



# LA Galaxy Media Conference

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*Saint Paul, Minnesota, USA*

**Greg Vanney**

Press Conference

Galaxy - 2, Loons - 1

*Q. Just your thoughts on finishing out this season with two wins? The group has been through a lot this year, but to close it out with two wins, what did it say about this group as you turn the page for next year?*

**GREG VANNEY:** Look, I'm proud of these guys. The start of the season was like nothing any of us wanted. But literally at the turn, the halfway point, we started to put some things together, started to find a little bit more cohesion, started to get some results along the way.

Better finish. Everybody stuck together all the way until the last game. And we beat two playoff teams down the stretch, which is a nice statement for where we are. We finished third in Leagues Cup which makes a statement. I think we're probably one of the better teams that didn't make the playoffs when it's all said and done.

But it is what it is. We are where we deserve to be because of how we all started out. We learned a lot of lessons about ourselves, and we brought some guys along. And we'll be in a better spot at the beginning of this year, also because we finished strong and we finished the right way. And getting a couple of wins down the stretch will make us all feel a little better as we go into the next three weeks of training camp. Don't tell everybody yet.

But as we move into the next little phase of things, everyone will feel a lot better. Really positive.

But I'm happy. The guys battled today against a team that had a lot to play for. And we felt we had something to play for, too, for a couple of different reasons.

*Q. As you look back at that stretch to start the season, now you're months away from it. Can you just process what that was like, something we've never seen before?*

**GREG VANNEY:** It was a reflection all during it, just trying to think about what can you do different, how can you help impact the team, how can you put guys in better positions to play, how can we get more out of guys, how do we get guys healthy?

There was a lot of things, that fitting pieces together, trying to figure out different things along the way.

It was challenging for everybody emotionally, as we all know, because when you're not getting results, it's a gut punch. The guys stayed together. We felt like we had had some better performances than our results had probably warranted. But we were conceding goals in bad ways and unable to finish chances. And that's not a winning formula.

But we felt that through stretches we had some solid performances that we couldn't get anything out of. So we just tried to stay focused on that, the process, trying to improve, trying to work on some details. And sometimes when big things aren't



working, it's hard to get to little things. And the little things were making the difference for us through a lot of games.

But yeah, we found some stability and then we were able to, I think, get into a rhythm, start to see more of our principles, the speed of our game started to pick up a little bit more.

When we're a good attacking team, we're a better defending team, too. I think those things were fitting together, because oppositions were now having to deal with us. We found a transition game again. We had no transition game at the beginning of the year Joe out and Gabe in and out.

So it was a process, but we learned a lot about ourselves, we learned a lot about the necessary pieces that we need to function how we want to. We had a good sense, but just where we are, we've learned a lot.

We have to take that. We've got to do some good offseason work with it. And we've got to come in ready to fire from the beginning because we may be into it really quick, but we'll see.

*Q. I know we talked about Elijah and John Nelson a bunch, but in this game tonight they both seemed like they had standout games again. What does it say for Elijah that he looks comfortable in the system, he's pressing the pace, he's finding outlets, he's creating some space on his own? How much of a jump forward has he made just in, almost seems like half a year, really?*

**GREG VANNEY:** Yeah, I really think he was in his head a lot of the early first part of the season. It's not abnormal. And I think he was just trying to process a little bit how our system functions, what his role was going to look like, the speed of the game in MLS. We weren't winning games which always puts a little bit of weight on things.

So I think actually by taking a step back, him taking a little bit of time to work in training and to watch some games where we actually played well and some things functioned and talking to him as the season progressed, he said I feel a lot more comfortable with what we're doing now and what I need to do.

Then it just became repetition. He has great power, he can really cover ground. He has soft feet for a big man.

One of the things he did tonight was his running through the line created more space in front of Gabe to be able to attack.

For me we saw Gabe less standing on the ball but more especially in the first half driving the ball, getting moving forward which is where Gabe is at his best. He had a couple shots trailing in the space behind Elijah. They were able to play Elijah in a few times.

I felt he did a great job creating forward momentum on that side of the field. And I felt it helped Gabe which is something he's been missing over the course of the season. He's been trying to change the speed of the game. And I think he's best when the game, when the speed of the game has been changed for him and now he just needs to keep up with it.

I think he had an impact on others, not just himself and the team. Again, I think he's learning. I think you see a lot of confidence in him now. I think a lot of clarity in his mind. And that gives, I think, him and all of us comfort when you're on the field and now his natural qualities are starting to come out. I was really pleased with him.

John is a machine again today. He had a couple different roles. In the first half he was getting higher up the left side. In the second half we held him a little closer in the build. Then we switched from building a three to building in a four so his roles changed in there.

