

St. Louis CITY Makes MLS History, Shuts Out San Jose 3-0

by Nathan Tucker
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ST. LOUIS - Prior to this MLS season, many who covered the league thought that St. Louis's expansion team would struggle, some thought they'd only win four games all season. On Saturday, St. Louis CITY continued to prove all doubters wrong with a dominant 3-0 victory over the San Jose Earthquakes.

"I'm just very proud of this group," said head coach Bradley Carnell following the win. "Everything that we're doing, the excitement, the relentlessness, the ruthlessness of

what we're doing on the pitch. And we're creating moments of quality. We executed the game plan we had in mind, and I thought the boys had their most complete performance to date."

It was relentless. It was ruthless. It's the style of soccer St. Louis CITY has brought to Major League Soccer, and it's one the rest of the league is struggling to keep up with.

On a bitterly cold evening in Downtown West, CITY came out of the gates hot and were creating the better chances early in the contest. Striker Joao Klauss fired a rocket that was parried away by San Jose goalkeeper JT Marcinkowski right around fifteen minutes into the match, which was the best chance in the early going.

St. Louis got on the scoreboard in the 34th minute, when a counter attack found onrushing defender John Nelson. Nelson swung a cross into the San Jose box, and CITY striker Niko Gioacchini was on the scene to toe-poke the ball beyond the outstretched JT Marcinkowski.

"Niko (Gioacchini) complements what we do very well." Bradley Carnell said of the 23-year-old forward. "I think he's found a system here in St. Louis that rewards his style of play. Sometimes it's about painting a picture, sometimes you need oil-based paint, sometimes you need water-based paint. We think we found the paint he needs for his picture."

Artistry aside, endeavor and attack drove St. Louis CITY to their victory on Saturday evening. The second goal, right before halftime, was the end product of a phenomenal hustle play by Joao Klauss. CITY's Brazilian striker dispossessed a San Jose midfielder at the center circle, started the break, and tried to pass to Rasmus Alm. The pass bounced back to him as he skated by the Earthquakes' back line and made no mistake in the box, slotting a shot between the legs of the San Jose keeper Marcinkowski.

The roof lifted off CITYPARK. Chants of "S-T-L! S-T-L! S-T-L!" could probably have been heard counties over. At least it felt that boisterous from the press box.

When asked about how demanding he can be when St. Louis is in possession, Klauss half-joked: "I'm a striker, I always want the ball!"

Klauss has quickly become a fan-favorite among the CITY faithful. Fans in the standing supporters section throw their beers in celebration when he scores. They do so when other people score too, but there's noticeably more when CITY's #9 scores. A player who never really found a home in Europe looks to have found one here in St. Louis.

“I love this city, I already feel like the city is my home.” said Klauss following the win. “I’m glad the city feels the same way about me.”

As one would expect, San Jose pushed to get back in the game in the second half. A slip in defense by CITY defender John Nelson gave the Earthquakes a free cross with several players looking to score. The cross fell to the feet of Quakes forward Cade Cowell, who stabbed his effort wide of goal.

In the 61st minute, CITY captain and goalkeeper Roman Bürki made what could be the biggest save he’s made all season. Cade Cowell got on the end of another San Jose cross, and this time put his shot square on target. Bürki showed off his reflexes with the palm save on the close range shot attempt, and the rebound effort from Earthquakes striker Benji Kikanovic flew into the standing supporters section.

“We’re always good for scoring goals,” CITY captain Roman Bürki said postgame. “So if I can help by keeping a clean sheet, it makes us very hard to beat.”

Czech international Tomas Ostrak came in as a second half substitute, and made an impact in just ten minutes on the pitch. At the edge of the San Jose box, Ostrak had one shot blocked, another CITY shot was blocked, and the loose ball came back to Ostrak. Ostrak was given the freedom of CITYPARK to set his feet and shoot, and he rifled a shot that deflected off an Earthquakes defender and into the net for St. Louis’s third goal of the night.

At that point, the game was officially over. San Jose looked like they wanted to be anywhere but a freezing cold soccer field. The Earthquakes faltered in attack, and were turning the ball over frequently, giving CITY plenty of opportunities to add a fourth goal that never came to fruition.

As mentioned, the win makes St. Louis CITY SC the first MLS expansion team in the league’s brief history to win their first four games. Not only that, CITY now has a five-point lead in the MLS western conference in just four games played.

“It’s a beautiful record, but we’ll be happy about it for about 25 minutes.” said St. Louis CITY Sporting Director Lutz Pfannenstiel Saturday night. “But we’re already thinking about next week. We’re have another game coming up against Salt Lake City, which is a difficult team to play against, we know they’re always dangerous.

“But again, lots of people thought we’d only win four games all season.” Pfannenstiel continued. “Now we’ve won four in the first month. It sounds boring, but we just focus on our principles, that’s the only way we can succeed.”

Succeed they have, likely beyond Lutz's wildest dreams when he was named Sporting Director in 2020. CITY looks to keep the historic start going in next Saturday when they travel to face Real Salt Lake.



