



# Toronto FC Media Conference

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## John Herdman

Media Conference

Toronto FC 2, Atlanta 0

**JOHN HERDMAN:** I think he did a terrific job coming in. He's been really patient and he's been building from the preseason, so you know, I thought he did a really good job, and then you know, if I talk about prince getting his first goal, I mean, the lad works hard. If you see his physical numbers, he puts a shift in for the team and he stayed ready. He stayed focused.

And then I've got to mention, obviously, young Spicer, that's a pretty special moment for the lad. He's got quality. We had a feeling he'd score tonight. We had that conversation with him, and yeah, defensively I was proud of his work.

So just I think a collective performance tonight. I think you hook at Fede's efforts. You look at young Jahkeele, I thought he took a step up again, and you know Alonso, long staff putting good shifts in. I have to probably talk about the collective more than anything tonight. It was nice to see.

With the injuries, it's Lorenzo's hamstring, so it will be MRI tomorrow. With Shane, it's potential concussion. With head injuries, particularly with Shane, you've got to always protect the players. So we'll assess tomorrow and let you know Monday or Tuesday.

### **Q. Is this just a bad run of hamstrings?**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** I really don't know. You look at their loading this week, players were bubble-wrapped this week because of where the squad was at. I think we've just been very unfortunate with the injuries. With Lor, sometimes it's his calf. I'd say cold nights, they are always vulnerable on nights like this, and unfortunately it's his turn. Hopefully it's all getting it out of the way at the beginning of the season so we can come out the back of the season with it behind us and hopefully the other teams are starting to break down.

### **Q. For someone so young and experienced, Tyrese takes a great deal of confidence and dynamics. What is it that you like about the player profile?**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** We like about the wing back being a maverick. So when we seen him at the NCAA he was a wide forward and he was so direct. I think of my national team with Buchanan, he had a sort of directness that wants to get at a player and wants to see the whites of their eyes and just go after them. He will start developing a new threat level for us because when you've got that level of pace, teams have to respect that.

So he was an unknown quantity tonight but what you'll find is over time when you have that pace and I guess 1v1 ability, it starts to loosen things off for Lorenzo or whoever is in those pockets. They can't defend them as tight as they normally do it. I think he did well tonight. He stuck to the game plan. He was very professional. We knew against lob, that was going to be a big, big challenge. That's an experienced Georgian player, you know.



I said to him, look, while I know what you'll bring in the attack, it's the professionalism in your defending I'm looking for tonight, and I thought he did well.

**Q. As you mentioned, Fede a has really put in some solid shifts this season, and still, the goals haven't come. What's his frustration level like and what does he have to do to break through?**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** I think are seeing his frustration right at the end of the game that, last opportunity. But he's been awesome. So much was said about the two Italian lads before I came. They were this, they were that. But this man has really just given himself to the team. He's willing to play wing, inside forward, wide forward. He'll press. He'll recover back; and then there he is in the 90th minute, 1v1 just showing his quality.

So with him, it's going to come. It's just a matter of time. Hopefully it's moments come at the right time, the big moments.

**Q. It's certainly early days yet but every week we're writing about that they have got so many points this year, where they got this last year. When you look at the team now, what do you think is the major reason for the turnaround? Are they just bought into what you're selling?**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** I always talk about this selling thing. Like for us, it's about clarity. When they have clarity, they are intent and it brings an intensity to the work, to the conversation, to the ownership of moments. So when you look the the clarity they have got, between again, we broke it into phases. We look at phase three being this first ten games and we set a points track, and we made it clear that tonight we could either stay on track with our 0.2 points we are game, where we are at that moment or we are going to be off track ask taking ourselves out of that sort of top five placing.

And I've said, if you can keep a team in and around that top five, you're going to lose games, but the critical part is you don't go back-to-back losses. They had to fight for that tonight. We knew Atlanta were a bit depleted but we had excuses, as well. We had our excuses if we wanted to bring them out but at the same time, I think the clarity of championship teams, strong teams, those aren't your fragile teams and they don't lose back-to-back. I thought they fought tooth and nail to, one, keep a clean sheet and two, make sure that we got that result to keep us on track.

**Q. Despite all the injuries, this team has managed to keep four clean sheets. How do you evaluate the defensive work so far in the season?**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** I think Luka wasn't too busy tonight but we had to credit Luka and big Sean Johnson. They came up big in big moments when we needed them. When you look at Kevin Long, he brings a real experience at the back. I thought he was a Colossus to tonights mopping everything up. He had a yellow card as well. We left man on man at the back. Every center back, it's their worst nightmare to be in that situation. But we said, we were too low against New York. We were way too low. Our off average height was 42 meters and they made a commitment tonight to play 52 meters and they were right there. They are with bang on. That takes a lot of courage to do that.

