



Toronto FC Media Conference

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John Herdman

Media Conference

Orlando City 2, Toronto FC 0

Q. It looked like your team had most of the action going and then things turned around. What did you think of the performance and what was it like for you, your first night on the sidelines?

JOHN HERDMAN: I think I enjoyed about two thirds of my night on the sidelines. It's a proud moment to be able to step out there as and club manager of TFC. The fans showed up tonight in good numbers. They had good energy.

I think it's part of what's ahead for this club. There was elements of tonight I was really happy with and there's elements that needs work. I mean, it's pretty clear the players showed an attitude and intensity for a period of time they haven't showed for a long time. I thought they had a clip -- when they put their body on the line.

We were in a good space for I think at least two-thirds of that match and then it got away from us in about the 60th minute. About the 73rd, 74th, we managed to get a hold of it again but by that I felt like it was too much. Too little, too late. I think I will reflect upon that period of time, that 15 minutes. I think the players efforts levels were still there. The tactical shifts with Pereyra and the big man coming on front, we found it difficult to handle them, particularly in transition. We will look at that.

So we'll look at that. But at the same time, I mean, there was a shift tonight. I thought it was pretty noticeable. The players were committed, and I think clear, and on the same page for long periods of time.

Q. You talked yesterday about wanting to see some result the from the team. Were you happy with the --

Yeah, they wobbled for a period. I thought it was a short wobble but to see key players still back pressing and still trying to save time. So taking responsibility. I think that was an important thing for me to see tonight.

But more importantly in that period of time, we tried to shift some things tactically. With about ten days of work, we destabilized them for some periods.

We tried to shift into a diamond and with Oso popping in at the 10, and it destabilized them at a time where they needed to stay -- for me I'll take that one on the chin. I said to the lads, I'll take ownership for that little period of time where they probably would have been better staying tighter and stronger and staying committed to what we worked on for ten days.

So I'll take that punch in the face but I think can't fault them tonight. I thought they really put a shift in and with three months of preparation now and maybe some considerations on roster development; and again I've provoked the players to say, if you want to be here next year, you'd better be all in. That 60 minutes that we seen there tonight, it's pressing for 60 minutes solid. We have to be committed to that.



These fans, they are not putting up with that anymore. They will accept a loss but they won't accept the lack of effort. They won't accept guys sacking the game off halfway through, and I thought our lads showed they were willing, willing tonight to stay in the fight.

Q. You inherited a team that has had a season that is officially the worst ever in franchise history and the bench tonight had five goals, that's all from Kerr. How big is this rebuilding job ahead of you?

I think it's an exciting task because even in ten days, we've seen a shift. We've seen a shift in the mentality of the group and we've seen a shift tactically. With Mabika starting in the center back three, we looked very comfortable. I thought we looked strong there.

I was gutted for Michael that we had to move him off the back three, they looked very comfortable in there. I'm really optimistic. I think they are beaten down. That's the reality is players there that are just low on confidence and while we're able to ramp that up a bit this week and get the energy levels there and commitment to their roles -- given the context, there's just been a lot of change, defeat after defeat after defeat, having to read on social media, the hits. The frustration and all that. That takes its toll. Even getting these guys up for the last game was a big challenge and I think they took it.

So I've learned a lot from these ten days. It was a really important time. We could have waved the white flag and came in at the end of November but we wanted to field this group and I've taken a lot of good information. I've seen things from players in ten days I didn't expect to see and there was some players tonight showing what they could be next season. Some might have showed that maybe they are not right for this club.

Q. There does seem to be an identity crisis here.

I think the identity is there tonight in a home game, home style of play. If we are talking identity, tactically we brought that identity to the fans, clarity to the fans, consistent high pressing.

I thought Orlando struggled to get off their own half for long periods of time. I think that identity, they embraced it and it's very clear with what I would expect to see if I was here and watching a game in my stadium and I thought they -- at best -- the defensive elements of that, some of the attacking but the identity is the edge.

We're just missing that edge. There's just this winning edge that the guy comes on, center forward, two touches, goal. Two touches, goal. That's the edge that's missing in this club. It's the cost and maybe there's a quality element to that. That's the difference. They had five shots tonight, five shots. Five shots. Two goals. For us, we can raise quality of tactical cohesion and we can raise quality by insuring these guys trust each other more and the arguments and the back biting that's been going on, it takes three months to start to dissolve that, so they actually want to work and play for each other. All of that can move, but we still see the quality in this group. There's no doubt, we need to add some quality in different positions.

Q. Inaudible.

I thought they put a hell of a shift in. There was some real commitment I seen and working through the emotional response of what we have seen in the past. They are going to turn it and then turn around and start spreading back 20 yards which you see from Lorenzo and Fede in the last 15 minutes.

I'm taking all that information in. I think they are in a better context with a better build. The I think we can get these players fully committed and dialed in.

But at the end of the day, they have to be ready to win for this club. I think when we get more tactical cohesion, you've seen a lot of unforced errors from the DPs at the moment. I mean, that's normal. They are just starting to find that rhythm in how we want them to play but that has to change. Those unforced errors have to change. I think they have got a high level of quality and again I really complimented their efforts and it was another level.

Q. What lies ahead the next few weeks? I understand you have next week off and then the players get training for a few weeks which seems a bit strange?



