



Toronto FC Media Conference

Saturday, May 4, 2024

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

John Herdman

Media Conference

Toronto FC 3, Dallas 1

Q. Big night for Fede and big day for the Longstaff brothers.

JOHN HERDMAN: It's funny, once it went in, the curse is broke, I said that at halftime to Fede, when he missed the penalty and was able to make it in there. That was it. I knew. I had a chuckle at halftime. I think that curse that was on him is lifted, and in the second half, we watched the Newcastle matches at the same time usually, so we usually send text messages back and forward. And sent him a text that said, "Your brother scored and I fancy you scoring, Longy," and he did. Grabbed the match ball. I'm proud of him. Proud of him.

But proud of all the boys tonight. I thought that was a really good home performance against a Dallas team that you could see came in with a bit of confidence. I think once we settled in to our rhythm, yeah, we were in control. It was nice. I enjoyed it.

Q. What do you gain by playing --

JOHN HERDMAN: Well, he's the profile we were looking for, that top of the box in 3-4-3. He hits that perfectly. I think he's just clever. He's got a real high IQ. He understands that space. And we see that. We are here. I used to kept saying to him, we used to come on and cause this absolute mayhem off the bench in those pockets of space.

Again, he draws plays, so that brings more space for Oso and Prince and hoping to lead Fede out wide. Really happy with his performance tonight. He didn't get a goal or an assist but you can see he's a handful.

Q. I thought we saw some of the relief from Fede after the first goal. What did you see?

JOHN HERDMAN: It was a nice moment. I think the whole team, when it happened, you know, when he took it away, I thought, this guy, he's cursed, he's generally cursed.

But getting the penalty, and when he missed it, I was like -- great he knocked it in. It set him up. He's been setting that left foot shot up for nearly a year and a half, hadn't he, waiting for that one. But it was a beautiful goal and one that only he can score in this league.

So it's exciting. I enjoyed it tonight. Yeah, I think the fans are starting to believe that this TFC team is going to, one, put a shift in for them; two, turn up; and three, keep them in the running.

Q. Fede is a veteran guy that's been around the block, but do you have to talk to him when he's going through this kind of a stretch he was going through? Because he was doing a lot on the field. He just wasn't getting good balls.



JOHN HERDMAN: Our conversations, I really enjoy working with Fede. So many different layers to him. I asked him just to stay focused on his leadership and as I keep saying to him, if you keep focusing on modeling your leadership, good things happen to good leadership, and the universe will turn, and it did. That's what happens.

It was on the day of my sister's passing; so I knew she would do something for us tonight, and she made some good things happen. So there's probably some divine intervention going on.

Q. Any early word on Petretta?

JOHN HERDMAN: Yeah, it was naughty. I thought it was naughty. No word yet. We're thin enough as it is going into this stretch, and our fingers are crossed.

But if he has to come out that early, I can't imagine we'll see him any time soon. This will be a big problem for us, yeah.

Q. Shots on target -- what was the key?

JOHN HERDMAN: We had a sense that they would be very direct. We had a sense that they would try and bring those set midfielders on to the ball and find the channels in behind. So they had a strategy to draw your wide center back into the half space and then try and find the player in behind.

I think the guys committed to that. We got caught early doors with the second phase pickups, but once we saw -- it was a pretty -- I thought it was a strong performance defensively. So I just think, again, you come back to some of the key tactical challenges we knew they would pose and it played out how we thought.

Once we got into the rhythm -- yeah, you're able to playing like a Fede Bernardeschi at wingback. He's going to do that work. That's a player that's willing to do the ownership for his team regardless. We have a lot of lads like that that are putting big shifts in. I think, yeah, just a collective commitment to the strategy.

Q. How important is it for the team to have this performance?

JOHN HERDMAN: It's critical. This is our new phase and we knew we had to start strong. We thought we did a good job in Orlando but it wouldn't have meant much if we didn't take the win here. I think the win here has solidified the charge that we are on at the moment.

Now more importantly, starting this phase the right way at home. I think all in all, when I look at what this performance meant to the group is just trust. It's trust that we can keep these winning habits and it is a habit winning.

With Fede's performance, what you start to see is teams put more attention on him now. Similar to what was happening with Insigne and Lorenzo, scores two goals and all of a sudden you have three players over to that side of the field quickly. Fede is starting to show that he can win games on his own again.

Q. Is this about where you thought you would be at this point?

JOHN HERDMAN: No chance. I mean, it's where you visualize. You have to visualize, and then you do everything you can to manifest it with the culture, with everything that you're throwing into it.

But if you think this team for the last three years have been nowhere near this sort of echelon.

You know, you'll get the narrative, this is a good squad, it really was a good squad, and that's where it should be and that narrowed the shifts. But we're just focused on next game, next three points.

We've got a target for this window, and if we stay as disciplined and committed, we can reach that target, particularly with the home games we've got.



So stay humble. Keep our feet on the ground. One game at a time. Get the Cup game out of the way this week. That's going to be a tough match in Montréal. And then NYFC. I know the lads are really looking forward to that match.

Q. Next week, how much is it going to be --

JOHN HERDMAN: We've already spoke to a group of players. We tend to set missions up. So one group are already on mission for this game. They have been working as a unit. They have been looking at the scouting for the game.

So we've got one group already ahead of the game. And they are ready to take Monday, a heavy day tactically. We have about nine, ten players that are just ready to play this match, and we've got another group that will be ready to come into the match to finish. So as I've said to the lads, like going into these games, we take nothing for granted. This is a quarterfinal. You're two steps away from a Canadian Championship. It will be all hands to the punt, and there will be no one getting left home and there will be no one allowed to take a day off.

The lads, the best 18 players will be on that airplane and traveling to Montréal to get that result.

DraftScripts by ASAP Sports