



Toronto FC Media Conference

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John Herdman

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Toronto FC 1, Charlotte 0

Q. Another clean sheet. Can you give us your thoughts on that goal, and also the celebration that ensued?

JOHN HERDMAN: I didn't realize he was that heavy. He nearly took us right off our feet. It was amazing. I said today would be a tough game. They are a very direct team, direct second phase. You've got to fight for everything. Two strong forwards. But proud of the lads. I thought they put a shift in, again. And our quality came through, and we have got that quality, and to do well in MLS, you need your DPs performing at that level, and Lorenzo certainly came in trumps today. But for me, you've got to talk about Luka Gavran made a big save. He didn't have much to do but he made one big save that kept us in the game, and then Sigurd, he's had to go out in off-time and big Sigs has come in and I thought we did well second half with him sort of managing that back line.

So all in all, the fans, got to mention them. I think you could feel it on a knife edge, and I knew this was that game. It's not a game where they open up like the New York Citys or Atlantas. They stay tight in a shell and play that direct style. The fans stuck with us. And when Lorenzo scored, I just felt, this is what the stadium can feel like through this season. I think they felt we might be back. We're getting close to it.

Q. Can you give us an update on, first of all, Sean Johnson and also Kevin?

JOHN HERDMAN: Yeah, it's been tough, actually. Sean just picked something up in the session yesterday. So yeah, we can assess, we couldn't put him on any injury report because he got assessed this morning, and he's still under assessment. They are just trying to figure out, and I'm at a moment where it's low risk, real low risk on our key players. I'd rather push the next man up.

Luka did well in the preseason in the matches and the moments he played, and he's been performing well this week, as well. I've noticed that. We asked Sean, know, manage himself and let's look to the future as opposed to the here and now.

And then Longy, he's been feeling his cough since the turf. I said a couple lads got beaten up on the turf, and he's just had some tightness all week. We knew he was touch and go for the game, and he was probably only going to have a half in him. We knew at halftime, once he sits in the dressing room, it's going to seize up, so we had Siggy ready.

Yeah, all in all, I think those lads stepped in well, and we'll be assessing those players to see how they are looking for next week. Luckily six days to get them ready.

Q. Has there been a common theme, or maybe it's more than one theme that's been common across the three performances through the first three games?



JOHN HERDMAN: Clean sheets. Clean sheets. I mean, clean sheets. It's hard to get a clean sheet in MLS. Such an open league, and the players told us that you have these crazy 20 minutes in MLS where the game just tends to open up but there was no way a Smith team is going to do that. His team is never going to open up, and for us, we wobbled a little bit. We were too open. I addressed it halftime, around the 35-minute mark, we came away from our identity and we bent, but we didn't break again. So that's got to get better.

But I think the consistency has been the effort of Federico Bernardeschi. I think he has been just an absolute warrior for us, and to see Kobe Franklin come in, he had three big opportunities. It seems to be the next man up, no matter who we put out there. We can trust to, one put the work in, and two deliver the best they can. That's all I can ask from my players.

Q. Matty, 30-minute cameo, his first competitive action in 15 months. How do you think he did?

JOHN HERDMAN: How do you think he did?

Q. Pretty solid.

JOHN HERDMAN: Yeah, he's good. Pretty solid would be the way I would describe it. His passing ability, he can control the tempo of the game. Things changed when he came on, but I did think, you know, Prince stretching the line a bit more also helped the stretch within the team. Longstaff is building. Nice to hear the fans, they gave him a big reception. So I think they are excited to see him. It's great to see another -- out there fighting for TFC.

Q. Osorio, a milestone day for him, 300th MLS game and 11 years to the date he made his debut. You've coached him for a long time through various teams. Can you talk about the kind of player you have as your captain and what he's meant to Canadian soccer?

JOHN HERDMAN: I came to this club to work with -- right from the starting point, I've worked with Sinclair. I've worked with Hutchinson, just some great people, great humans, and they are right in the core of your leadership group. And if you've got a player with that character, that high-level character, like high standard character, you want to work with those people.

So as I say, for me, the conversation coming to TFC, you've got to be there; are you committed, will you wear the armband; are you committed to taking this club back, and beyond where it was at. And he was.