Yeah, it is strange. It is strange but you know what, I honestly think they need to stop. They just need a full stop and get settled in their minds. They need clarity. They need clarity on what they want in their future, whether this is it. They need some time, some of them, and maybe go into some therapy. This has been a tough season. A tough season. Can you imagine the young kids, their exposure to football has been this? You're seeing young players, they are not up. They are playing restricted. They are playing tight.

So there's going to need to be time for them to breathe and we'll allow that but then we are going to get back to work with them and some of that work will be on dissolving some of the psychological issues that are at this club and we'll be doing that when they comeback just to get a head start.

But my sports science team, they are clear. They are a pre-foundation that they are going to put in and that work is going to get done to make sure they are set up with all the right programs for the off-season and they have to come in ready for that off-season. This is the return story for a lot of these guys, and -- do we give an opportunity like we did to the 2011 women's national team, do I give these guys the chance to redeem themselves or do we clearly look at trying to change it and rebuild.

So that's what I've got to figure out in the next two weeks because I'll tell you, a group of guys that want to return are a motivated group of people, and if I smell that and sense that similar to the women in 2011, committed and they end up on a podium nine months later, that's what I'm hoping. And I'm going to smell and see and feel from it the group but at the same time, they have got to be showing me and I'll spot that in this off-season work.

Q. How much at the beginning --

Yeah, I think that white board -- I think you know, all in all, I think tactically they were -- for long periods and I think there's been a good uptick in the work this week. I was really impressed. He's been bright-eyed ready to go, and he's building confidence, and I think he has not suffered from those ebbs in confidence. I think he's thriving and -- really thriving in this moment.

But I think tactically, it takes a preseason to get to where Cincinnati is up and where Austin is, where they are trying to tactically adapt and be fluid.

I thought for 60 minutes we were there and when I tried to adapt tactically, I was like, okay, there's a challenge here. We are not on the right page. The young kids coming in, we are trying to fix it. But too much, too soon.

Q. When you mentioned Cincinnati -- does that inspire you with the task at hand?

Studied the system, out how they approach the league and how they use their DPs, the rotation of DPs and how they use their center being about as to be able to maintain this consistent amount of minutes players are playing. Some of their tactics have been successful. We have seen in MLS the back five structures, they are very effective particularly against teams that are loaded with frontline DPs. So these are things we've analyzed as we came in and start to set a vision and tactical philosophy and identity for this team. I'm very clear on where Toronto FC are headed next season. I've been working with Jason Hernandez on the profiles of the various positions, physically, technically, emotionally, mentally, so they have seen some of that work already. We came in we'll be able to work in the off-season. Just have to.

Q. You've talked about the team behind the team here since you've joined TFC. It's a lot different from where you came from. Has anybody said no?

I think you are operating on a budget. We are in a budget cycle which is a fiscal budget which, and I'm right in the middle of the of the cycle and I have to be mindful of what I'm doing. I come from a frugal reality and working within tight means. That's quite refreshing that we are doing things that we can absolutely justify if it leads to winning in the future.

I think TFC have got a great staff. I was so impressed, 76 people in that building, and they know what the team needs. They do a good job for the team. I watch them travel. It's like a Ferrari F1 pit stop. We are just not delivering on the pitch. We are not delivering on the pitch, whether that's the coaches, they have to keep pushing that next level of the players.

We have got to evolve that group mentally and emotionally, tactically because that's where I think the big shift was a hundred



percent, the people behind the team, good people working hard, very hard and doing a bloody good job.

Q. Was that a significant moment, the transition --

It's a great stadium. As I said to the boys in the dressing room after, it's my first loss and that hurts. I expected to be able to step in there and do what we needed to do -- and for the fans. It was painful. I took responsibility for what I could.

At the same time, I'm letting the boys know that, yeah, this hurts. This really hurts. Because we were buzzing and we genuinely thought, this is a level of invincibility in this stadium with these fans. So I made a commitment it won't happen again.

Q. You mentioned the infighting behind the scenes. How do you go about adding new personalities to that and new players?

Yeah, we've been talking about this behind the scenes. It's just about bringing the right people to TFC. People that reflect the fans, reflect this city. This is a city made up of immigrants, majority of immigrants that have come across who are hard working, and we have to see that as a genuine -- we have to stay above the line, the character and competence. We are very clear what those things are, and that's the standard. There's nobody that enters this club from this point forward that isn't willing to give it all for that ship, and that jersey isn't going to be disrespected in any way, shape or form in 2024.

Q. When you see the crowds -- do you think that is specifically --

I think they are frustrated. I mean, they want to get a win tonight. I think tonight the effort was there. I cannot not fault the effort of the players tonight. The behavior, remnants of that, they shifted. They could have walked another round but they didn't. They recovered. It took them a moment to get through that, okay, normally I'd be walking around here but they shifted and I was proud of that work tonight.

But I understand the fans. It's a city that should be an apex predator in MLS given what the guys have said here, our resources. We should be at the top of the food chain just sharpening our teeth. But those that stick with us will enjoy the return.

Q. Inaudible.

I mean, we'll reflect. We'll reflect on this. This is part of the discussions we've got to have internally but the man -- I've been watching this team suffer for 13-odd games and while maybe he's not been on the score sheet, he's always giving his all to this city.

So we'll have that conversation behind the scenes. He's definitely starting to hit that age where he understands what has to happen now and he's ready.

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