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ZACH THORNTON

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CHICAGO FIRE FC NAME CLUB LEGEND

ZACH THORNTON GOALKEEPER COACH

Chicago Fire FC today announced that it has named Zach Thornton as goalkeeper coach. The Club leader in appearances as a goalkeeper (215), starts as a goalkeeper (212), and wins (109), Thornton returns to the Fire with 26 years of experience as a coach and player.

"We are thrilled to welcome Zach back to the Club, now in a coaching role, as he brings a strong legacy of success from his championship years with the Fire," said Chicago Fire FC Head Coach Ezra Hendrickson. "Zach is an excellent leader with invaluable experience as a coach and as a player in MLS. We have a strong tradition of excellence at the Fire when it comes to the development of goalkeepers, and he will play an instrumental role in making sure that tradition continues."

Thornton, 49, becomes the latest addition to Hendrickson's coach staff following the recent departure of former goalkeeper coach Adin Brown. He joins assistant coaches Junior González, Frank Klopas and C.J. Brown on the first team coaching staff.

"Chicago Fire is my Club," said Thornton. "I may have played at other places, I've coached at other places, but the chance to come to my second home Chicago, that's something that I couldn't pass up. I had success here as a player, and I'm excited to coach here and bring additional success to the Club."

Thornton rejoins the Fire after spending the past season as the Houston Dynamo goalkeeper coach. Prior to joining the Dynamo staff, the Maryland native spent seven seasons as goalkeeper coach for D.C. United (2015-2021). During his time with D.C. United, the team qualified for the MLS Playoffs on four occasions as Thornton oversaw the development of promising young goalkeepers. Before joining the ranks of MLS assistant coaches, Thornton served as head coach of the Villanova Wildcats (2013-2014), men's and women's goalkeeper coach at Elizabethtown College (2012) and volunteer goalkeeper coach at his alma mater Loyola College in Maryland (2012).

Prior to becoming a coach, Thornton began his Major League Soccer career with the New York/New Jersey MetroStars in 1996-1997 before joining the Fire for its 1998 expansion season, where he played until 2006. During that span, Thornton backstopped the team to the Domestic Double, winning the 1998 MLS Cup title and the 1998 Lamar Hunt U.S. Open Cup. He was also anchored the team's backline for three additional U.S. Open Cup trophies (2000, 2003 and 2006) and an MLS Supporters' Shield title (2003). He is one of only three players in Club history to be a part of all six of the Fire's domestic championships, alongside Chris Armas and C.J. Brown.

After leaving the Fire, Thornton joined the Colorado Rapids in 2007, the New York Red Bulls in 2008 and closed out his playing career with Chivas USA from 2008-2011. At the international level, Thornton earned eight caps with the U.S. Men's National Team from 1994-2001.

WELCOME

ZACH
THORNTON

GOALKEEPER COACH



FOURTH QUARTER DOOMS BEARS IN LOSS TO RIVAL PACKERS

ARTICLE: LARRY MAYER

Through three quarters Sunday at Soldier Field, the Bears were outplaying the rival Packers fairly decisively on both sides of the ball.

Returning to action after missing one game with a left shoulder injury, Justin Fields picked up where he left off before getting hurt. The dynamic second-year quarterback produced more highlight-reel plays with a sensational 55-yard touchdown scramble and a 56-yard completion to Equanimeous St. Brown that set up another TD.

The Bears defense, playing without several injured starters, was making longtime nemesis Aaron Rodgers look mortal for the first time in recent memory, punctuated by back-to-back three-and-outs to open the second half.

It appeared that all was well when the Bears entered the fourth quarter with a 19-10 lead. Until it wasn't.

In the final period, the Packers tallied two touchdowns and one field goal on three straight drives and intercepted two Fields passes in the final 2:52 in outscoring the Bears 18-0 in the fourth quarter to win 28-19. Fields' passer rating dropped from 114.0 after three quarters to 75.7 for the game.



Stepping up: With leading receiver Darnell Mooney out for the season due to an ankle injury, St. Brown and N'Keal Harry helped fill the void.

