitution. Can you explain the rationale? Was he injured? Was it tactical?

JAVIER PEREZ: Very simple, it's tactical. The one thing that was between him and Alejandro, and Alejandro couldn't play more than a half because he's been out for a long time. So we decided to bring Jahkeele on, he did a great job. But then we decided to change tactically. We went into our 4-4-2 diamond and it was difficult to accommodate Jahkeele in that shape, you know, that we started the game in a 4-3-3 and then went in a 4-4-2 diamond. It was a tactical decision.

I think we were able to keep the three in the middle, the back four, as I said before, I think the back four are doing a great job, and then he was up front just to leave Yeferson and Jozy. Yeferson was probably a little bit more wide or wider than would be my preference, but that was a tactical change to the 4-4-2 diamond; and I think Jahkeele gets these minutes and I think it was important as well for him and his development, and he will have more opportunities from now till the end of the season. He has been playing now consistently during a number of games and I think it's a good experience for him.

Q. I saw two different teams between the first and the second half. What did your team modify to get more attack chances, because we saw two teams pushing so much forward but I think Toronto got more chances and opportunity and very good effectively. What do you think about the first half and the second half?

JAVIER PEREZ: Yeah, I think you're right, I think we have a first half with a lot of energy that we've been playing in the past, with Jacob and Achara, these two players, they give that you. They give you the energy. They give you the depth, not only the possession, but with them I think we can play a little bit more vertical.

As I mentioned yesterday, yesterday you asked me or one of your colleagues asked me about what we have been working on during the international break, and it was just being a little bit connected, a little bit more connected with the back four to give freedom to the three up front, and I think that was the intention. That's why it looked where, again, both teams, they were creating chances in

transition, being dynamic, aggressive.

And then the second half, we changed the shape, and we have more feet in the middle, so it's normal that we look a bit more -- we look a bit more in control, more possession type game.

You are absolutely right, I think the team look a little bit different in the first and the second half. Just because of the personnel and the formations that we use in each one of the halves.

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