

# St. Louis City SC “Not Up To Standard” - Lose 2-1 To Portland At CITYPARK

by Nathan Tucker  
April 30 2023 11:01 AM



ST. LOUIS - St. Louis City SC knew they'd be facing a strengthened Portland Timbers team compared to the one they faced in March. On Saturday night, City struggled to find a foothold against a tough Timbers side and fell at CITYPARK 2-1.

For fans who might have expected City to win based on the difference between the two teams in the standings, the first half was a rude awakening to just how the game would go. Portland dominated possession early in the first half, in fact, it took nearly 20 minutes for City to even sniff a chance at goal.

Indiana Vassilev found some space after a few tidy passes by the City midfield gave him room just outside the 18-yard box, attacking the north end of CITYPARK in front of the supporters' section. Vassilev's shot was probably a yard or two over the goal, one that was always rising over Timbers goalkeeper Aljaz Ivacic.

The loudest those fans in the supporters' section would get in the first half was yelling for a penalty when Jared Stroud went down inside the edge of the box. St. Louis City head coach Bradley Carnell had a few words with the fourth official on the sideline but didn't seem to protest the lack of a penalty call nearly as much as the 22,429 in attendance in Downtown West.



The fans weren't the only ones frustrated with main referee Ismail Elfath's decision-making in the first half. City goalkeeper and captain Roman Burki went straight to the referee after the halftime whistle blew, looking for an explanation for some of Elfath's first-half refereeing.

Eduard Löwen had a golden opportunity after Rasmus Alm fed him a bouncing ball in the 52nd minute. The star German midfielder collected the pass at the edge of the 18-yard box inside the defense but sliced his effort just a few feet wide of the Portland goal.

“Edu (Löwen) always looks to exploit space,” said City Head Coach Bradley Carnell. “But he’s a targeted man now. Everyone knows how good he is now and they prepare for him.”

Moments later, Roman Bürki came to the rescue to stop what was sure to be a goal off the foot of Timbers winger Santiago Moreno. Moreno played Christian Paredes in behind the City backline, Paredes dropped his pass back to Moreno who had yards of free space in the box, and Bürki came up big yet again when City’s defense was left exposed.

About 10 minutes into the second half, the heavens opened, a good amount of rain began to fall, and with it the temperature fell about 20 degrees. A lovely evening for soccer at CITYPARK had quickly turned into a gloomy affair, and what followed compounded the misery for those gathered in Downtown West.

Santiago Moreno found newly-signed Portland striker Franck Boli running behind the City back line in the 61st minute. Yet again, Roman Bürki was up to the task, denying the former Ferencváros striker.

Unfortunately for City, in an attempt to clear the rebound, John Nelson fell on the loose ball, and referee Ismail Elfath pointed at the penalty spot.

“I don’t think it’s a PK,” said Nelson postgame. “They didn’t even go to VAR (Video Assistant Referee, pro soccer’s review system). I just fell. I’d have to go back and watch it to really see and be sure, but I wasn’t out of position reaching for the ball.”

After the match, referee Ismail Elfath relayed to the media that there was “no clear and obvious error” ruled on his decision that would warrant a VAR check. In the match, Portland’s Evander coolly converted the penalty, sending Roman Bürki the wrong way.

To his credit, City’s Bradley Carnell was very succinct in his answer regarding the referee’s call:

“If we have to rely on the ref, we’re in for a long season.”

Carnell brought on Tomas Ostrak for Miguel Perez to add some attacking emphasis in the second half. After the Portland goal, City subbed on their US Open Cup stars, Aziel Jackson and Célio Pompeu, for the final 23 minutes plus stoppage time.





In the 79th minute, those moves paid dividends. City stormed in, thanks to a good run from Tomas Ostrak down the right side of the box, Ostrak laid off a pass for Pompeu who was standing at the edge of Portland's six-yard box, and Célio side-footed a shot into the roof of the Portland goal.

CITYPARK erupted, but their joy was short-lived. Just three minutes later, Santiago Moreno would dribble through the City midfield and lay a pass off to Portland winger Yimmi Chara, freshly on as a sub for his first MLS action since week one.

Chara took a shot first-time with his right foot, and Roman Bürki was left rooted to his spot. All the City captain could do was watch as Chara's shot found the gaping right side of his goal.

"Today was a bad game for us," City goalscorer Célio Pompeu said following the match. "I don't think we brought our energy. We weren't getting after second balls, we didn't win our challenges (tackles), it was way too easy (for Portland)."

City pushed for a late equalizer by throwing bodies forward, but couldn't create any clear-cut chances in the final minutes. The full-time whistle blew, and the packed away supporters section, full of Timbers forest green, erupted as their team took all three points in St. Louis.

“It’s our own fault, we weren’t aggressive enough,” said City midfielder Eduard Löwen. “In the end, we can only blame ourselves. It was way too easy for Portland to score, the first goal comes from a penalty after a goal kick, the second they had four players rushing in. It was just too easy for them.”

“This was not up to my standards,” admitted Bradley Carnell. “I apologize to the fans. This is not what they come to support. We go home with empty stomachs, no points, we’re disappointed, mostly because we don’t want to play like this in front of our fans. That’s the most hurtful thing.”

City looks to meet those standards and return to winning ways next weekend on the road in the Lone Star State against FC Dallas. Kickoff is set for 7:30 pm Saturday night.