But defensively he has such a good instinct and feel for things, and sometimes he just puts out fires and he reads some things that are unique to John because he has that -- probably his tendency is a little shifted toward the defending side and a little less on the attacking side, which I thought he was excellent in that regard tonight.

I was proud of him. I saw his dad. I told him he was outstanding tonight. We all saw the same thing.

*Q. Any significance with the minutes for Eric there at the end?*



**GREG VANNEY:** Maybe but not necessarily. I think it's kind of still to be determined. But it leaves it in a position where anything can be considered here as we go into the offseason.

*Q. First off, just in this game, what was going on with Pec not getting back into the game and Yamane, not letting him sub again?*

**GREG VANNEY:** Those are the rules we have to abide by. This one I don't understand. Their guys run into each other. One of them gets up and fine, and the other one is down and he has to get help. He gets to come off and go right back on.

Their guy puts a forearm shiver into our guy, goes down, no foul called, he needs help. And he has to stay out for two minutes. That one I don't understand. I understand the rule but I don't understand how it doesn't get applied in one situation but applies in the other.

I understand the nuance of their two guys running into each other, but he needed assistance, right? And through no fault of theirs or ours. I didn't get it. That's why Gabe got treatment on the field and it wasn't a yellow card. It wasn't a head injury, and so therefore he had to sit out.

So we're trying to prevent time wasting. Sometimes there's logical situations that aren't time wasting, but anyways that's the rule.

With Miki, Nasci, evidently took too long to get off the field. So then Miki has to stay off the field for a minute. But then a minute could become five minutes. It all depends on when the next stoppage of play is. Anyways, I showed my frustration in the rules, that's all.

*Q. That first one, okay, so if I go in and I knock some guy down and he needs assistance, it helps my team. Maybe I should knock more guys down.*

**GREG VANNEY:** Yeah, there's a lot of different logics. I can tell you, in some ways I understand it later in games when guys like to go down with cramps and hang around and it slows down the game, it does stuff. It has taken a lot of that away to be fair to the rule.

I just think there's other times, especially when you have (indiscernible) and they're more logical, and you can go, hey, he took it in the ribs, or it's a logical moment, not moment where people aren't wasting time. That's when I have a hard time. It is what it is.

*Q. You finished 26th overall. You finish ahead of Kansas City in the West. Celebrating?*

**GREG VANNEY:** Not celebrating. I'm not celebrating it. There's nothing great to celebrate about that. We remain focused on our process. I think we've had improvements through the course of the year. I think we finished with two wins. We learned a lot about -- we saw players come forward who are young and are going to really benefit from MLS this last stretch and the group really fought to the end. The group took a Champions League spot got out of a tough tournament. There's a lot of positives, but our standing is not one of them.

*Q. As you're going through the year and figuring things out and players becoming better acquainted with the league, better in tune with your system, players coming back in from injury and all that, and you're really experimenting trying different things, are there things you look at that you ended up settling on that you feel that you might have been able to figure out earlier? And the one that comes to mind with me is when Diego went into midfield it just changed everything. Might that be something to figure out earlier?*

**GREG VANNEY:** Maybe. That coincided with Marco getting healthier and coincided with Joe getting healthy, who missed the first part of it. As Joe came onto the wing that afforded us a little more moving Diego into the middle. As Marco gets healthier, gives us the chance to maybe drop Diego back.

But also Nasci got healthy and came along, which gave us a little more speed and athleticism at the top end sometimes



because I was trying to find the balance between, what I call, space creators and space users -- guys who run for the depth and guys who want the ball at their feet.

At times, I felt like we had too many guys that are looking for the ball at their feet and not enough guys that are threatening the opposition. And the opposition was just pressing us in and we weren't getting behind. And that's when you don't have a Joe and Gabe running through the lines.

For me it was a little bit of timing on each of these things that allowed us to get there. And then you're trying to bring, obviously, Lucas, trying to settle him into the league, and Elijah trying to settle into the league.

As we got healthier I think things started to, again, healthier and a couple of guys settled in, things start to piece together. And it helped us helped me to find better solutions as well. I don't put that on everybody else. Again, the balance of things on the field started to look a little more appropriate for how we want to play the game.

It also brought a transition game into us. And if you think about the team last year, we would get on top of teams 1-0 or whatever, and then our transition was as good as anyone in the league. So when teams had to come out and play against us, they had Joe, Gabe, Ricky, Dan, these guys running and breaking lines and then putting the game away.

We couldn't get on top of games. And then we didn't have that ability to break away if we were. So it was just timeline and things piecing together and guys coming together.

