

# City Welcomes Houston Dynamo to CITY PARK, Looks To Sweep Homestand

by Nathan Tucker, Sports Reporter  
June 3 2023 7:25 AM



ST. LOUIS - St. Louis City SC looks to make it three straight in the cauldron that is CITY PARK on Saturday night with Houston Dynamo FC coming to town. Homestands are a bit different in a sport where a team generally plays once per week, but City has a chance for a three-game sweep in Downtown West this weekend.

“We knew that we needed a good home stretch,” said Bradley Carnell at his pre-match presser on Thursday. “We got off to a good start against Sporting KC, we knew Vancouver was going to be a really tricky and really difficult opponent... (Saturday’s game against Houston) is the next three points and the next journey.”

City’s journey this season has been a winding road, full of peaks and valleys a fledgling expansion team can face. One of their biggest obstacles has been injuries that have forced shakeups, primarily to striker Joao Klauss and midfielder Rasmus Alm.

Klauss went off with an injury to his quad in a 1-1 draw at Colorado Rapids in April. Following Klauss’s injury, City’s goals dried up, the worst case being the 1-0 loss at Soldier Field to a lackluster Chicago Fire team.

Since that paltry display, however, City has opened the floodgates again, scoring seven goals in two matches at CITY PARK. Even still, teammates want Klauss back on the team sheet.

“Every day I’m asking him, ‘When are you coming back?’” said City’s Eduard Lowen following a recent match. “We’re looking forward to getting him back soon.”

How soon might that be? Bradley Carnell gave an update on the status of both Klauss and Alm Thursday afternoon:

“Klauss did part one of training (Thursday), Alm was fully integrated in the group,” Bradley Carnell said, updating the status of the two key City players.

“He’s eligible, available to dress (on Saturday). Klauss, we’ll have to see, but it might be a game too soon, and we have to think about the turnaround for Wednesday (the rescheduled resumption of City’s away match against FC Dallas)”

If we know anything of Bradley Carnell’s strategy of easing players back from injury, just look at Njabulo Blom’s progressive return, it will likely be a while before Klauss returns to the starting eleven. But perhaps a substitute appearance within the next week is on the table for the striker who’s now missed five weeks of action.

Rasmus Alm's impending return, one could guess as a substitute on Saturday night, might force Carnell into another lineup shakeup. After going 11MLS matches with 11different lineups, Carnell has gone to the same lineup twice the past two weeks.

The results are quite plain to see: 4-0 over an improving Sporting Kansas City team, and a 3-1 win over a Vancouver Whitecaps team that's often a struggle to break down defensively.

So is it a simple case of "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" for City and Carnell? Or something deeper?

Striker Niko Gioacchini mentioned work he had done in training following the 4-0 win over Sporting KC. Work that included the way he played as a standalone striker, including how he played on and off the ball.

"I had some personal adjustments that I talked to my teammates about," said Gioacchini back on May 20. "I tried to stay away from him (Indiana Vassilev, who played a more advanced midfield role in both the SKC and Vancouver wins) and give him more space to turn and create and it worked. It's something to keep in mind for the future."

During their search for offense following Klauss's injury, it often felt like City was playing as if Klauss was still out there, playing long balls that would usually be meat and drink for the big Brazilian striker.

Now it seems City is playing more to Gioacchini's game, which can utilize his pace, but also opens up space for their attacking midfielders like Indiana Vassilev and Eduard Lowen to create, and score.

On Houston's side, they're coming off a 6-2 loss in Vancouver on Wednesday, and will likely have a bit of squad rotation following their midweek action. It's a game that Houston actually led 2-1 after 16 minutes.

The Dynamo fell apart in the second half, and the Whitecaps were scoring goals for fun. And that was before their midfielder Nelson Quinones saw a straight red card for a violent tackle just six minutes after being subbed on.

No one wants to play an angry team, and Houston will certainly be looking to hit the reset button when they come to CITY PARK Saturday and keep their playoff hopes on track. The Dynamo currently sit in the final playoff spot in the MLS Western Conference.

“This game could be a very tight affair and determined by a set piece,” said Bradley Carnell, noting Houston’s desire to get a result after their bad midweek match. “But we’ve earned a little respect on the set piece side of things.”

“They played some guys 60 minutes (Wednesday),” Carnell continued. “They might get those guys turned back around (for Saturday). But we can only control what we can control. I know they have a very good roster, and Ben Olsen (Houston's manager) I know likes to bring some grit and desire to his teams.”

City will have to match that grit and desire Saturday if they want a homestand sweep. The broadcast is streaming for free on Apple TV with St. Louis-born soccer star Taylor Twellman on commentary.

Local radio broadcasts are available on KYKY Y98.1 FM in English and KXOK 102.9 FM in Spanish.