



# Toronto FC Media Conference

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## John Herdman

Media Conference

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**Q. Congratulations on a point in a very tough place to play. That seemed like a team that looked a lot different from the one last year. What were your thoughts about the performance?**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** I thought it was exactly what we needed for the first game of the season. We were able to get our first point in this league, which was nice. It was nice because they had to fight for it.

When you come up against Acosta and this team is a very organized team as we have seen last season. Really tough to get anything clear.

We had that in our mentality. I thought the opening exchanges, if we had managed to get something earlier, I thought that would have maybe made a bigger difference to the game, but I think all in all we were resolute.

We showed that fighting spirit. We stayed connected right until the end. So for me it was a good start to the season, but still work to be done. A lot.

**Q. Lorenzo coming out in the 62nd minute, was that sort of always the plan to give him about an hour? You talked earlier this week about wanting to manage his minutes, so I'm just wondering how much of that was tied to wanting to manage his minutes? What did you make of him in the hour that he played?**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** Yeah, it was -- for him it's still preseason. He hasn't played a preseason match since Nashville and picked up 60 minutes in that match. So today it was pushing 45, and we would see, assess after 45 and see where was he at a level where we could keep him going a bit longer.

But this about managing Lorenzo through the whole season so we get him for as many home games as we can. Those are the players that when we're on the road, can do some of the work that needs to be done to keep clean sheets and to get points on the road.

Sometimes for us the three points would be great, but at the same time we're in that mentality of when we go away, the point is one of the hardest things to achieve in MLS. So that was nice tonight.

I think with his performance and you see those little combinations with Richie, both players had one and a half training sessions together. I think that partnership will blossom through the season.

Obviously the flexibility of being able to play Richie on that right side and potentially Fede on the left and looking at the variation on that is going to be good for us.



I think Lorenzo, it was a good start. He had his moments, which he should. He is still in his preseason. We're just going to keep getting him stronger and getting him ready to really fire up for that home opener.

**Q. A couple of debuts in the line-up. I'm not sure if Richie counts as one, but Kevin Long and Deybi Flores. What did you see from them tonight?**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** I think Deybi was manning the match for us. He really pushed a level of performance there. I said we have to recruit that type of player. I think the front office did a great job in bringing that profile, which is that competitive, destroyer type profile I thought TFC lacked last season in the middle of the park.

Him and Alo have built a good relationship through preseason, but his intensity is special. I watched him for Honduras and have had to play against him and always worried about the player that was on his side that would be left standing after the game. He is so intense and passionate.

Yeah, he was solid. Longy did what we expected him to do. Again, we've done well with the profiling. We went after multiple targets. We were pretty clear on what we wanted.

That connection, again, with the front office, Jason Hernández and his team, has been class. They've looked at the profiles, and I think that was the perfect profile for TFC. He brings the experience, the composure. He doesn't get rattled. You can see in that moment that last five, ten minutes of the match where you are chasing the points, he brought his experience.

I would really point to him, Raoul Petretta, and Deybi Flores. I thought were exceptional today.

**Q. Just wanted to ask you about that postgame huddle. We were seeing that on the broadcast, and it seemed like that was an important moment for this group, mindful of especially we'll say the narratives that have lingered around this club for a bit and the project you're steering to hopefully put those in the past.**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** Yeah, it was an important moment. It was Sean Johnson's 100th clean sheet. I think that's a really special occasion for any player. It was a moment where we got our first point in that stadium against a very, very good team.

This team has been killing it in MLS last season, so we knew it was going to be tough coming here as the home opener, the energy of their fans. More importantly, Lorenzo spoke, and it's just the start. It's the right step forward. As you said, we're fighting together now.

Whether it's Jahkeele Marshall-Rutty and the 19-year-old coming off the bench or Kobe Franklin, you know, young players. Of course, Kosi Thompson, to solidify the game. Those players can be trusted because there's a connection here. They know that these veteran players have got their backs, and we're going to get through this season together.

So, all in all, that huddle was just a symbol of the first step.

