

St. Louis CITY Continues Unprecedented Start, Win 4-0 at Real Salt Lake

by Nathan Tucker

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ST. LOUIS - St. Louis CITY SC hit the road this week, heading to a bitterly cold Sandy, Utah to take on Real Salt Lake. After a slow start, CITY found their footing offensively and hammered the hosts 4-0, staying perfect through five games in the MLS season.

The first half was a chippy and somewhat sloppy affair, and frankly, the worst half of soccer St. Louis CITY has played so far this season. No offensive threat, multiple turnovers in possession, and passing that resulted in half-chances for Real Salt Lake, and without Roman Bürki, would have been trailing heading into the halftime break.

The best chance for either team came right at the stroke of halftime. A loose ball in the box fell to the feet of RSL defender Brayan Vera, who found some space and rifled a shot low toward the CITY goal. Roman Bürki got a strong right hand to the shot and kept the score at 0-0.

Moments later, the halftime whistle blew, likely to the relief of St. Louis CITY. It was the first half of their short MLS tenure that CITY didn't score a goal. Luckily for them, they didn't wait long into the second half for their first goal of the evening.

St. Louis won a corner on their first forward move of the second half, and Niko Gioacchini was right on the spot to side-foot an Indy Vassilev cross right past Real Salt Lake goalkeeper Zac MacMath. It's Gioacchini's second goal in as many games.

It looked like a totally new St. Louis CITY team coming out of the halftime break. CITY had a pep in its step that was lacking in the first half, and were winning the midfield battles they lost in the first half. Gioacchini and Joao Klauss got in behind the RSL defense again in the 59th minute, but Klauss's shot was blocked at the edge of the six-yard box.

Klauss would get another chance moments later, and would make no mistake with that second chance. A deflected shot bounced back to Klauss, who put his laces through the ball on the half-volley from just outside the D at the top of the 18-yard box, and found the corner of Zac MacMath's goal.

At 2-0 up, CITY were in the driver's seat after an impressive start to the second half. They didn't need Salt Lake's Pablo Ruiz to pass the ball right to Klauss to give the Brazilian striker a clean breakaway, but they'll take it. Klauss converted when one-on-one with MacMath and put CITY 3-0 up on the night with his fifth goal of the season. Klauss sits at #2 in the early MLS Golden Boot rankings.

St. Louis continued to put their foot on the throat of Real Salt Lake, continuing to press and look for more goals. The once boisterous supporters section behind one of the goals at America First Field got much quieter in the final stages, and many of the hometown fans made their way for the exits early on a very cold Utah night.

Another goal added by substitute Rasmus Alm in the 76th minute would put the result beyond all doubt, and even with a 4-0 lead, CITY continued to press on and look for more goals. By the final ten minutes of the match, it didn't look like Real Salt Lake really wanted to be playing anymore.

With two goals, Klauss was named Man of the Match for St. Louis City, but one could make an argument for Roman Bürki. Bürki's save at the end of the first half kept the score at 0-0, and had RSL gone into halftime with a lead, the second half could have looked very different.

Bürki was tested a few more times in the late stages, off of corner kicks and frantic Salt Lake attacks. He was equal to the task each time and had a total of eight saves on the night, his highest single-game total thus far for CITY.

With their fifth win in as many matches, St. Louis CITY stays at the top of Major League Soccer with 15 points and goes five points clear of Seattle Sounders at the top of the Western Conference. Real Salt Lake drops down to tenth in the West.

St. Louis CITY returns to Downtown West on April 1, where they put their perfect record on the line yet again by hosting Minnesota United. Kick-off time is set for 7:30.