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Q. Just in terms of dealing with final action and leading into the final action, wondering about your frustration, the two plays that jumped out were start of the second half, Reus has ball over to the right, and he decides to play a pass rather than take the shot. And then the crossover and Joseph hits it with his leg rather than taking a diving hit. You look at the numbers and everything is up the flanks, very little came out of the middle in terms of leading into that final action. Just your thoughts on those things.

GREG VANNEY: Yeah, first, a lot of things came from the flanks because they defend in a 4-3-3 and their three central midfielders, they stay pretty central and clog up the middle of the field. So it's harder to come through the middle when the defensive midfielder is just sitting there kind of near the center backs and the two other central midfielders are there. They are really pressing, if you call it that, but they are defending with one high.

So just there's not a lot of space to penetrate them through the middle. It's coming off the sides, trying to play combinations off the sides to get back to the middle. There's a couple occasions where Miki tries to slip Marco through the middle once and overhits it.

So there's a couple moments that we missed. But by and large, again, I think when a team defends with the midfield that's overloaded in the middle defensively, then sometimes you have to work off the outsides.

To me, the issue wasn't that we had to go to the outsides. We got to great spots. It's the connection of the final action. You know, you get to the end line, we've got to fight hard to get to good spots in the box to -- whether that's to be physical, to bump and to just win little windows of space to be able to redirect things on goal. Beat the to spots on the near post.

Things that we've got to work really hard, and sometimes even more physical in other ways to try to give our crossers, who also need to connect with our finishers, good opportunities to set each other up.

We couldn't have been in more good spots probably through the course 90 minutes. We could have but we were there a lot. Just we didn't connect many times on the final action.

So I think sometimes that's what's presenting itself to us. We are a team that doesn't mind going through the middle. But I felt like that was the opportunity that existed for us, and we got to some really good attacking positions.

What was the first two? Sorry.

Q. Just in dealing with the decision-making in those final actions.



GREG VANNEY: Yeah, I mean, again, we spend a lot of time and energy on working for the last -- and we've been talking about the last ten yards to get deeper, to not settle for shots outside the box. And we certainly got deeper today and we forced them to have to defend really low.

It just comes down to, again, syncing up the action in front of goal along with the crosser, and being a little more precise and being a little better with our timing. But that's where -- those areas where we are getting to is where the vast majority of goals come from in the game, in the game of soccer, period. Just we were in good spots. We just weren't connecting the final action.

So you know, that's just -- yeah, we've got to be better. We've got to be better in that regard.

Again, giving up a goal relatively early, means that the opposition, once again, is incentivized to really sit in a lower block and really protect themselves, and they don't ever have to extend themselves.

So again we are trying to create chances against a team that doesn't have an incentive to really open themselves up too much, and yet we are still creating good moments. Just not finishing them.

That's the disappointing part. We found another way to get something into the back of our goal. I don't blame Maya. It's a bang-bang type of thing. We lose the ball on the left side in an action that's building where we just, I think, check out of the action for a second and play a pass, and they nick it and then it's in a transition, gets across. And you know, bad things come off of the situation. But outside of that, we lost a game where we gave up zero shots. We had ten plus. We needed to make the goalkeeper make more saves. We needed to put more things on goal, and we needed to, obviously, get goals out of all the opportunities we've had.

But you know, outside of that, in the second half, we had a lot of control of the game in the attacking half of the field.

Again, it's a broken record, and I hate to say it because it's not good enough for results, but we controlled the entire game. And we don't -- we find a way to give up a goal and we don't do enough to put things in the back of the net.

Q. One of the better spots you had was early in that second half. Wondering the thought process in switching Paintsil and Pec from the sides. It seemed to open things up for you, but then to lose both of them to injury on top of everything else. And is there any assessment yet as to the severities yet?

GREG VANNEY: First, we switched the sides again because as a lot of the actions were, as you said, coming around the outsides, and our wingers were getting deep and getting into good spots.

But there's a number of times where they are getting into good spots and they are on their weaker foot, which you know, sometimes connecting that last pass may come down to that. Just a little more detail when you're on your stronger foot.

So we flip-flopped to give them a little bit more confidence to get around the outside, to get in line. Maybe even to get a shot from a little bit of a tougher angle but a shot that we could just rip something across the goal and see if we could even get a deflection or get anything.

It's just a different look for our guys. I felt like it opened up some really interesting opportunities.

Also, just to whip some balls early behind the back line and see if we couldn't get on something before they were in, and that's kind of the chance that Joe had where a ball gets whipped in with Gab's left foot and behind the line, and before they are able to drop in and just protect the goal.

We were just trying to open up some different looks by getting those guys on their strong sides, if you will. Yeah, we did it. We just didn't score.

Obviously they both came out of the game. I don't have any real indication on the severity of things. We'll have to see over the next couple days. Hopefully nothing too bad but you know, we'll see over the next couple days. I don't have a great answer for you right now.



