

POST GAME QUOTES
Saturday, March 4, 2023
LAFC vs. Portland Timbers



STEVE CHERUNDOLO
LAFC HEAD COACH

RE: Opening Statement

“First game of the season for us and we are happy to come away with three points at BMO Stadium after a long offseason and extended preseason due to weather last week. We got off to a good start in both halves, but didn't finish as strongly as we had anticipated. Reasons being lack of rhythm, possibly a little bit of lack of fitness to continue playing in the fashion and the manner we played, as well as, putting Portland under pressure while trying to play as high as possible. All very normal in the first game of the season, so nothing alarming. However, glad we came away with three points because that is the most important thing today and it gives us a lot to build off.”

RE: On the pregame ceremony and if that have any effect on the team going into the season on a high note?

“That’s a question for the players. As far as affecting the group short term in a negative way, I would say no, the first half was good and we went up 2-0. I'm not sure anybody is connecting the dots as far as if we win this many games, it's too far away. No one is really thinking about repeating anything and we're not even talking about that. We are laser focused, first on this game and now our heads are now moving towards the champions league first leg.”

RE: On the importance of ending games strong and the desire to get to a point where the team this season is doing so consistently?

“For all the teams in our league because it's a very congested schedule, especially for those who are participating in the Champions League, and for most people in the stadium, including some Portland affiliates, the game was over at 3-0. If you're a LAFC fan, coach, or player, it needs to stay that way in order to conserve energy and effort looking forward to next week and in this long and grueling season that it will be. We need to be better in those moments of finishing games and in a manner that is smart and in a way that we can also conserve some energy.”

RE On the starting front 3 and about their play and how they kind of interchange?

“It's always connected. We try to utilize all of our players and build up. When we're moving forward to the next phase and in the final third, trying to get beyond the opponent's back line, we will involve our eights and our outside backs a lot. These are things we train on the pitch daily, so it's always connected. One thing we're always asking of our team, whoever is in that position at the moment, are deep runs. In order to make a deep run to have control of the ball, so it's always connected and I thought they did a good job tonight. They were always dangerous and a handful and I would have loved for that to continue for another 10, 15 minutes. If we were able to do that, then we wouldn't have got ourselves into trouble. However, it's game one and we can be happy with this.”

RE: Thoughts on the grid in the box of both of the first two goals. as well as Chiellini's performance both finishing and defensively.

"Set pieces are an extremely important part of the game, we saw that in the final as well as today. It's certainly a phase of the game we understand and respect here at LAFC. It can open the door to results like today and performances as well. It's very important to us and we work on it a lot. We understand that it's not just about being in the right spots or having a good idea, it's effort, commitment by the players, timing, and quality of service. All of those things are good attributes to the players we have on the field, we are a very dangerous team on set pieces. There's contact in the box when you're putting 20 players in one penalty box. It's going to be contact and the referee decided to call a foul on one and not the other. That's why he's there, but we obviously accept and respect those decisions. We think we have a pretty good idea of how to break teams down with set pieces and it worked again today."

RE: On Giorgio Chiellini's performance, both finishing and defensively.

"Giorgio is pretty amazing and for me the best player on the field tonight. He's a step ahead of everybody else and that goes a long way. He does an amazing job of keeping his body in a physical condition and not only able to keep up, but also dominate. It's fun to watch and a privilege to coach. He's a really funny and amazing human being too, which makes spending time with him even more special."

RE: On the decision to pull off Carlos (Vela) and Ilie (Sanchez), and was that an eye towards CONCACAF?

"Ilie is probably more short term, as he was sitting in yellow and got caught in a few fouls. In some ways, some referees maybe give him a second yellow, some don't, but thought the ref did a good job tonight of keeping control of the match and managing that. I just didn't want to risk that and also looking towards Thursday in Costa Rica."

RE: On Carlos and how much his role and extending his franchise record both goals and assists tonight with his performance just going into season six.

"First and foremost, his physical condition this year is better than it was at the start of last year. We can expect much of the same prolific Carlos. He is somebody who's football IQ is off the charts and his left foot as well. He's somebody who will continue scoring and setting up goals at the same rate. There's no reason for him to slow down, some areas of the field will be more particularly in the middle at the nine positions, which will be played more often by him. But as you can see, we are very fluid up front and we ask our front three to interchange throughout the 90 minutes."

RE: On Carlos being more like an old-fashioned number 10 position that they say doesn't exist in modern soccer anymore?

"I'll disagree with you, as I don't think Carlos is a classic 10. He's actually a winner. If you think back to his days at Arsenal, Osasuna, and even here in LAFC, he can beat players one on one, can beat him in behind, he comes inside, he finishes passes, he's the full package and I would not label him as a number 10."

RE: Thoughts on the three newcomers?

"Our new players who saw the field tonight in Aaron Long, Timmy Tillman and Stipe Biuk, I thought they had a decent start. Aaron obviously understands this league very well, has played in a number of years and excelled in it, so there's no surprises there. Timmy had bright

moments as well, and will see a lot of the field this year as well as Stipe. Both of them need rhythm and time with the group. Their attributes that they bring to us, with Timmy and his ability on the ball, his physicality and his very excellent timing with his passes and runs in the box, which you didn't see tonight, but you will throughout the season. Stipe has come on, but you didn't see a lot of him tonight, but what we've seen in preseason and training, his runs in behind are excellent, as well as his movement in the box. We're excited about those two and getting them involved more frequently, but the most important thing is getting them on the field and getting the others used to them."

RE: On the new acquisitions and the relative depth of the team as it currently stands. How does he navigate the challenges of both Champions League and early stages of the MLS season?

"We see it as an opportunity, not as a difficulty or a challenge. It's an opportunity and it's an honor to play in the Champions League. It's one that we earned and one we would love to repeat year after year and those are our goals. In order to do that, you need to maintain the level of play in both competitions. We will try to rotate at the right moments to give players breaks. However, because of the way the rules and regulations are in our league, the one sort of question mark or moment where we kind of roll the dice is, we have to stay healthy.

"Sometimes we're not always in charge of injuries, ones that happen in games at least. We need to stay healthy to be able to perform well in both competitions. If we stay healthy, then I like our chances. But because of the smaller rosters, the way our league is set up, it's just not possible if you have injuries. You'll maybe see some ups and downs, but so far so good and we'll try to maintain that."