Kev came on, and then you had Siggy who has bought into that as well. Once one absolutely commits, typically the other ones come with, and with his experience, I thought he led that well tonight. So the clean sheets are down to some quality in our back line, and some good work from Jason as well. Got to give him a shoutout when he has his clean sheets.

**Q. What did you see from Tyrese --**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** Yeah, it's part of that job when you play that nine, you have to be able to play back to goal. When you have the tops of the box, they are always looking for the late play. They will run a channel to open a gap, and the back to goal work is critical. He has to be able to play our one, two touch well.

I thought his mobility was good tonight. I thought he really good actually add something to that profile. So he's ready to run a channel. But do that unselfish work to open a gap for Fede and typically, when the ball doesn't come, the strikers put their hands up and they have a little trot back, he was reset around, ready for the next pass. I was really impressed with him tonight. He just came back from injury, and the med team, they were really concerned about his minutes. We were pushing him at 55 minutes. That was a little bit beyond his threshold. And then obviously what we learned from that first game is



Prince coming in, he does make an impact. You seen that tonight. He comes in with a real fire in his belly. So yeah, I've got to complement both them two tonight.

**Q. Is Spicer the fastest player you have in the squad?**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** Yeah, he is. He's got real pace, real pace, and he isn't learned to use it yet, either. That's the exciting thing. Some of that work out wide, he's got to learn some of those little individual movements that maximize that type of pace. We have the wing back coach working with him every day on patterns and he's watching world-class wing gaps, close the gap.

When you're playing wide forward and wing back, it's very different things, because you've got to have the guts to want to make all the things you do in a wide forward to get him nine, knowing that when it doesn't come, you've got a 60-yard recovery. So we're building that, our physical profile to do both, because he's definitely a sprinter.

**Q. From a match fitness perspective, is Matty where you thought he would be?**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** He's high-risk, yeah. I wanted could keep him on. You could see he was enjoying his football. That was awe lovely performance from him tonight. But again, the medical team, I've got the meters per minute right next to us on the laptop and he's moving into red zone. So with the way the squad is, I've got to -- I would have loved to seen him and Oso out there together tonight. They would have really combined well but we've got to manage it.

**Q. We say the defenders and the midfields having trouble giving the ball to the forwards because they isolated a lot at the beginning, and that was because a tactical mistake or what happened? Also, that was the thing that you fixed, and you told long staff in the middle of the first half?**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** They were pressing high. We knew they were coming out with some gusto. The coaching staff were in the media pretty clear, they were coming out on the front foot. You've got a 30-kilometer win behind you, and it's pretty easy to press and get pressure. It feels like you're up against tight -- as well as a wind that you know you're not going to be able to hit those diagonal passes.

So for us, it was about two things. One, we had to roll Lorenzo out. McCarthy was doing a good job, that was one thing, so we just had to roll him out wide, just roll McCarthy out, and it was about Matty joining on the inside so just creating a little plus one against the midfielder on the side. That was one of the tactics.

And then the other one was creating that back form. They were starting to cheat with their two wide forwards on to our centre-backs, which meant we were struggling, and again, Matty is so mobile. He was able to set that little back four on the side and just take away the initial like full press that we were feeling.

So I think once we got hold of that, it was decent, and then I think what you are seeing with Fede, we asked for a plus one, so instead of him sort of sitting in that box midfield, it was important for Fede to just come and join Lorenzo, and to give us that extra number, because it meant they were always going to be a number down on that side. Once they got a little bit of joy together, you could see we got rhythm in the game. So there were a few little things we had to change because that's a very good pressing team, very well organized, third-highest PPTA in the League. You know to get control in the game against then. You have to work.

**Q. Inaudible.**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** I always say that those players like the international games, you know, they just add something else to their focus levels, so it doesn't bother us that they have got to go away for these big moments because also when -- well, no, because I think when you're dealing with a squad, those other lads that you are speaking to, the Thompsons, you are getting them ready and they can see light at the end of the tunnel. It keeps your squad tight. But I mean, with Deybi, it would be great to come home after this game he wasn't going to play in the next match, the next friendly, so you know, we are going to get him back for next week which is great news. He's not going to be there for the whole window. Either way, good to have Deybi back but he's going to be fighting for his place. That's the competitive -- I thought those two in the midfield were brilliant tonight.

Clean sheets win games. I've got Jason, he says it pretty much every week. You know, goals win games, but clean sheets win championships. Divo, he's an absolute warrior when it comes to the details and making sure the guys know exactly what their jobs are going to be in games, and after the New York game, we weren't happy. We were not happy. The two of us had a strong meeting with the centre-backs, and the back five, and to be fair they owned up and manned up tonight. It was brilliant. Yeah, we've just got to keep going.

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