Q. The accumulation of all of this, it's kind of ridiculous, the whatthefuckery of what's going on right now, just absorbing that, how are you getting along with that? And do you see any parallels -- it's a different situation, but parallels to way things went in 2023?

GREG VANNEY: Yeah, I like the phrase of it because that's what feels like sometimes.

Yeah, I mean, there's parallels to a few points in my career, 2023 being one of them. Others where you get, I don't want to say a perfect storm, but you get a series of events that when put together, they become challenging.

And the guys, you know, we've got to find solutions inside of that. On the field, we've got to find solutions in every way.

That's why I say every year is a journey. Every year is different. It presents new challenges every single year. This year has provided plenty of them from the start of after winning the championship and having to clear out some guys to injuries to performance stuff. There's been plenty of things.

Our jobs here as a collective group as a team, as everybody, is to find the solutions, even when challenges present themselves. So far, yeah, we haven't found those solutions. We're going to keep fighting for it, and keep looking at ways to build our way out of it, as we did in 2023 and other years that I was involved in tough years.

Q. Scott asked the best question there. But when you look at Marco Reus and what he was able to do in this, I know you guys have been trying to get him more active and staying on the field longer. I think you got that out of him today. How important do you see him fitting into this game and how many chances have you guys created through him?

GREG VANNEY: Yeah, I thought, again, his vision, his quality, all the things -- his ability to inside the game, process the game and find solutions inside the game, it's different. That's why he is who he is and has played where he's played.

I think he was able to unlock a number of these situations for us that we then need to, you know, I keep saying it, just do better with the final pass.

A lot of times, it was the pass before the final pass, was an excellent pass and it got us going in the right places. But sometimes it came down to the final pass and the connection to the runner.

Again, I think Marco, his cleverness, his awareness of the field and his capacity to hit different types of passes, it certainly unlocked things through the course of the game. So it's nice to obviously have that and have him in a physical condition to be able to use him for longer stretches of the game where he can impact the game.

And now you know as a collective group, we've got to do more with the opportunities that he's presenting us with, and others are presenting us with.

So it's a good piece to have him finally out there. Now we have to translate into what he's out there to do is help us score goals.

Q. Maybe you touched on it a little bit but the mental part of walking into the locker room after a game like that; you guys didn't allow a shot, and just sort of the absurdity of just the whole situation, how do you talk to the guys after this game?

GREG VANNEY: Yeah, we've said a lot of things after each game. But for me today was, you know, in some ways, I felt for the group because I thought we played a solid game and a pretty complete game without the -- when I say that, I say 90 minutes.

We didn't play a complete game because we didn't put things away, and we didn't connect in the final actions. But we didn't give up anything. We had control of the game. Lose the game without shots.

Right now, it's a group that every little bit of confidence matters in the group because they are doing some good things, and not having -- getting anything out of it to show.



So for me, the message is about, like, it feels the way it feels. We don't accept where we're at. We don't accept that we can play the way we played today and lose the game.

Doesn't mean that we don't feel bad or we don't feel a certain way and we're angry or all these other things but we don't accept it. We have to go back to work. We've done a lot of good things, but we haven't done enough yet to put up three points.

Goes back to the training field and we work, and we're going to work final actions, and we're going to continue to work different things to keep finding solutions.

That is -- it's a character checkpoint right now, which is, you know, answering a difficult moment and being able to find solutions in this moment and be stronger when we come out of it. So that's the work to be done.

Q. On availability, we haven't seen Elijah in the game day roster the last couple games. Is he dealing with anything?

GREG VANNEY: No, he's okay. He's okay.

He'll start to be getting involved. Just take a little step back with Elijah to get him -- again, a little bit more connected with the game model and things like that, and then he'll re-enter back into the group.

It's been a little bit of choices when you see certain guys, they are a little more familiar with some of the game model stuff and just getting him settled in and build him back in because we can use his physicality at times. And also settling him into a position. Sometimes he's played high for us and sometimes he's played low.

Just taken a little step back when he came in, for he and for Lucas, it's like we needed them to be ready right away, and the reality is they needed a little time to settle in and just be ready to go. And so he's going to be ready. He's been doing all the work that he needs to do on the training field. He's had a good couple of weeks. And as I said to him today, your opportunity is going to come again. He'll be coming soon.

Q. Obviously the season's going on now. Not as many games. Approaching the midway point of the season pretty soon. Do you anticipate installing maybe some new tactical changes, something maybe different from the current system you guys have? Or are you still confident in the current game model; that it's going to get the job done by the time the season's over?

GREG VANNEY: Look, every -- let me just start with this.

My reputation as a coach since I've come into this league is a guy who is tactically flexible, changes things, mixes things up. We did five different systems in Toronto. I honestly don't really believe that much in just the idea of system. It's more about movements, and it's more about where spaces are and how to build overloads.