St. Brown caught three passes for 85 yards, including a career-long 56-yard reception. Midway through the second quarter, St. Brown beat Pro Bowl cornerback Jaire Alexander downfield and caught a perfectly thrown long pass from Fields in stride. On the next play, David Montgomery's 7-yard touchdown run gave the Bears a 16-3 lead.

Harry also produced a career long reception, hauling in a 49-yard pass from Fields early in the fourth quarter. The Bears quarterback scrambled out of the pocket and chucked the ball downfield to Harry, who made an acrobatic leaping catch.

"Just instincts really," Harry said. "It was a good job by Justin getting out of the pocket. He threw it up and I just went and did what I'm used to doing."

The Bears acquired Harry in a trade with the Patriots July 13. He hurt his ankle in training camp and missed the first six games of the season. He played in three contests and then was a healthy scratch for three straight weeks. Sunday marked his first game action since Nov. 6 against the Dolphins.

"It feels good, but at the end of the day I know I could do more," Harry said. "I know I could make a bigger impact. So I've just got to really lock in these last few weeks and make sure I'm ready to go."

"I've been working really hard trying to make sure I stay mentally ready, physically ready, so I've just got to take advantage of every opportunity moving forward."

Adjusting on the fly: The Bears running game took two hits when fullback Khari Blasingame came down with an illness Saturday night and was unable to play and tight end Trevon Wesco exited with a leg injury on the third play from scrimmage.

"When you have a fullback like Khari that we have, he's instrumental of our offense being able to do all the lead blocking and all the different things that we do," said coach Matt Eberflus. "I thought the offensive coaches did a really good job of getting Wesco ready to go because he's our guy that really steps into that role. Then Wesco gets hurt ... so then our offense had to move and do a good job with adjusting during those two things that happened. I think they did a good job."

The Bears rushed for 155 yards and two TDs on 25 carries. Fields ran for a team-high 71 yards on six attempts, while Montgomery added 61 yards on 14 carries.

No excuses: The normally reliable Cairo Santos missed both a field goal and an extra point for the first time in 47 career games with the Bears.

After pushing an extra point attempt wide right in the second quarter, Santos' 40-yard field goal try early in the fourth period was blocked by Green Bay defensive lineman Dean Lowry. The kick could have extended the Bears' lead to 22-17.

"It just didn't go my way today," Santos said. "Just got to do my job. I'm done making excuses out there. It's frustrating. I try putting my 'A' product every day and I feel like I've done a great job of that all year. I feel confident in saying that, [but] on Sunday the extra point consistency is not there. I've just got to do my job."

Santos has now missed four extra points this season, the most in his nine-year NFL career. Two came in monsoon-like conditions in a Week 1 win over the 49ers, but the third proved to be costly in a 31-30 loss to the Lions Nov. 13. Santos' missed field goal Sunday was only his second of the season. He made his two other attempts from 40 and 28 yards and is now 18 of 20 this year (90.0 percent) and 75 of 84 over four seasons (89.3 percent) with the Bears.

BULLS FALL TO KINGS 110-101 TO END WEST COAST TRIP, LAVINE SCORES 41

In the checkerboard that is the NBA, the Bulls during this six-game road trip have been jumping forward diagonally with mixed results, impressively capturing the men on the road from Milwaukee through Salt Lake City. But then being leaped over in Phoenix and San Francisco.

Until Sunday when the Bulls in Sacramento were crowned by the Kings in a 110-101 defeat.

Which—and you knew this was coming—left the Bulls deeply in the red, 9-14 for the season with this disappointing 2-4 road road trip. So if you think that was a tortured metaphor, then this season isn't looking much healthier.

"I said this before the year started," related Bulls coach Billy Donovan. "I talked to them right when training camp was starting. I knew this was going to be really hard for our team. I tried to talk to them, prepare them for it."

It wasn't unlike the message Donovan—coaches always being the biggest worriers—sent last season during high times when the Bulls even into February were flirting with first place in the conference. Donovan warned he didn't like what he was seeing, and so Donovan said this season to be cautious with Lonzo Ball out, with Zach LaVine returning from another knee surgery, with the Bulls not about to sneak up on anyone like last year, and perhaps not articulating it, but everyone knew DeMar DeRozan wasn't making all those miracles again. Not like Donovan knew for certain, but this also isn't new in the NBA for teams that have reformulated like these Bulls.