**Q. John, last season when things went wrong with this team, you saw a lot of hands being raised, body language, things like that. There seemed none of that today. Was that a point of emphasis you had made, or is it just part of the new culture?**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** It's the standard that's set. I think it's been brilliant with that leadership group. That was one of the standards that won't be tolerated at this club, and I think it only ever gets tested under the heat of battle, and it was hot today. It was really hot today.

There were some hot moments going both ways on the pitch where people got frustrated with a touch or a pass or at the other end when Acosta is working his magic. I thought the guys were able to just stay on task. They're clear on what their roles are, and they've got a togetherness, a purpose for why they're here now. I think that tends to -- it doesn't give way of the frustration or pain of the performance as easy as it did.

So that's being worked on, and I have to commend the leaders because they've set their standards. Ultimately, they lead



those behaviors on the pitch.

**Q. By my count Sean Johnson made seven saves today, including some really sort of key ones at important junctures of the match. I just wanted to get your sort of perspective on his performance tonight. You named him as part of the leadership group, and I guess it's for, in part, because of reasons because of his performances like today.**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** I thought he was a great signing for TFC. I think the fans thought that was the missing link. Unfortunately, little injuries and other things that occurred last season, it was tough for Sean.

Certainly we've got a strong central spine. Myself, Jason Hernández looked at that through the offseason and said, look, with Sean in there, adding Deybi, adding an experienced center back that can still do it in the league. I think that's really been a big part of that spine.

We know he has that in him. I thought he made two big chest saves from tough angles, but two big saves that a lot of us from the front players to the people on the bench would just expect him to do it. So, again, when you come to a stadium like this with players like this, you know he is going to be busy at some point. He's all in. He's all in at the moment.

**Q. Two quick ones if I may. First one, John, just on managing Acosta, really limiting his chances today. I thought it was a real team effort, but Shane O'Neill in particular sort of stood out on that front.**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** I could have put Shane on that man of the match performance. I think he was right up there as well. If you look where he is at, he's a changed man from the guy I met in Toronto in October.

He's really shown that pedigree that people had seen at Seattle when he was pushing for championships. It's been a real pleasure working with Shane because he's had a tough few things going on behind the scenes. He just brings a focus and intensity to every training there, and all the DPs they love him because he's just honest, so honest with everything he does.

He had a big job today as you have seen tracking Acosta. When Deybi couldn't manage him, Shane would step in. I think we learn from Acosta. I think a big learning was we needed to turn with the man more. I thought that was that little bit of detail we lost today.

We did limit his chances, but still there were moments we could improve. So every game we play, we'll learn. It will be a different story when we head back.

**Q. Just real quick, did you feel like there was a goal out there for you guys today?**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** I think the chances were there. Fede was heading to the top corner, the little deflection. I think Prince made a great save on Lorenzo's shot. What were the chances on that?

Yeah, I just feel like the first 15 minutes of each half the last probably five, ten minutes of the second, first half as well, we had a chance, good chances there. We had good moments where we needed to capitalize.

For us we'll go back and review those elements and just close those gaps. That's what the beginning of the season is for, but I was happy with Fede's contribution. I thought he did well on the flank, and we found him when we found him. He was very dangerous.

I would like to see a little bit more from that left side with Lorenzo and Richie, but that partnership will develop over time.

**Q. John, we haven't had a chance to talk to you since the announcement about Adama Diomande. I am wondering if you could speak to that because it seemed like earlier in the preseason you were talking about wanting to give him time to see if he can kind of come back. What led to the decision about waiving him?**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** Yeah, it's always a tough decision. Adama's fitness, injuries have been plaguing him for a period of time. So it's not easy when you've been injured for those periods, and you are then pushed to different standards.



In the preseason he's a class guy. We had great conversations, but I think largely we needed that international slot. That's a big one.

With Adama there was still a few more weeks before we felt we could even get him to sort of match readiness to come off the bench, and we just needed to step on. We need to do change gears. With some of the signings, Nicksoen Gomis, Kevin Long, and some of the others that we're potentially looking at, that international slot is coveted first.

A tough decision. I would love to have seen him flying at his best, but there was just no guarantee of seeing that in the first ten games of the season. If you know the first ten games, you've got to start strong in MLS to stay in the race. It was a tough big decision, but one that we had to make.

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