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WEEK 9



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Chicago Fire Soccer Club Acquires Forward CJ Spong

The Chicago Fire Soccer Club announced today that it has acquired forward CJ Spong from the Philadelphia Union. In exchange, the Union will receive \$200,000 in 2019 General Allocation Money, \$100,000 in 2020 Targeted Allocation Money, and an additional \$100,000 in 2019 General Allocation Money should the Chicago Fire acquire said funds this year.

Spong is under contract with the Fire for the 2019 season with a Club option for the 2020 season.

"CJ brings a different skill set to our attacking options," said Chicago Fire Soccer Club President and General Manager Nelson Rodriguez. "We can now be more varied in how we attack."

Spong, 30, joins the Fire with 233 appearances (177 starts) in eight MLS seasons, tallying 56 goals and 23 assists during that stretch. Spong has spent the last four seasons (2015-18) with the Union, posting 36 goals and 14 assists in 123 appearances (108 starts). He

was originally selected by Sporting Kansas City as the 10th overall selection in the 2011 MLS SuperDraft and made 34 appearances during his rookie season, scoring five goals and adding five assists en route to being named the 2011 MLS Rookie of the Year. In four seasons with Sporting KC, Spong won an MLS Cup (2013) and the U.S. Open Cup trophy (2012).



"CJ is a player who adds athleticism and a high work rate on both sides of the ball," said Chicago Fire Soccer Club Head Coach Veljko Paunovic. "We also believe that he will increase our scoring capabilities. We're looking forward to working with him this season."

At the international level, Spong has earned four caps with the U.S. Men's National Team. After receiving an invitation to the team's January camp in 2012, Spong made his debut for the USMNT in a friendly against Venezuela on January 21, 2012 and earned his second cap just four days later with a substitute appearance against Panama. In 2017, Spong received the nod to represent the USMNT ahead of a friendly in Portugal on November 14, 2017. He started that match, recording an assist in a 1-1 draw.

Transaction: The Chicago Fire Soccer Club acquires forward CJ Spong from the Philadelphia Union on Feb. 23, 2019. In exchange, the Union will receive \$200,000 in 2019 General Allocation Money, \$100,000 in 2020 Targeted Allocation Money, and an additional \$100,000 in 2019 General Allocation Money should the Chicago Fire acquire said funds this year.

Name: CJ Spong
Position: Forward
Height: 6'1"
Weight: 185 lbs.
Date of Birth: Dec. 27, 1988
Birthplace: Manassas, Va.
Citizenship: United States of America
Last Club: Philadelphia Union

CREDIT: CHICAGO FIRE SOCCER CLUB

Chicago Blackhawks fall short against Stars 4-3

All season the Chicago Blackhawks have battled adversity.

From losing their coach to dealing with a pair of eight-game losing streaks to welcoming new faces into the locker room, it has been a roller-coaster of a campaign for Patrick Kane, Jonathan Toews and Co.

Demonstrating amazing resolve, the Hawks steadied the ship and managed to reel off 10 wins in 12 games from Jan. 20 to Feb. 20.

Suddenly, coach Jeremy Colliton's team had the chance to jump into a wild-card berth with a pair of victories this weekend.

But that's not what happened.

Instead, the Hawks dropped a heartbreaker to Colorado on Friday and followed that up with a gut-wrenching 4-3 loss to Dallas Sunday at the United Center.

The Hawks (26-28-9) are 5 points behind Minnesota and 6 behind Dallas, the two wild-card leaders.

"It's that time of year where it's going to get tougher and tougher," said Jonathan Toews, who completed the Hawks' comeback from a 3-0 deficit against Dallas when he tied the game at 3-3 at 4:16 of the third period. "We've got to find ways to keep ... striving toward that complete game as a team.

"We're getting close, and obviously we've got to stay with it and not let these two losses wither away at our confidence."

Sloppy, undisciplined play allowed Dallas to grab that 3-goal lead, but the Hawks fought back with goals by Chris Kunitz, Drake Caggiula and Toews.

The game turned when the Hawks were whistled for too many men on the ice at 7:25 and Duncan Keith took a tripping penalty at 8:03.

The Stars cashed in on the two-man advantage when Jason Spezza tapped in Alexander Radulov's pass to give the Stars a 4-3 lead at 8:55.

Colliton said the too-many-men penalty amounted to confusion on the bench after the Hawks enjoyed a long shift in the offensive zone. "I'm not going to point any fingers right now," he said. "We (need) to change earlier. That's it."

That wasn't it for the Hawks, though, who were awarded six minutes of power-play time in the final seven minutes and 20 seconds. After the first power play went for naught, Roman Pollak was called for a double minor when he high-sticked Drake Caggiula and drew blood.

It appeared the Hawks would tie it when Alex DeBrincat wound up and fired a perfect one-timer on net,



but Stars goalie Anton Khudobin exploded across the crease and soaked up the blast with 35.4 seconds remaining. Khudobin turned away 44 shots.

"He made a lot of big saves," Caggiula said. "A lot of them were pretty high-quality chances."

Said Toews of blowing the four minutes of power-play time on Pollak's penalty: "Unfortunately couldn't get any draws going to kind of save our energy and wear them down, keep them in their own end. Still creating chances, just couldn't find the back of the net.

"Yeah, tough one. Big opportunities there to try and at least even the game up, if not take over in the third. (Stinks) that we let that one slip."

Now the key is to not let the season slip away during a three-game road trip to Anaheim, Los Angeles and San Jose.

"We would've liked the standings to look different coming out of the weekend, but it's probably not as ugly as it looked a month ago," Colliton said. "Just got to have a good road trip, get some points. There's lots of points available.

"Nobody's going to win every game. If we win more than our fair share, we'll get in."