"They were all, 'We're going to handle the adversity.' Well, these are the moments you've got to be able to work together and pull together and pull yourself out of it," Donovan said. "To me, it's very, very easy to play and compete at a really high level when things go well. To me, you find out what you are as a team by how much adversity you can endure and withstand."

This would be the time as the Bulls Wednesday start four of five at home against Washington. At five games under .500, the Bulls are at their lowest point since the end of Donovan's first season with the team in 2020-21. After 23 games that season before the Bulls had DeRozan and Nikola Vučević, the Bulls were the same 9-14.

But Donovan insists he still likes what he's seen with this Bulls team and remains confident.

"I know the character of the locker room and the guys, and I know how much they care and I have belief we can do it," Donovan said. "But we are going to have to pull ourselves out of it. We've obviously dug ourselves somewhat of a hole. We can be as frustrated as we want; that's not helping anything. We're going to have to find ways to help each other be better."

That frustration Sunday was evident on the face, and perhaps in the intensity as well of Zach LaVine, who was the old Zach again, flying around for a season-best game 41 points, eight rebounds and four steals, leading the team in each of the categories along with most free throws and threes made.

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Kings coach Mike Brown said it was a big win for his surprising 13-9 Kings because that is, 'a Chicago team that is physical defensively led by Caruso, who is one of the best on the ball defenders out there. To face that physicality and to get a win off the back-to-back (for the Kings) and grind it out the way we did when we didn't shoot the ball well (30 percent on threes) was fantastic."

Caruso was scoreless in 30 minutes, though his worth is seen in remarkable stuff like in the second quarter when he stole the ball from Monk, lost the ensuing fast break to Mitchell, but then stole back the ball from Mitchell to get Coby White a layup score. Which is another conundrum for the coach. White is the team's best three-point threat off the bench, but Donovan needs Caruso's defense and tends to ride him instead of White.

Meanwhile, in those last minutes of the fourth quarter when the Kings made a 17-7 run carried by those free throws to make it 110-97 with two minutes left, LaVine was the only Bulls player to have a field goal in the last four minutes. And that came with incredible effort on a rebound putback score among three Kings defensive players.

Like the newsman Howard Beale from the groundbreaking movie Network, Zach was as mad as hell and not going to take this anymore!

He started the game taking the ball and blowing by everyone for a three-point play and continued with 17 first half points and another 15 in the third quarter when the Bulls predictably charged back from a 15-point halftime deficit, this time 62-47. That made it 82-78 Kings after three quarters. But you know how we hear so often about the difficulty of digging out and all that.

LaVine led the Bulls with nine fourth quarter points, but wasn't as sharp shooting three of nine. But DeRozan dragged to the close missing four of five shots in the fourth and the Bulls never got a chance to lead after pulling within that 88-87 with 9:31 left.

ZACH LAVINE FINISHED WITH A SEASON HIGH 41 POINTS IN THE LOSS TO SACRAMENTO.

BULLS FALL TO KINGS 110-101 TO END WEST COAST TRIP, LAVINE SCORES 41

CONT.

Monk sandwiched a huge degree of difficulty drive and a three around Williams dropping a ball out of bounds, making it 93-87 Kings with a Bulls timeout at 8:30. The Kings are a quality three shooting team, but not so much a making one this day missing two straight while the Bulls matched that. DeRozan then got his lone fourth quarter basket on a spin and three-point play. But the Kings took advantage of a Caruso switch onto Sabonis for a score and feisty Mitchell with a fast break score against the tiring Bulls. That made it 99-90 Sacramento with 5:45 left and another Bulls timeout.

LaVine got a driving foul for free throws and then a driving score, taking the usual closing offensive priorities from the struggling DeRozan. And then there was that remarkable LaVine rebound and score to make it 101-95 with 4:07 left. But the Bulls were reaching too much, both for redemption. And Kings players.

