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Head Coach Freya Coombe on Social Isolation and Staying on Track

By: Morgan Turner

With just 5 days of what was shaping up to be a promising preseason in the books, Sky Blue FC was forced to suspend all training and team activities as the result of a league-wide training moratorium in response to the novel coronavirus outbreak. As the situation has further escalated, public parks and green spaces have been closed indefinitely in New Jersey forcing the coaching staff and players to get creative with their training methods. During these unprecedented times, Head Coach **Freya Coombe** could not overstate the importance of online video meetings and maintaining a schedule in an interview with the club’s communications team.

“I think the key is trying to keep as much structure as possible,” Coombe stated. “So, when we’re doing Zoom calls and check-ins with players and the fitness plans and the medical staff checking in, we’re trying to keep it to a similar time of day, trying to build structure into the athlete’s days as much as possible.”

“I know it’s very difficult right now, but we’re still trying to get them to work out and to complete a fitness plan whether it’s in the living room or if they have access to a garden or backyard that they can use in isolation.”

Coombe notes the players are checking in with trainers, coaches, and enjoy free time at the same time as they would during a traditional training day. Coombe concluded stating the importance of “building a structure and trying to keep their day as similar to their athletic day as possible.”

Coombe also pointed out creativity will play a major role in the club’s approach to social distancing. Players have logged in to online video platforms for everything from core workouts and yoga to at-home physical therapy sessions.

As far as work off the field goes, business has continued as close to usual as possible.

“Alyse (LaHue, General Manager) has done a great job with setting the standard and the tone with all her creative ways of providing activities for the staff,” Coombe went on. “As a technical team, we’ve tried to follow suit. We’ve had our own meetings and had our own little events with the players as well. We have things like coffee talks in the morning where the players can log on and have a Zoom meeting with all the other players over a cup of coffee and just chat, similar to the locker room environment.” Ultimately, Coombe makes the point that the mentality is “people first, players second” in making sure players are healthy both physically and mentally.

Without any new film to study, Coombe and her technical staff have taken the opportunity to review old clips from every possible approach. “I’ve watched the same game probably eight times, looking at it from different player angles... then reviewing that game with the players,” she said. Players have also been able to engage in more in-depth discussions with the technical staff. “We’re doing a lot of film with the players right now, using this time as an opportunity to go through their game and really focus on them as a player and as an individual.”

Despite these unexpected challenges Coombe remains optimistic about the coming season. The move to Red Bull Arena and Red Bulls Training Facility has been beneficial to the players and coaches alike, while fresh faces have added to the team dynamic.

“A big thing about this year was maintaining high standards within the culture of our group and I think the training facility does that,” she stated. “It’s a top grass training facility that raises the standard of the training environment. Other standards go into that, but when you’ve upgraded the standard of the training facility in the way we have from last year to this year it just communicates to the players what the expectation is.

“The new players that we’ve brought in and the existing players came back really fresh, it had a fresh vibe to the team and to training. We managed to get our playing style across to the players and they were starting to get challenged with how we wanted to play, but at the same time, it was delivered in a way that the players had a great time. It’s now about finding that situation again, getting ourselves back together to find exactly that balance and continue to work hard for preseason – whenever that is.” At the time of this writing much remains unknown about the impact COVID-19 will have on professional athletics, but one thing is certain – when sports return, and they will, Sky Blue FC will be ready.

Head Coach Freya Coombe and GM Alyse LaHue Talk Offseason Moves