



Toronto FC Media Conference

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Toronto, Ontario, Canada

John Herdman

Media Conference

Toronto FC 1, Houston 0

Q. Aside from the win, maybe just talk about the team's performance. What did you make of how your team played?

JOHN HERDMAN: Well, it was a great performance. Come to Houston and keep a clean sheet, it's our first win since 2010. We don't come here often but it's not stadium conditions, a place, that I think players get excited to come to. It's tough. It's something we've talked a lot over these last two weeks about what it's going to take for a championship push, what it's going to take, and the last run through MLS.

What you've seen tonight was what it's going to take. It's going to take a squad of players that are going to get three points for their club. That's what I seen tonight led by the skipper, Jonathan Osorio, I thought he organized this team, pushed himself to his limits tonight. As a team, they responded.

So, you know what I liked was the character. We did say it's not going to be perfect. There's games that you're going to play and defenses will win the playoff berth and I thought that was a key part of it tonight, just real solid defending and every man committing to that clarity.

Q. That first half, how did you see that sort of playing out, and how important was it dropping Oso back to get more control in the second?

JOHN HERDMAN: Yeah, we had a shift structure in the first half. Shifted to a three-man. After about 30 minutes, they were able to get that plus one on the side, on the right-hand side, and we adjusted that.

So I thought just, again, the midfield off, we had a three and just gave us that extra number to balance out the head to Herrera, who is such a wonderful player. We had some problems trying to manage the distance between our two midfielders and our front three for a period of time.

But again, we knew that coming here, there are not many teams that can get a foothold in the game, whether it's the conditions; and they obviously adapt well to their conditions, and they are so aggressive. Every single pass backwards, the whole team is stepping on and making sure it's uncomfortable.

Just to scrap through, we had a couple of chances in the first half. They had some chances, as well. But I thought coming in at halftime, it was just a gritty away performance, which is what we needed.

And then coming into the second half, our first 15 minutes, we said we'll go for it. We'll get more pressure on them and commit a little bit more.



Q. A pretty immense performance by Kevin Long tonight. Wanted to get your sort of take on what you saw from him.

JOHN HERDMAN: Yeah, he came off the pitch and he just said, love those games. That's the English Championship, playing against new DP striker, we could see he was in good form coming into this game and Longy knew he had a sufficient shift. But I shout Sigurd and O'Neil for as long as he could managed the distances around them. He tended to have that cover and I just thought he was brave tonight. He stepped off the front when he needed to. Didn't have a huge amount of pace so could be more aggressive.

Yeah, when you work on a back five, the center back is key. He shifted tonight. We dealt with it, their No. 9. But again, you do need those two center backs around to you give you the cover and Flores is in front of him. I think it was a good sort of central spine from Sean Johnson who was solid through to Longy. And then you've got Davey, putting his shift in right through the center of the shift.

You need this. As I keep saying, the boys keep saying in this playoff run, it's not going to be pretty. You just have to push and get through these games and scrap for the points. It felt good. It really good feel good. I mean, I don't come in here to Houston thinking we're going to dominate the ball, dominate the game. You come into Houston to get three points and get the hell out.

Q. The goal in Miami for Prince was ruled an on goal but he got his tonight. He was a hungry man at that back post. Maybe just on him and the balls from Fede as well?

JOHN HERDMAN: Fede is class as well. He's quality. He's always there. And when quality meets a quality run, and I think that's what Prince's bread and butter is. He needs that quality service. It was great to see him arrive. We've been working on the set pieces this week. The lads have really dialed in. Something, again, the skipper had raised to say, look, set pieces are going to be key. We put attention on that. Terry Dunfield did some work this week. Which was good, with the lads. We put a lot more time into this this week than we've done previous weeks just with the extended time. It delivered.

Yeah, this is it. You've got to take the goals anyway you can, whether it's set pieces, deflections, there's games we've played better in and lost this year and this is one that I'm really happy with. It reminds us of sort of the beginning of the season where we were just fighting and scrapping right to the final whistle together. But one more thing was just to say to the lads coming off the bench, we were rotating some players, obviously Fede, Richie, etc. Etienne, rotating players. Because we've got a match in two days time, which is crazy.

We are going to come out of Houston and play a game in two days and those guys will have a little bit more gas in the tank as well. So we took some risks bringing key players off the pitch, and it just shows that guys can come in and bring that level of concentration. It was brilliant.

Q. It was reminiscent of the early 1-0 wins. Are those extra sweet for a coach?

JOHN HERDMAN: They are because the clean sheet is really important. When everyone dials in to say we are going to give it everything to keep a clean sheet, whether it's the goalkeeper or for Sean to have that confidence that the work is going to get done, we have worked on our defending the last couple weeks denying those central areas getting the wide center backs tighter. Those elements were on show. Longy did well, Siggy did well, Shane, and then Aimé coming in off the bench was really good.

Again, the guys in front have got to put their shift in. They did really well to just keep forcing them into those wide air was and when you play with the back three, with the quality of players of longy, you see he's one of the best headers in the League. Those players can deal with those crosses. I was happy. I mean, there were some hairy moments, but there's never a game in MLS where there are not hairy moments.

Yeah, proud. Just proud of the character, the intensity, the fight. All the results went our way tonight but the only go your way if you make your own way and we made our own way tonight and we capitalized on what will be a big evening for TFC given out the league panned out today.



Q. Big game on Tuesday. What was the message to the group heading out of this one?

JOHN HERDMAN: One game at a time. I mean, the lads know we've got an exciting home match. It's a game we want back. Excited to get out on the pitch and compete against them. The players are really clear about that game being important for the club and for our next step, which is to see if we can bring silverware home.

So that much is an exciting one for this group, and again, these players knew they were going to come out of the game to be ready for that match. Some players were left at home, as well, to make sure they got the full recovery and not the travel in their legs. We are excited to get in front of our fans. It feels like it's been ages. It's going to be good.

Q. A big win tonight but also a costly win in that both Osorio and Bernardeschi picked up their third yellow cards which means they are suspended next week. How do you feel about that going into that game next week without two key starters?

JOHN HERDMAN: It's been the story this season. I tend to expect that it's not going to go as planned. Even some of the subs we had to make tonight were the ones that were not planned because of fatigue, injury, etc. Like potential injury. So you know, this is the Wild MLS.

But I've just got to rely on the squad now. The squad showed tonight that again, we can rotate, and it gives at least Federico and Jonathan salute clarity about what they can do on Tuesday in that Cup match. They can really let loose and go for it now without having a D.C. United game in the back of their minds.

We keep saying this. We have to go next man up with TFC. It's been like that this season. To lose your skip is never good, and to lose Federico and the impact he has is never good. But we will have Lorenzo hopefully back fit and ready to roll for us. We are going to push. We'll have our fans. We'll have our fans hopefully in playoff mood as well.

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