Which left a few foul words, the foul winds of defeat and a Bulls team left unloved by enough success on this road. "We play good when we're behind and then we don't get over the hump, so we got to figure it out," said LaVine, who had a large contingent of family in from Seattle for the game. "That's for the leaders of the team to do. Band together; it's us versus everybody. Nobody is going to help us dig out this hole besides us. That's how we have to go about it. There will be tough conversations, there'll be words said, but sometimes you need that."

Talk about hovering through the fog.

Maybe some of those words will come from Donovan to DeRozan, who looks like he might need a break.

The amazing footwork, pump fake, mid-range scorer has had a difficult trip, the worst run of his Bulls tenure shooting just over 40 percent the last five games in the Western Conference and 10 for 33 the last two. He's the rare warrior (they're definitely not in Golden State with all those days off) in the NBA who never skips games. Could it be catching up?

DeRozan for the second straight season by far leads the Bulls in minutes played after being the oldest player last season and second this season. His playing time even went up on this trip to close to 37 a game, and would have been more if not for the big loss in Phoenix. He remains among the league's top 20 in minutes played and one of three players logging that much over 33 along with Kevin Durant and Kyle Lowry. It's what helps qualify DeRozan as a star, but can there be diminishing returns?

Even if DeRozan remains typically sanguine about the Bulls' prospects.

"I've got the most confidence in the world. Once it clicks, it's going to click no matter who we're playing," said DeRozan. "It's the beauty of sports, of life. When you get down, your true character shows of who you want to be. It's on us to control that narrative going forward. It's supposed to be frustrating, it's supposed to hurt, it's supposed to suck, it's supposed to be all those things."



PATRICK WILLIAMS WAS REINSERTED BACK INTO THE STARTING LINEUP AND SCORED 10 POINTS ON 4-OF-8 SHOOTING.

BULLS FALL TO KINGS 110-101 TO END WEST COAST TRIP, LAVINE SCORES 41

CONT.

“Now how do we challenge ourselves to come out of this thing and make something out of it?” DeRozan continued. “A true competitor is going to pull through. We’ve really got to dig in and be conscious of that (early deficit), understand what is our flaws in moments of the game and try to pinpoint what is it that’s giving us that deficit that we’ve got to fight against. It’s the beauty of sports: When you are down, how do you respond from it?”

Me, me, pick me! Winning games?

Yes, that’s also why I didn’t get good grades in school.

The Zach attack was the big positive of the game, especially the way LaVine is moving. It seemed like the team was being extra cautious to begin the season with the consecutive games limitation provision and minutes restrictions. LaVine most often this season has found himself in the corners watching more than acting. So he seemed Sunday like someone who threw away his crutches, pulled out all those wires and tubes and checked himself out and brought that intensive care to the basketball court. The West does bring out the poet in all of us. Hey, the sun. So that’s what it looks like.

It was a bright start for a change, the Bulls ahead early as the Kings first eight shots were threes. They missed most, four of 15 for the quarter as the Bulls went ahead 18-11. They trailed 29-27 after one... and then imploded. Derrick Jones Jr. with three opened a bakery filled with turnovers, Goran Dragić added two, and DeRozan with one as the Kings bench made it 12-2 to start the second quarter. And then Monk recoved his robes and began making threes. LaVine held the fort with half the Bulls second quarter points, but the Kings fired ahead to a 61-43 lead with 11 second quarter Bulls turnovers.

“That really hurt us,” agreed Donovan.

The rest of us agreed.

Donovan did make a subtle shift back to the staggered rotation from last season with DeRozan out first instead of LaVine, and DeRozan starting the second quarter with the reserves. So that was new. Maybe it will take some time.

The Bulls again never got Vučević much involved, and for the second consecutive game played Andre Drummond limited minutes against a team using a small—or no—center. And the Kings were ready, one of Dragić’s turnovers when the Kings intercepted his lob to Drummond.

But LaVine, for sure, wasn’t giving in. He made a trio of three pointers in the first three minutes of the second half, and then buried his head and the Kings with a pair of driving scores and four free throws from two more drives. When DeRozan finished the quarter with an angry driving slam dunk, it was a game to be taken by the Bulls.

But it wasn’t, so again, it’s their move.



DEMAR DEROZAN FINISHED WITH 18 POINTS ON 6-OF-18 SHOOTING AGAINST THE KINGS.



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