



# LA Galaxy Media Conference

*Sunday, February 25, 2024*

*Los Angeles, California, USA*

## Greg Vanney

### Press Conference

LA Galaxy 1, Inter Miami 1

**THE MODERATOR:** Greg Vanney, LA galaxy Head Coach.

*Q. Well, first off, just your thoughts on what you guys did out there.*

**GREG VANNEY:** I was very pleased with the work of the guys. I thought especially for a first game and a season and then a number of guys. We probably had between Dan, Ricky, obviously Joseph -- those guys didn't get much time in preseason either, so they came out. I thought everyone, but I thought they were very good.

Trying to get in sync in terms of organizing a press and how to get pressure to them was going to be tough just because, again, those guys haven't had much time on the field together. I thought we did a really nice job of just condensing the field, making it difficult for them.

From a defensive standpoint, I thought the back line, everybody stood tall for a lot of the game. John made a couple of big saves, which you're going to have to make against a team like this. With the quality that they have, you have to make a save.

I thought we left a few opportunities on the table. That probably can be the difference when you are playing a team with the quality that they have. You have to finish your chances for sure when you get those opportunities.

I'm really proud of the group. I look forward because I see what this team is capable of even on a night like tonight, and knowing the guys are still coming together and getting healthy and all that kind of stuff, I really am excited about the group we have.

*Q. You've been part of a number of MLS Cup Championship teams, both as a player and a coach. What did you think of the atmosphere tonight? Was it kind of similar to that, and how do we get to the point where every game is like this?*

**GREG VANNEY:** It's interesting. I said that before the game. I was, like, one day every night is going to be like a night like tonight where every game is a spectacle of sorts. I think the league just has to keep growing. You have to keep getting top players because that's what people want to see. The quality of soccer continues to get better, but I think this is a sign that progress is being made.

It did have a sense of a final, so that was great. Players love to play in this type of environment. You see the game that you saw tonight partly because of the atmosphere that's created by everything and everyone that's going around, and it just gets all of the resources of all of the players out there at the highest level. You know, concentration and work rate and all those things. Then you get a really interesting game out of it.



I don't know. I can't tell you how long, but I feel like we're moving in that direction. We see it through different times last year. We certainly saw it in the Rose Bowl when it was LAFC and us. That night had a feel of a final and a spectacle, and it was in the middle of the season.

There's ways and there's moments for it, and I hope more and more of these nights continue to come.

*Q. (Off microphone)*

**GREG VANNEY:** For sure. I love it. Playing against a team like that with players like that is a big challenge, trying to organize your group and set them up. I thought the game was there for us too. I was, again, really pleased with the guys, and it was fun for me.

*Q. A couple of situations there. Mark Delgado, two yellows. I don't know if you thought they were yellows.*

**GREG VANNEY:** Is that your response for the second yellow, that hmm?

*Q. The first one too. Just your overall thoughts on the two yellow cards that were sort of non-yellows really.*

**GREG VANNEY:** Really, really soft. Really soft. It's tough on a game like this just where there are so many people here to watch the game, and it's a big spectacle too. You have to be careful with handing out soft yellows, and it ultimately changes the game, right? Changes the game big-time.

You don't want to give Messi any more space than is already out there. He certainly took advantage of that, but that's unfortunate. Hopefully we don't see that too much.

*Q. Greg, following up on the yellows, the fact that you have replacement referees in there, do you think that factors into just the overall quality of the game? It seemed like there were real physical at first, a lot of yellow cards, and then no yellow cards. Was it difficult on the tempo side?*

**GREG VANNEY:** I think it's just a big game. I think it's a big game for anyone, so just the experience of the crew and all that is obviously a part of it.

I thought they did the best they could inside of the game. They made some mistakes. As they say, players make mistakes. It's just part of it.

We were happy to play the game tonight and didn't have a scenario last year like the first game. It doesn't actually arrive.

We were happy to play the game. I thought I stayed focused on the things that we needed to, which I thought we performed well, and I wish we would have taken a little bit more out of it.

It took a play late, late, late in the game where almost a deflection that goes back to Messi. It was almost like we dealt with the first one, and then it goes back to him, and then the speed of the game picks up again. Then he is just -- when he and Alba connect like that, it's ridiculous. It's really, really difficult to defend, and Alba is good at finding Messi when he gets on the move like that.

Unfortunately, he just slipped away us from for a split second, and that became the difference.

*Q. On the PK at the beginning there, Ricky missed that. He doesn't maybe have the best record on that. Is that something maybe you'll direct to somebody else or have a talk with him?*

**GREG VANNEY:** It will definitely be a topic.

*Q. This game Dejan Lovelich had a goal. What did you think of his overall performance throughout his entire game?*

**GREG VANNEY:** Good. It's a little bit of a tough game at times because you're trying to organize getting pressure to them,



and sometimes you're in between.

Ricky was in lockdown Busquets mode, so then it became a lot of work for Dan. Sometimes getting between the two center backs and trying to get pressure, so became some work on that side.

