

Nottingham Forest v Chelsea preview: Alonso demands a reaction

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Our **Nottingham Forest v Chelsea preview** begins with a manager who is not hiding his annoyance. Xabi Alonso wants a â??hard, competitive reactionâ?• at the City Ground on Friday night, after Premier League defeats to Sunderland and Leeds United either side of the international break.



Moises Caicedo comes off against Leeds, but is fit to face Forest. Source: Chelsea FC official website (chelseafc.com)

Nottingham Forest v Chelsea preview: a reaction is required

Back-to-back league losses are rare for a club with Chelseaâ??s ambitions, and Alonso made it clear at his pre-match press conference at Cobham that he does not consider them a matter for excuses. Asked whether the absences of Joao Pedro and Moises Caicedo had contributed to the Leeds defeat, the Spaniard dismissed the idea. His diagnosis was more basic. Chelsea, he said, missed â??many basicsâ?• needed to compete in the Premier League, especially in the second half.

That is a pointed message from a head coach. It suggests the problem was less about personnel and more about intensity, duels, second balls and defensive discipline: the unglamorous things that decide matches against well-organised opponents. His line that the focus must be on â??what we can doâ?• rather than what has been done sums up the tone of the week. The game against Leeds, he said, has been analysed but will not be forgotten.

The match kicks off on Friday evening in Nottingham, which means the early hours of Saturday in Singapore. Night owls and early risers, take note.

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Team news: Caicedo back, Joao Pedro and Lacroix still out

Caicedo is fit

The best news for Chelsea supporters is that Caicedo is fine. The Ecuadorian midfielder landed heavily while challenging for a header in the first 45 minutes against Leeds and had to come off. Alonso confirmed he trained this week and â??is going to be okayâ?•. After a poor second half against Leeds, Chelsea need the kind of ball-winning and tempo-setting he brings in the middle of the park.



Alonso's frustration against Leeds was clear on the touchline. Source: Chelsea FC official website (chelseafc.com)

Two familiar absentees

Joao Pedro is not ready to return. The Brazilian has been out with a thigh injury since the win over Everton in October, and Alonso confirmed he will miss the Forest trip. Maxence Lacroix also remains sidelined with the hamstring problem he picked up in the Carabao Cup tie against Liverpool in October. Alonso said the France international is one week closer than he was for the last match, but not close enough for this one. Both players are worth watching in the coming fixtures.

Key battles and what to watch at the City Ground

Alonso expects a â??tough gameâ?•, and there are three themes worth watching.

- **The basics.** Early duels and second balls will tell us quickly whether the message from the training ground has landed. If Chelsea lose the physical contest in the first 20 minutes, the City Ground crowd will become a factor.
- **The middle third.** With Caicedo returning, Chelsea should have more control of the centre. The challenge is to maintain it for the full 90 minutes rather than fading after the break as they did against Leeds.
- **Finishing without a focal striker.** With Joao Pedro still unavailable, Chelsea will need their other attackers to carry the threat. Alonso has spoken about utilising Emeghaâ??s power and handling â??chaotic situationsâ?•, and how Chelsea cope with scrappy, transitional moments will be revealing.

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Why this match matters for Chelsea

Two defeats in a row can turn into a crisis if the third game goes the same way, and Alonso knows it. Every point Chelsea drop in November makes the climb harder in the months ahead, and the head coach has framed this trip as a test of character as much as tactics. He wants standards that are â??not acceptableâ?• to slip to never be repeated, and the City Ground is the first chance to prove that the message has been absorbed. A win would calm the noise quickly. Another flat display would make the next fortnight very uncomfortable.

Prediction: a response, but not a stroll

The quality in this squad has not disappeared in the space of a fortnight. Expect a more resilient, more direct performance, and a tight contest in which one set piece or one moment of quality could settle it. A narrow Chelsea win would be a reasonable call, although Forest at home will make it uncomfortable.

It has been a busy week of Premier League storylines. If you are planning your weekend viewing, read our Arsenal v Man City preview and our Everton v Liverpool preview, and find more in the LBRD Sports section.

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