And we can do a bunch of systems. I can throw five in the back, I can throw two strikers up front. We can do a lot of different things. And we've done a lot of those things over the course of the first 11 games, or wherever we are now in the season.

In different phases you've seen two strikers; in different phases you've seen a back five; and in different phases you've seen three midfielders, sometimes four midfielders. There's been a lot of different variations that have happened, and we've rotated players into different areas.

I think a lot of tactical flexibility is inside of the game. And anybody who follows the game and sees the movements of the players, they probably would recognize a little bit of tactical flexibility. Just because on paper it says 4-3-3 or it says 4-2-3-1 doesn't mean that that's where it lasts the whole game.

For me, that part of it is a little bit, whatever. It's things for people to talk about but it has really not a whole lot to do with the grand scheme of the game.

It also depends. Like, do you want to defend five in the back if the opposition is only going to play three up high? Because



then you have two center backs who are doing nothing. And then it's hard to get pressure on the ball because then you have two guys in the back who are not really responsible for anything.

So there's a lot of variations. We have sat a little lower; we've pressed a little higher.

The reality of the day is, we gave up zero shots, and we had ten-plus, plus 30-something touches inside the opposition's box. It's not the system.

Is it the game model? You can argue whatever you want on that. It's not that. We've got to execute in the action. Creating a game model is about putting players into final actions where they can try to be successful and connect with each other and finish. And then guys need to -- we need to be sharper as a group, and we're going to keep working on the training field about doing that.

But we dominated this game in every single way, and we didn't execute, and we gave up an own goal.

To me, today, it wasn't about any of those things. We looked at, we did different variations and movements inside of the game to try to unlock. We switched our wingers. For those who think that's a tactical shift, we went left winger, left-footed, right winger, right-footed; there's a tactical shift. They go through the game all over the place.

So for me, these are just things for people to kind of talk about. But ultimately every single day in our staff locker room, we talk about the players we have and the best way to set them up to be successful in every single game, and we try to do that.

Like I've said, I haven't seen many games. I haven't seen a team that's played us off the field in any shape or form. I've seen us make mistakes and having a hard time finishing things.

And those are things we have to keep improving upon.

Q. The team no doubt on paper is talented. Do you feel like -- you touched on it before, but after 11 games, they are the ones across the white lines. Are you seeing enough character from them? Because in these circumstances, you kind of need a lot of deep character to get out of a Grand Canyon-size hole like this. Do you feel like you have that?

GREG VANNEY: I'm not here to talk to the world about the character of our group.

I think our group has gone out there and competed in every single game. I think our group has put in a shift and an effort. We've played more road games than home games, if I'm correct. We've played through some tough times.

The group, we have not been able to execute and we have given up very soft goals. There's times I've wanted the guys to be more positive and push each other and be more emotional in terms of their leadership and guidance and driving each other in a tough time. Because like today, the emotion of today, is based off of an own goal in some ways, and us not, obviously, finishing some chances.

But it's not based off of the fact that we actually played a pretty damn good game for most of it.

So our emotions sometimes aren't matching up with our performances. They are matching up with the results, which is professional sports. I get it.

So I want our group to be more demanding with each other in a positive way, and to push each other and to drive each other and to expect a little more from each other; the same way I do with them, and for us to be challenging each other in that way, and not to go too deep into our heads and create our own constraints and our challenges.

That's the character piece I want to keep challenging this team with. Because it will change. Like I said, we have not been outplayed in many of these games. Yeah, you can't pick many games that we've been outplayed.

And we just need to turn that into results, period. Yes, resiliency is going to be important, and we are on the road for these three games.



But I want to see our guys push each other and challenge each other and be positive with each other and build confidence and do the best we can inside of the fact that we are not getting results, but we are doing some decent things.

Q. You already spoke about the final action. But in terms of chance creation, there was a lot to go around especially in the first half. Do you think this was the best performance that you guys have had in terms of chance creation this year?

GREG VANNEY: Yeah, I actually think this game, I thought the last game, we were into some really good spots and failed to connect the final action sometimes.

When I say "good spots," it just means that we are not settling from shots from 18 to 25 yards out. We are not settling for things. I feel like our guys, we're working to use every last yard of the field to drive the opposition deep, to make them protect the face of the goal.

You know, the majority of goals are scored inside the box, and I felt like during large stretches of the season, we weren't driving and committing ourselves to get behind the back line and into deep areas. And I feel like the last two games, and really today, I thought we did a great job of that.

And now when you get into those spots, it's the connection between the crosser and the finishers. It's creating spaces inside the box that we can use the little windows to finish. It's about, again, good decisions. It's all of those things. And we had lots of opportunity today, and we didn't execute on that.

But yes, in terms of chance creation, being in good areas, getting ourselves into dangerous positions, I thought this was certainly one of our best, if not our best games.

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