

City Unleashes Storm On Cincinnati, Wins 5-1 After Weather Delay

by Nathan Tucker
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ST. LOUIS - St. Louis City SC welcomed MLS league-leaders FC Cincinnati to a very wet CITYPARK on Saturday night. After a two-hour and 10-minute weather delay, City went to work, and dismantled Cincinnati 5-1.

The weather was the main story of the day heading into the match. A huge wave of severe weather swept the St. Louis region, and downtown St. Louis was under a tornado warning during the scheduled start of the match at 7:30.

During the tornado warning, many fans were left outside the stadium, told to take shelter elsewhere. Only a few thousand fans made it into the stadium before the tornado warning, they found shelter in the concourses and storm shelter areas within CITYPARK.

The delay obviously changed the preparation for the two teams. Speaking post-game, City players thought the downtime actually helped them in the match. Defender Kyle Hiebert played chess with backup goalkeeper Ben Lundt. Midfielder Eduard Löwen said he was laying around watching some MLS games with midfield partner Indiana Vassilev.



“The delay was good for the team,” said Löwen postgame. “We got to spend some time sticking together. It was a very enjoyable delay. Indy (Vassilev) was cracking jokes, it was a great atmosphere in the locker room.”

“We caught some early MLS games, but we were mostly having fun.” said St. Louis City head coach Bradley Carnell. “We wanted to bring that positive energy out with us.”

Despite the weather, tornado warnings, and over two-hour delay, more than 15,000 fans rode out the storms and greeted City when they took to the pitch in Downtown West. If it wasn't apparent already, St. Louis's soccer fans are devoted to their new club.

"The fans definitely helped us," said St. Louis City midfielder/winger Jared Stroud following the match. "We came out (after the delay) and saw how many people were here and we wanted to come out and play. Brad (Carnell, City head coach) said when we came out that we should reward the fans who stayed. Luckily, we did, early and often."

Just three minutes into the match, at approximately 9:52 p.m. central time, St. Louis City opened the scoring off Jared Stroud's right foot. Stroud found space around the corner of the 18-yard box, and beat FC Cincy goalkeeper Roman Celentano at his far post.



"Felt good," said Stroud of his early goal. "My first home goal, it helped us get a few more I think. I was probably somewhere I shouldn't have been on the field, but I smacked it. Hopefully Brad doesn't get too mad at me."

36 minutes later, at approximately 10:28 p.m. central time, City added a second. Eduard Löwen was rewarded for his efforts in the first half by finding a loose ball in the box

and hitting a half-volley shot low to the left side of Roman Celentano's goal. Löwen had come very close to scoring on a free kick about 15 minutes prior. So close, in fact, that the Louligans behind the goal on the north end of CITYPARK set off a smoke bomb thinking Löwen's shot had gone in.

“(Löwen) was connected all the time,” said City SC head coach Bradley Carnell, of the performance of his star midfielder. “He did enough to be defensively solid, but he's also very clean on and with the ball. When there's an edge to the game, he rides tackles.”

While possession and passing stats will look like FC Cincinnati dominated this game, the real result on the field was anything but. Despite the clearing of the weather, Cincy was caught in a City tornado, and couldn't find an escape.

“If we exude pressure and create havoc against an opponent, that's where we thrive.” Carnell noted of his team's relentless performance Saturday night. “I was very happy with tonight's performance, but we don't want to enjoy the show too much. We don't want to lose our shape and our compactness on defense.”

Seven minutes after the second goal, at approximately 10:35 p.m. central time, Kyle Hiebert headed home to stretch the lead to three. Joao Klauss flicked a headed pass into the path of Jared Stroud, who found space on the left wing, and swung in a lovely cross that was only finding the head of Hiebert. Hiebert turned in the goal, and City was absolutely flying into the halftime break.



“I just found a little space in the box,” said Hiebert on his goal. “Amazing ball in by Jared (Stroud), and a good little play by Klauss to set it up. It's really special for me to score in St. Louis with so many friends and family here.”

The only boos to be heard from the 15,000+ in attendance at CITYPARK came at halftime, when an announcement came over the PA system that beer sales would be stopped at the end of halftime due to the late start. Those who were wanting to further celebrate City's goalfest had to hustle and get their beverages during the halftime break.

Eight minutes into the second half, at approximately 10:50 p.m. central time, Niko Gioacchini scored City's fourth goal after being played in behind the FC Cincinnati defense by a sublime pass from Rasmus Alm. Gioacchini, the MLS Expansion Draft selection, has found new life in St. Louis.

“Niko (Gioacchini) is growing all the time,” Bradley Carnell said of his 22-year old striker. “I think he's found a good environment for him to perform. He's a bit of an artist, he has the qualities to change the game. He has all the tools to get in behind and cause havoc.”

Four minutes later, at approximately 10:54 p.m. central time, Rasmus Alm fired a shot from about 25 yards out that bounced off the left goalpost, bounced off the back of Cincinnati goalkeeper Roman Celentano's head, and trickled into the Cincinnati goal for St. Louis's fifth of the night. The goal was credited as an own goal against Celentano, but Alm celebrated his effort all the same.



“(Rasmus Alm) puts his energy on the opponent,” Carnell noted of his energetic midfielder. “He puts pressure on passing sequences and creates opportunities. He was a big part of our ability to play connected and keep our shape intact.”

Cincinnati found the scoreboard five minutes later, at approximately 10:59 p.m. central time, with City stretched and looking to add more goals themselves. Sergio Santos rushed into the box and smashed a Dominique Badji pass beyond Roman Bürki’s right foot.

“I was disappointed we couldn’t keep the shutout for Roman (Bürki),” Bradley Carnell admitted. “We briefly lost our shape and compactness. We tried to reset it a few times tonight.”

The match settled into a bit more of a rhythm for the final thirty minutes. Bradley Carnell opted for fresh legs to keep St. Louis City’s energy high. Among the five subs made in the final thirty minutes was Selmir Pidro, who was the team’s first MLS signing. Saturday night was Pidro’s MLS debut.

“I was very happy for (Selmir Pidro),” Eduard Löwen said after the match. “It was important for him to play tonight. He did a very good job after not playing for a long time.”

“As the game progressed, we wanted to get guys in,” Carnell added. “We have faith and confidence in our players and our roster. It’s our biggest enemy as well, because everyone wants to play a full 90 minutes. It’s all about finding the balance, and we have a lot of games coming up, some midweek games, so we need everyone on board.”

The final whistle blew at approximately 11:30 p.m. central time. The late night at CITYPARK was one that fans won’t forget for a long time. More importantly, City reinstated themselves at the top of MLS after losing two straight.

“We never wanted to say anything was broken,” Bradley Carnell acknowledged. “We are the creators of our own destiny. Everyone expected us to lose in Seattle and we did. So how do we bounce back? We keep things fun, we keep things jovial, lose, but also serious. There’s an ebb and flow, we find balance in the chaos.”

City’s controlled chaos has them back on top of Major League Soccer and the Western Conference with 18 points from their six wins. Up next for City: a trip to Colorado to face Stan Kroenke’s Rapids, with kickoff set for 8:30 p.m. CT on Saturday night.

[Bradley Piros also contributed to this story.](#)