So with that said, what can I say about Oso? The hardest-working player on the team. Maybe Bernardeschi is just underneath him at the moment but he is the hardest-working player on the team. You can see the quality, as well. He can do all that stuff, running, but he can bring the quality in those moments, as well, just you can see his movements and his touch is next level. So what he said at the end of this, summarizing, another step, guys. Another step to bringing this club to where it needs to be. That's his mentality. He's always on. Next step. Next step. Next step. He's never thinking about the last step, and he's never willing to stand and wants to be pushed. He's pushing everyone.

Q. It's a little bit early to read too much into the standings but I think that win puts you guys level with Miami, they have a couple more goals than you guys do. Is this about where you expected the team would be at this point?

JOHN HERDMAN: We set our goals. We set our goals. The players set their goals. They have seen the track. They know through this phase, the points track that's going to get them to where we want to be by the end of the season, and they are on track. They are on track. All I'll say is it's process. The effort, the intensity, the desire, but the clarity -- the clarity to fight for that point.

I said to you before the game, the guys were so clear. There were so many storylines to this game and it could have been a bit of a service for them but we just brought them to clarity. Just get the points. Doesn't matter how it happens.

We've got good players on this team that can make that happen, and if we stick to the process, it can happen.

So I'll be saying the same thing all season. Just stick to the process.

Q. Lorenzo said this week, he may have been joking, but he said this week he texts you more than he does his wife.



Do you get a lot of texts from Lorenzo, and if so, can you give us a sense of what the back-and-forth is about?

JOHN HERDMAN: I'm wearing his perfume at the moment. You need to ask him about that one. That's something (laughing) we've had some fun. He's a real character. I think he's on to enjoy the club, enjoy his football. He knows that we're trying to get the best out of him. Every player is committed to trying to get Lorenzo in and around the ball. I thought they did a good job today trying to nullify him.

But the relationships, he's a tough player, and I'm willing to listen to him. I think that's an important part of this. He's got his ideas on tactics. I mean, the guys see more football matches -- he's forgotten more than I know, I'd say, about football, so I tap into that and I'm enjoying just the relationship at the moment. At times it's intense. He doesn't give you a minute; he doesn't give you a second. You've got to be at the top standard. If you're not, he let's you know. And I've built that trust where I can let him know, as well. I think that's where things are starting to blossom.

Q. You gave Kobe the start. What was the rationale and what did you make of his performance?

JOHN HERDMAN: I mean, Kobe is just a warrior for this club. I love what he brings, and again, he's another player that will do everything he can do bring the best out of Bernardeschi and Raoul does that for Lorenzo, very sacrificial.

But Kobe in training, through the preseason for me, he's taken everything on board, the timing of his runs. The tactical piece, he's so tactically disciplined, and you've got to put that around key players. Today was good, given that they have a really narrow back four, it was all about Kobe trying to stretch space for Federico, and then arriving late on the 2v1 on the fallback. He's had some big chances through preseason, as well. Soon enough that, goal will come for him and when it does, I think it will change everything. So for me, he's just a warrior for this team, and I love working with him because he's home grown. You need a couple of those fellas on your team.

Q. Talk about the decision of having the front three with Oso and Bernardeschi and Insigne. What did you like about the front three today?

JOHN HERDMAN: Yeah, those diagonal runs, the 2v1 moments that we were getting, they weren't going to give you too much through the center, but you have to invest in the center of the field against that team. If you just play around the outsides, they defend crosses well. They get 2v1s quickly on a Y-play we saw. We work with a false nine with Oso. That was important to just have the extra number around the two screens. Then Lorenzo and Fede in the inside channels, and then Kobe rolling in to allow Fede to have the width.

So for me, what I noticed with that team, if you played an end, you didn't have quality, you were getting hit on the transition. You were very vulnerable. I needed to put three quality players, players who can handle the ball, to just draw them in and then to be able to work out wide.

For periods, it looked okay, but we were too slow in our build. Way too slow. I wasn't happy with the pace of the work across the centre-backs into the two midfields. The two midfielders distances were too wide. I think when we fix that and with Matty coming on, he's a progressor. He has the skill set to play in that identity, whereas owl is more of a defensive unit, and we needed -- we knew, first half they were shelling it, and we needed that physical presence from owl. It was a tough tactical battle today. Dean's got them well-organized. Yeah, they are going to do well this season.

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