



# Toronto FC Media Conference

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*Toronto, Ontario, Canada*

## John Herdman

Media Conference

Toronto 2, D.C. United 2

**Q. Hi, John. Tough one. Tough one to lose like that. General thoughts on the game.**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** Lose? We didn't lose.

**Q. Sorry. Felt like a loss.**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** We picked up a road point. We definitely did. But we didn't lose.

**Q. Fair point. Maybe just talk about the team's performance and the inability to close things out and get the full three points?**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** Yeah, I mean, I think we carried on from where we picked up against Philly. I thought it was a terrific start for us.

We probably could have been in three (indiscernible.) Had some really good chances. Second half, 2-nil, we were in that balance of trying to control the game. Obviously (indiscernible) was out and you think all the cards now are stacked in your favor to just see the match on.

Again, football match is the goal. The red card, the second red card, you know, they're all turning points from what I've seen in MLS. There is no game over on the road. There is no game over ever.

So I think for us, we're disappointed. The dressing room, we've said what needed to be said. Players have owned key moments.

Yeah, I think last year we might have celebrated our point on the road, but this is a different mindset from this group. They know they dropped two points tonight. That might be crucial in the race. But we picked up a point, and that might be crucial as well.

Two away results, and we'll take that at this stage. But disappointed, John, for sure.

**Q. Did you get a second look at any of the sort of yellow cards that sent off Gomis or Bernardeschi?**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** I haven't seen them. I was involved in trying to organize the ten-man strategy and then the nine-man strategy. That's where my mind went, straight to work. I haven't had a chance to see it.



Bernardeschi said some words in the dressing room and the players understand. As a leader I think people are together. We're strong together. That's a man who has carried big parts of our attacking strategy over the last sort of seven, eight, ten games. We have nothing but love for Federico Bernardeschi.

**Q. Sorry if you touched on this already. Just like the chances in Philly, both goals tonight were really well crafted movements by the team. Are you feeling good about where the attacking element is for this side right now?**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** Yeah, for sure. It's just game management. That's the critical part of it. Again, at 2-nil I thought we were in control.

And then it's all about game management, which I think this team have got to develop. I think the championship teams are able to settle on the ball in those moments and take away that direct rhythm.

We just needed to shift the direct rhythm, James. That was the key. You can go direct, but then you've got to start getting back into our draw, the play-behind strategy, and rhythm that you saw in the first half.

I thought we were just about getting into that rhythm when they scored their goal. It was a tricky time. The crowd gets behind them, fatigue starting to set in, you're in an away environment where the pressure is coming.

We've got to learn how to manage these games, James. All in all, I thought attacking-wise the team found a real top level tonight, particularly in the first half.

**Q. This is twice now that we've seen kind of hostilities carry on after the final whistle. Your captain is in the middle of it. Is it the characteristics or sort of the identity that you're trying to build with this club? And was tonight maybe a situation where maybe the referee got -- lost control of the game a little bit?**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** I think the conversation, I think Jonathan had some comments to say to the ref. I think one of their players might have got involved in that.

I mean, the captain is emotional for sure. He's super emotional. Heading away to play for Canada now. He had the opportunity to carry three points out of the stadium, and as a captain, you know how much he loves the club.

I don't think there is any strategy behind the scenes to have aggression after the game. Tonight there was just some passion towards maybe the officials, some comments that were said. I didn't see or hear it, but we got it settled down pretty quick.

The lads were good tonight.

On the officiating, you know, it's a tough job, being a referee. I've got to say that. I've seen some yellow cards I think are soft, but I think every manager across the league is going to complain about this or that, particularly when you feel like you should have won a football match.

At the end of the day we made mistakes in the penalty area. Those penalties, penalty was a penalty, and I don't know exactly what happened with Federico, but I've just got to trust the officials are going to do their best and support them.

**Q. How difficult is it to play against a team like D.C. with that pressing style they have? Really forces to you play through that pressure.**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** Yeah, I thought we handled it well tonight, John. We had a few nervy moments, but I don't know if you seen the pitch, it's not in the best conditions. Playing I think American football on it.

We did say it's going to be tricky, but still got to be brave. Mistakes will be made, but if you're brave enough to draw those two midfielders that were attached to our midfielders, spaces will open and we'll be able to play across the next line quickly.

I think we found that rhythm. Again, I thought first half we just looked in control. Not many teams have been able to really push D.C. on the back foot for long periods, because if you know the stats, they're the most direct and aggressive team at



home in MLS.

I thought the lads did a good job at that tonight. Again, for us, John, just game management. Got to manage those games.

**Q. John, there was a short cameo but how nice was it to see Richie back out there tonight?**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** Yeah, hadn't predicted we would be down to nine men. He was only supposed to be there for something like 15 minutes, and I think ended up with 12 minutes of extra time.

It was great having him back. Of course everyone was excited. I'm sure he'll be not happy conceding two balls. At least one on his watch. He'll not be happy with that. I know how much of a competitor he is.

But it's a big step for this club to have him back. There is no doubt he's going to bring another level to what we've seen already in both attacking and defending, but experience. I think the experience is what Richie can bring, and the passion for this club.

Yeah, great to have him back.

**Q. This is now the official halfway point of the season with a record -- you have a record of seven wins, seven losses and, three draws, coming of what was a grueling past 32 days where you played nine games in two competitions. When you look at the first half of the MLS season, how would you characterize where this team is right now? Are you happy? Is the team where you thought it would be at this point?**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** Yeah, I mean, there is another level to come I think from the team. I think over this last phase, you've seen the growth in areas in our performances, whether it's the clean sheet at Philly, whether it's being able to deny Benteke and pretty much nullify the threat the D.C. United which scored in 13 games prior to this.

I think when you look at it you say, look, there is another level, but there is another level, and we have to demand that next level. I think where we started with the players that we had and inherited they've took big steps together. I think they can see the steps they've taken, but they want more. We all want more from this club, in the dressing room, behind the scenes, and we're going to keep pushing for it.

I think the fans have seen what we said we would do. We would fight every game. We would bring the work ethic every game. We give them a team that would entertain them, that they could be proud of. So that's as far as we've come.

The level is still to be reached when we see Lorenzo and Richie Laryea consistently with Kevin Long, Osorio, Prince Owusu back, et cetera, et cetera. I think that consistency, fingers crossed one game I would like to see that group playing together. Hopefully when the lads get back from international duty we'll see that.

**Q. John, I know the players are going to get a couple days off. Do you let yourself have a little bit of a break now? What's the first thing do you now that you know it's 14 days before that next game after these games every three days?**

**JOHN HERDMAN:** Yeah, follow the process, review the game, look at the stats, get the package ready of the game review, have a look at where we sit in the league, what games surprised us over the weekend, recalibrate our points tally.

And then I'll go walk my dogs. Head back to Vancouver and walk my two dogs. Miss them. Get to see my son play, and that's something I haven't been able to see all year.

Bit of family time. Not too much, not too much. Just enough to reset and go again.

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