Again, I don't think we have to use him too much in link-up play. I don't think that's going to be our primary use of him, but I felt like he got into some good spots. I felt like his movements were good. I think he's going to find more opportunities. Again with our wingers and with the way we're playing and the speed we're playing, opportunities are going to show up.

So I think it's a good solid start for him, and again, he didn't have much of a preseason because he missed a fair number of the minutes, so really getting up to maximum speed and sharpness is something he still is working through, but in general, I was pleased with his presence.

*Q. Just your general thoughts on the back line. We got to see Maya and Martin play together for the first time and Miki making his first MLS appearance.*

**GREG VANNEY:** I was really pleased with them. It's not an easy team to play against, and the more time they have on the ball, the more difficult they are to play against.

In terms of managing your gaps and managing the width, I thought they did a good job. I thought Eddie did a good job of trying to protect them and trying to take certain things away.

The group collapsed and dealt with stuff. Maya dealt with a lot of crosses today that he was able to clear and intercept. I thought they played like what you would expect, two very experienced center backs that have seen a lot of things over the years and have helped to organize and read plays and deal with situations.

You didn't see any, for lack of a better word, 'little kid stuff.' It was two mature guys who really kind of understood the situation and dealt with scenarios very well.

*Q. This game was pretty intense from the get-go. A lot of fouls really quickly. Were you surprised with the intensity, the chippiness of the game at all?*

**GREG VANNEY:** Not really. I think you have Miami, who is Miami, and our guys were looking forward to lining up against Miami, so that brings a little bit of intensity to the situation.

I think Miami is playing the Galaxy, which if you probably look at the slate of games that they have, there are a few of them that probably get their attention, and this is maybe one of them.

I think that some of the calls early were maybe a touch soft, which maybe gets guys a little bit frustrated and wound up, and then you get into it a little bit more. I think different things kind of come into the game. You catch somebody the wrong time, the wrong way.

I think the game picked up a little bit when Messi and Edwin were having some words. Then I felt like the intensity found just a little bit of a different level after that. They started pressing a little bit more, and I felt like the game clicked on a little bit.

No, I'm not really surprised. Two highly competitive teams that are good and wanted to win today, so I think that's -- I like it. I think that's the way you want to get into a season and get ready to go.

*Q. Do you have an update on Julian Aude and perhaps on Gaston?*

**GREG VANNEY:** Yeah, Julian, I think he was more cramping than anything. He said he didn't -- his terms were, "I didn't break the muscle." I think he was just cramping.

With Gaston, he'll be ready to go. He was ready to go tonight. I was just concerned with, to be honest, just the amount of defending we were doing and just him getting the confidence to be in challenges and tackles and situations like that. I just



wanted to get him a little bit further along for that.

I know he is going to be pissed because everybody wants to be in a game like this, but I felt like if we could get him one more week of live tackles and playing and training, then he'll be even more ready for the long haul of the season.

*Q. The art of closing a game isn't easy. Is there anything -- and especially kind of considering last season there were moments where you should have won games, not lost games. Is there anything you're working on specifically this season, maybe even from a mental point of view with the players in terms of always be closing?*

**GREG VANNEY:** The first thing is to keep all 11 guys on the field. That would have helped us I think closing out tonight, but yeah, we've been talking about it.

We worked on being in a little bit lower block and having to protect our goal at times. Because we were down a man, it was hard to be any more aggressive stepping out and trying to get to them because the repercussion of that is you have Messi with space behind your line, so you have to sit and try to be compact as best you can for tonight.

It's definitely something that we know we need to be better at than last year, but I don't think that's going to be a problem, but I think it's something we definitely have talked about and focused on, and that's just generally defending, but seeing out games is a part of that for sure.

*Q. Two quick ones. You mentioned the word I want to go back to, and you said potential. (Indiscernible) was just in here talking about Paintsil, talking about Pec saying that it looks like a different team, which was evident. He also praised Yoshida and Caceres. Does it feel like a little bit of a sigh of relief for you to have these players come in so easily and integrate themselves and give you that potential and give you kind of a sense of these are players that you want in your system? Too, quickly, are you leaning one way or another on the goalkeeper conversation, or is it just open competition?*

**GREG VANNEY:** Talking about the team and the group, I'm really excited about this group because I think we have I think for the first time a really nice balance between guys who want to play in between the lines and guys who want to play and go to goal and get behind and take people on one-on-one, and your team always has to have balance.

You can't have a bunch of guys who want to come and get the ball at their feet. You have to have guys who want to run and want to play on the run and play on the move.

Having a player like Ricky, who can skate through spaces and can get to the next line, having guys who can run is going to benefit him. It's going to benefit Dejan. It's going to benefit the whole team.

I'm excited about it because it's going to be tough for teams to clog up the middle of the field on us because that's what everybody did when they came here in the past or played us last year. Just create against density in the middle of the field and see if wings can actually beat you. Now we can beat you on the wings, and that's what I feel like we're going to be.