*Q. You mentioned that the team ended the year by beating two playoff teams. The team also won three of the last four. When you see that, does that make the beginning of the season a little bit harder to stomach? Or does it give you a reason for optimism for 2026? And then, what does it say to you that the team was able to dispatch this Minnesota United team, a top 4 team in the league with relative ease, no big chances on goal today?*

**GREG VANNEY:** I think the beginning of the season it was frustrating. I don't know if it can get any more frustrating. But it is. The hard part was I've always felt, like even at the beginning of the season, if we could get a little more healthy, get a little more of our pieces, the balance of things would work out for us and maybe that would translate into results. We couldn't find those plays inside of games where we could get results.

And I always said the margins were just really fine for us and things had to go well and we had to be really clean in execution, and we just didn't.

As we got to the second half of the season, I thought we found probably what more of our level should be, as we kind of came together and got a bit healthier and things started to fit together.

If we would have had more of that stretch, I think we would be in a different position, for sure. But the season is the season and you go through the ups and downs that it brings to you and the timeline of which things played out, they did.

But I was really, as I said, I was happy with the group and the way they battled through the Leagues Cup and the way that we finished off the season. There's a few games inside the league we lost in the second half where we kind of rotated.

We were playing Leagues Cup and we weren't necessarily focused on the result of the league either. So we maybe lost a couple potential opportunities inside of that because we were really playing Leagues Cup.

There were some games in the second half of the season where I felt like, I think of St. Louis and the goal we give up late there, and San Diego we gave up a really late goal there. And I'm sure there's others along we won recently.

But there's some others where we just missed out opportunities to, I felt in the middle of the season, to put ourselves back in the race with a few of those games that I brought up there where we might have got ourselves back in the race if we would have taken a couple more points in the middle section.

*Q. I believe Joseph ends up with the Golden Boot for the team. Could you talk about his impact and what you'd like to see from him next year, when the next step would be for him?*



**GREG VANNEY:** I think especially in the second half of the season, I thought Joe, again, we were finding him on the run. He was doing more things in dynamic, direct types of situations. We were finding him behind the back line.

Today he found that ball out on the wing, driving into the box to finish on his right foot. He made a great pass off the post back to himself to finish. He got a goal and an assist on that, I think.

But I think for Joe, he's at his best when we can, again when we can pick up the speed of the game or find him where he can now just keep the speed of the game, he's at his best.

When he has to try to figure out how to take a play that's kind of slow and in possession and turn it into an attack, I feel that's not when he's at his best.

Having a guy like Ricky who changes the tempo and the speed of the game will bring new life into Gabe and Joe, no question, because Ricky changes the speed of the game. And those guys take advantage of those moments.

Joe is going to be fine. In the second half of the season, he had some great moments as forward for us. Then he did some really good things on the wing where he's slightly more comfortable.

But I thought he really got going sort of midseason when we were able to start playing more forward passes finding him in more dynamic situations. I thought he got himself going.

Those two guys are going to benefit a lot from having a guy like Ricky back, who just the way he plays ball through the lines and changes the tempo and attracts attention to him, they're going to see a whole new set of situations that they didn't get as many of this year that they'll get again next year.

*Q. You put Ricky back on the field healthy. With the emergence of Elijah, Harbor, Cuevas, is the roster built ahead of schedule, you think, going into next year?*

**GREG VANNEY:** Potentially. I think it's worth talking to. There's work to do, for sure. But when you see guys like Harbor emerging and Elijah emerging, next year I'll say we need to be good and we need to be deep because with the break that's going to come for however many six, seven weeks, whatever it is, in the middle of the season for the World Cup, things are just going to get pushed together on either side, which means you'll have to play more games more frequently and we're going to have to rotate and you're going to want to keep your level high.

So having those guys emerge, it definitely helps us to look at and go, okay, we're seeing our depth and we're seeing quality kind of emerging in our roster. And now we have to be very specific about what pieces we need to try to raise our level. And some of that is in the starting group and some of that is going to be in the depth of things as well.

But certainly anybody who grew up this year is a positive thing for what the future will look like.

*Q. Could you just talk a little bit about what kind of presence Maya Yoshida has been for you this season? He's 37 years old, just finished his 22nd season in professional soccer. What kind of presence has he been on and off the pitch?*

**GREG VANNEY:** Maya is a consummate professional. He's a guy who works so hard. He's disciplined. He's routine and detail-oriented in things he does. He's a great example for guys.

You don't play as many years as you said because you do things lax. You play that long because you are on it and you're super professional, and that's Maya.

I think his presence, leadership in that type of way helps a group, especially when you have some young guys around that are developing and are coming along, it helps to have a professional like Maya around, no question.

This was probably one of the first years in his career where he had some soft-tissue stuff that he had to deal with. So start and stop. We had to rely on him. Whenever he was healthy we were relying on him at 37 and that's a lot for him. But he



wouldn't have it any other way. I could tell you if he was even kind of injured, he was fighting to be ready to play.

That's another thing, a guy who wants to be on the field and would give anything to be on the field is a great example for the next guys that are going to be taking on those types of mentality and those types of roles.

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