

Seattle Shuts Down City 3-0, Hands St. Louis Second Straight Loss

by Nathan Tucker
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SEATTLE - After their historic start, St. Louis City SC is finding out how hard Major League Soccer can be, especially against top opposition. Saturday night was the second straight MLS lesson in as many weeks, and for the first time City lost on the road, 3-0 to Seattle Sounders.

Bradley Carnell lined up his St. Louis City team in a 5-3-2 formation, in an attempt to stifle Seattle's possession-heavy attack with more defensive numbers. For the first 45

minutes of the match, the plan mostly worked. Seattle had a few chances, but nothing too dangerous to worry Roman Bürki in the City goal.

On the offensive side of the ball, the best chance for St. Louis came just 16 minutes into the match, striker Joao Klauss got on the end of a pass inside Seattle's penalty box and flicked a shot onto the near post. The shot beat Seattle goalkeeper Stefan Frei but bounced the wrong way off the post and behind for a goal kick.

Unfortunately for the traveling City, that would be their best chance of the 90 minutes plus stoppage time. While the 5-3-2 held for the first half, the Sounders came out of the halftime break with more energy, and after 20 minutes, Joshua Atencio scored the first of the night for Seattle.

Atencio's strike was a first-time hit from outside the 18-yard box. Nicolas Lodeiro rolled a pass back to the onrushing Atencio who hit one that Roman Bürki had no chance to stop. Raul Ruidiaz would make it 2-0 just minutes later.

A cross from Alex Roldan squeezed through the hands of Bürki in City's six-yard box, and Seattle legend Raul Ruidiaz scored his first goal of the MLS season and one of the easier ones of his career. Ruidiaz tapped home from maybe four yards out into an empty net, and the night was solidly Seattle's at the 70-minute mark.

A City player did score a goal on Saturday, according to the official stat sheet. Unfortunately for defender Jake Nerwinski, it was into his own net while trying to defend a corner kick. Nerwinski tried to get a boot to the cross instead of allowing a Seattle player to have an open shot, and the ball deflected off Nerwinski's brightly-colored cleat and into the City goal.

Jordan Morris had the ball in the net for a fourth Seattle goal but was ruled offside, saving St. Louis City a little more embarrassment on the scoresheet. A speculative effort from Celio Pompeu in stoppage time was probably the best shot City had in the second half, which was one of their worst so far this season.

After missing time in practice during the week, Rasmus Alm did not make the team for the trip to Seattle, which led to a start for Miguel Perez. Perez, the second homegrown player in St. Louis City history didn't seem lost by any means, but only a few City players looked "good" in the 3-0 defeat.

Njabulo Blom was brought on for Perez in the 64th minute, and played just 14 minutes before being substituted due to an apparent injury. Blom struggled for movement for a

few moments before going down to the turf at Lumen Field, clutching his groin. Celio Pompeu, who hasn't seen a ton of MLS time this season, finished out the remaining 12 minutes plus stoppage time.

It's another setback for Njabulo Blom, who greatly impressed in his brief time in MLS before having to miss multiple weeks due to COVID. Carnell had been slowly working Blom back up to full-match fitness after his time out due to illness, but the injury has the chance to wipe out any potential progress Blom has made.

For the first time, City finds themselves falling down the MLS standings, They're now second in the Western Conference behind Seattle, and they drop to fourth in the early MLS Supporters Shield standings.

City is back at home this coming Saturday, facing FC Cincinnati. Cincinnati currently leads all of MLS with 17 points, and is one of two clubs who have yet to lose this MLS season. It's another big test for a City team that has come back down to earth over the past few weeks.

CITY2 Corner:

The reserve CITY2 didn't fare too much better in MLS NEXT Pro action on Friday night, losing 3-1 to the visiting Houston Dynamo 2. Much like their loss to Minnesota United 2, CITY2 opened the scoring just minutes into the game.

Aziel Jackson started for CITY2 after playing 20 minutes against the Minnesota United team that traded him last offseason. Jackson had a shot near the edge of the box blocked, which fell to CITY2 wide man Wan Kuzain, who found John Klein at the near post, who slotted an inside foot shot beyond the Houston Dynamo 2 goalkeeper and put CITY2 ahead 1-0.

Dynamo 2's Diego Gonzalez knocked home a rebound 30 minutes later to level the score at 1-1, latching onto a loose ball in the box and rifling it past CITY2 keeper on the day Christian Olivares. For many stretches in the game, CITY2's defense was all over the place, and Houston had plenty of room to run in behind.

Papa Ndoye would score two goals either side of the halftime break to make it 3-1 to the visitors who never looked back. CITY2 was on the backfoot defensively for the final 45 minutes, and it's proving to be a very different 2023 season for CITY2 than 2022 was. Without the help of top-level players getting MLS NEXT Pro minutes as a means of staying fresh, this is now a team of prospects instead of the proven, and the results show it so far this year.

At the end of the match. CITY2 captain Michael Wentzel attempted to poke a shot in and looked to have tweaked something in his leg, staying on the ground when the final whistle blew. One hopes the injury is just a cramp and he'll be available for their next contest on the road at Austin FC 2 next Sunday.