CREDIT: CHICAGO RED STARS SOCCER CLUB

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Boston Celtics fall to Chicago Bulls 126-116: Of all the losses, this one is up there, plus 10 things we learned

The Boston Celtics dropped an embarrassing 126-116 loss to the Chicago Bulls on Saturday. Here are 10 things we learned.

1. This loss is up there.

The Celtics have had some truly horrific losses this season. Were the Phoenix Suns (at home) the worst one? The Milwaukee Bucks, after which they had a team meeting to clear the air? The Los Angeles Lakers after holding a 20-point lead? The Los Angeles Clippers after holding a 28-point lead (!)? It's difficult to say. All were very bad in their own unique ways.

On Saturday, the Celtics came out and punched the Bulls in the mouth with a 7-0 start, forcing a quick timeout. From there, Chicago got comfortable, and in the second quarter, Lauri Markkanen and Zach LaVine started torching the Celtics.

The Bulls have an excellent offensive rating in their last seven games. That doesn't excuse the outpouring Chicago unleashed on Saturday. If this isn't the worst loss of the season, it's only because the Celtics blew a 28-point lead against the Clippers.

2. This powerhouse quote goes one of two ways.

There's really no in-between: "Because I'm here" either becomes a rallying cry in the postseason as the Celtics spark a deep run, or it becomes the meme with which the Celtics are mocked if they get bounced earlier than expected.

Either way, what a powerhouse quote.

3. Irving's stat line was a little incongruous.

In a brutal loss, Irving was quietly brilliant (and you would be excused if you missed it while watching the rest of the game burn down): 37 points, 14-for-24 shooting, 3-for-6 from three, 10 assists, five rebounds, a block, a steal and a charge taken. That's the type of line Irving often saves for the Toronto Raptors and Philadelphia 76ers of the world.

Seeing him waste it on the Bulls in a double-digit loss was a little jarring. His scoring is to be expected at this point, but some of the passes he threw were really impressive.

4. Marcus Smart appears to have been working on some things.

Smart can do back flips and kip ups. It probably shouldn't come as much of a surprise that he's willing to try a 360 layup.

5. Terry Rozier's continued struggles present a real conundrum.

The numbers are unkind to Rozier, and the Twitter conversation was even less so. He finished 1-for-9 from the field, 1-for-6 from three, and he was -16 in a game the Celtics lost by 10. By no means was he the reason the Celtics lost (wins and losses are almost never decided exclusively by the struggles of a single player coming off the bench), but his defensive struggles combined with his poor shooting helped the Celtics dig a second-quarter deficit that only ballooned in the fourth.

Rozier is a conundrum: He's very talented. He's clearly considerably better as a starter, but he's equally clearly not going to start over Irving. He's unlikely start over Smart or Jaylen Brown, although perhaps trying that for a game or



two -- given his increasingly indicative splits -- might be worth a shot.

That's all speculative, of course, but in a confusing season, Rozier's lack of production has been one of the most confusing elements.

6. Here's how Brad Stevens felt about his performance.

Stevens often attempts to fall on the sword publicly after disappointing losses. Certainly, he could have tried some things on Saturday -- Wanamaker over Rozier, a little more offense for Hayward (six shots) or Tatum (5-for-9, and just five points after a white-hot start), or even starting Brown over Marcus Morris (4-for-11, 1-for-4 from three).

But the Celtics are lightyears better than the Bulls and probably should have won anyway. Stevens can shoulder as much blame as he wants -- there's plenty for everyone to carry a share (with the possible exception of Irving).

7. Jaylen Brown and Daniel Theis helped Boston rally.

In the third quarter, the Bulls' lead swelled as high as 25, and the Celtics appeared to be on the verge of one of the worst losses for any team this season.

Jaylen Brown and Daniel Theis, however, combined to inch Boston back toward respectability. Brown got out in transition for a pair of baskets and buried a triple to cut the lead to 15. Theis, meanwhile, helped keep the score vaguely within striking distance at the beginning of the period with a series of pick-and-roll finishes at the rim.

This isn't really anything to learn, just some credit where credit is due on a bleak evening for the Celtics.

8. Lauri Markkanen and Zach LaVine scored 77 (!!!) points

Some of the shots Markkanen and LaVine hit were wide open and a result of poor defense. But others were contested twos and threes, which the duo canned anyway. That will happen sometimes when you let good scorers get hot.

This season has seen some truly bizarre performances against Boston, an ostensibly solid defensive team. Often, the player who scorches the Celtics is solid, but not a superstar (Jamal Murray leaps to mind).

Markkanen and LaVine fall into that category. Both are good, both have shown they can score, but the Celtics will probably walk away from Saturday's game a little stunned they couldn't figure out a way to limit them.

9. Brad Stevens: Apparently a believer in the hot-hand theory.

Stevens often laments how the Celtics allow opponents to get comfortable, which is intangible, but also extremely tangible at times. On Saturday, the Celtics allowed LaVine to get hot, and they never made him uncomfortable enough to cool him off. That killed them in the end.

10. Reminder: The Celtics play better against good teams.

This isn't really a positive or a negative on a bad night for Boston. It's just worth remembering as the team stumbles out of the gate following the All-Star game that the Celtics always seem to play up or down to their competition. Sure, they blew out the Bulls earlier this year. But Chicago's offense has been rolling lately, and the Celtics faced them sandwiched in between games on which they were clearly more focused.

That's not a good thing. The Celtics will pay the price for all of their mental slip-ups against bad teams when the playoffs roll around and their first-round opponent is the Philadelphia 76ers instead of (for example) the Detroit Pistons. Just don't be surprised if after falling to the Bulls, the Celtics rally against the Raptors. That's what this frustratingly enigmatic team does.

CREDIT: Tom Westerholm | twesterh@masslive.com

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