Now you have to make a decision. You have to defend the full width of the field, and that's going to open up real opportunities for everybody. So I'm excited about this group.

Again, I think it's an athletic league. I think it's a league that requires you to have guys who can do those types of things, and I think we're in a good spot. Today was just a sample of where I think we can get to with this group.

As far as the goalkeepers, John is the starter right now, but we really believe in Novak's potential. John has a really great presence behind the group and his experience and leadership and communication is important. Novak is still gaining that sort of confidence in behind the group, but he has a really high ceiling too.

I really like the two guys that we've got back there. I feel really confident with both of them. We'll want to bring along Novak this year for sure, but John gives us a lot of stability and a lot of leadership. I really appreciate his personality. That's one of the things that I feel like is really good inside of our locker room and also inside of our team.

*Q. So you guys have the California Clásico coming up. You were talking about the atmosphere here today and the energy.*



*Obviously you don't have to tell these guys to get up for a Clásico, but what's the message to the team to keep this intensity up for the rest of the season and the long haul?*

**GREG VANNEY:** That's it. I think tonight is a night that -- this is why I like these types of games early. They set a standard for you. When you play against Miami, they require you to set a standard or else you're going to get blown off the field.

So our work rate, our defensive concentration, the speed at which the ball was moving, all the things that -- the speed at which we were transitioning I thought, all of those things should be a standard for us. Now the question is, can we do this week in, week out and get a little bit sharper and take our chances a little bit better and keep improving as a group and integrating guys into the system?

It's important that we given also just where we've been last year, I don't think you're going to have to motivate a ton of these guys. They know what last year felt like, and they certainly don't want to be in that.

So I think the guys are going to be excited to get out and play, and I think they genuinely enjoy each other and feel like they have some real pieces to do some stuff. I think they'll like forward to each of these matches.

*Q. Is this the best back line performance or in the conversation for best back line performance during your tenure here?*

**GREG VANNEY:** It's fair. I haven't thought that deeply about it yet, but I think it's got to be up there because I think it was very clean. It was very without too many, if any, real errors against a team that asks a lot of questions of you on the defensive side of things and are very clever the way they move and players that are, Messi in particular, just so precise with the things that he can do that you can't be one step out or one step off or you could pay.

I think you have to give the credit -- a lot of credit to the guys. Again, they were really locked in and connected, and they did a nice job of reading situations together as a group. You would have to put it up there without question.

*Q. You go into some of the details and maybe also a contrast with Paintsil and Pec, what we saw out there today?*

**GREG VANNEY:** They have some similarities in that they are both pretty direct. I would say Paintsil is a little less direct, will pop in between the lines sometimes, will play, whereas Pec is quite direct. He's looking to go behind. He is going to drive forward.

I think they have some qualities. Pec, Paintsil a little bit more, occasionally will come in between the lines, like I said, and come inside and invert it. So today he played on the right, which his strong foot is his right foot, so definitely he was driving a little bit more to the outside. But as he slides over to the left at times and I think when they're on their inverted side, if you will, I think you'll see Paintsil probably slide inside from time to time.

Not a lot. I want them both to be pretty wide and to go after the full backs.

*Q. (Off microphone)*

**GREG VANNEY:** He does.

*Q. (Off microphone)*

**GREG VANNEY:** Maybe. They'll both take people on one-on-one, but I think Pec really likes to have his heels on the sideline, and he is going to want to run at people and take people on, whereas Paintsil sometimes will drift inside. He will play in between the lines a little bit more. He will play with his heels on the line, but he has a tendency to do that.

He's played in more positions on the field even than Pec per se, but Pec likes to get his heels on the line and run behind and really attack full back and go one-on-one.

*Q. You mentioned early on that you don't want to give Messi more room than you have to. We know what he can do in really tight windows. Just your evaluation have his game tonight, and what's it like for you coaching against a player of his caliber?*



**GREG VANNEY:** Everybody sees his quality on the ball, his quality when he is playing. For me it's the brain, right? It's what he sees on the field, where he recognizes different spaces, where he knows where everybody is all the time, and he's already organized what the next series of plays is looking like. Not just the next pass, but the next series of passes.

He's already calculated all of that out, and he's already manipulating things on the field. That's why it's tough sometimes when you give them time on the ball. His capacity to just manipulate spaces, manipulate who defenders -- whether defenders are able to step out and give pressure to something or have to stay in and defend because he's taken up a certain position.

He is just constantly manipulating the decisions that are happening on the field, which is hard to coach against, but it's a pleasure to watch.

Then obviously when he gets the ball and he takes the game again to another level and another speed and still has the quality inside of that, that's what's really different in the grand scheme of things. The precision on everything else.

It's just 90 minutes of calculation, and you see a lot of guys who move a lot. He doesn't necessarily move a lot, but he's always impacting the game with the different spots that he has taken up around the field, which is the influence of what you can do on the defensive side and how you have to manage situations. But I thought our guys handled it really, really well. Unfortunately got away from us one time.

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