

City Head To Vancouver In Reunion for Right Back Jake Nerwinski

by Nathan Tucker, Sports Reporter
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ST. LOUIS - You may think, after clinching the MLS Western Conference this past weekend, that St. Louis City SC might take their foot off the gas with two games remaining in their regular season, starting with this week's road trip to take on the Vancouver Whitecaps Wednesday night.

With an extended international break coming up, and two games that arguably don't really matter for City, maybe it makes sense to give players an extra rest. That wouldn't be very City of them, however.

“Between now and Vancouver, 100% focus on the game,” said City head coach Bradley Carnell at his pre-match presser. “For sure we'll give the players a few days off (after the game), and we'll have a scrimmage on the 14th (of October). So we'll keep up ourselves.”

Even though it may appear as though St. Louis City have hit just about every regular season MLS goal there is, there's still one more box to check for Bradley Carnell and his team this month.

“We want to keep going now,” said Carnell last Saturday after a big 4-1 win over Sporting Kansas City. “We need a couple of points now to reach 58 points, to make that record our own.”

That record that Bradley Carnell mentioned is the MLS record for points for a team in their inaugural season. LAFC set the record with 57 points back in 2018.

St. Louis City, sitting on 56 points, would tie that record with a draw on Wednesday night. A win would make the record their own, just as they have for many MLS inaugural season or expansion team records so far this season.

Outside of that record-breaking point total, with FC Cincinnati officially clinching the MLS Supporters Shield, City have pretty much crossed every bridge they needed to this season. Bradley Carnell credits his team for “buying in”, even if the motivation didn't come from him.

“It was externally driven in the beginning,” said Carnell. “There was buy-in because everyone doubted us, because of where we come from and our statuses as professionals.

Wednesday's opponent, the Vancouver Whitecaps, come into the match desperate for points, currently locked in a battle with pretty much all of the Western Conference for playoff position. With a win Wednesday, the Whitecaps can clinch their place in the playoffs, currently sitting on 43 points in 7th place.

There's only one guarantee as far as the Western Conference goes in MLS: that City will be on top. The remaining eight playoff places are separated by five points, with Real Salt Lake sitting in second with 46 points, and FC Dallas currently claiming the ninth spot on 41 points.

Between them are Seattle, LAFC, Houston, Vancouver, Portland, and San Jose. Teams like Kansas City and Minnesota sit on the outside looking in, but are just three points behind Dallas.

This is all to say that points are becoming crucial for just about every team in the west, and the Whitecaps will be putting out their best possible squad against City, not just so they can clinch their place, but so they can potentially get home field advantage in the first round. BC Place might not always have the most raucous atmosphere, but being a turf field is increasingly rare in MLS, and does offer Vancouver a specific advantage.

“It’s tough to play at BC Place,” said Carnell. “It’s never an easy away trip.”

One man more than familiar with the turf of BC place is City right back Jake Nerwinski. Nerwinski was drafted 7th overall in the 2017 MLS SuperDraft by the Whitecaps, and through 2022, played every professional minute of his career with the Vancouver crest on his chest.

After 2022, Vancouver didn’t pick up Nerwinski’s contract. His agent reached out to a few clubs, one of which being St. Louis City. He signed with City last November, not wasting any time.

As mentioned previously in my preview for the last meeting between City and Vancouver, a 3-1 City win back in May at CITY PARK, Nerwinski played a lot of time in Vancouver outside of his natural position at right back.

At City, Jake Nerwinski has made 27 appearances this season, 23 as a starter and four coming off the bench, and all have been as a right back. When he signed with City, that was one thing that Bradley Carnell assured Jake.

“When we talked on the phone, (Carnell) told me ‘I see you as a right back’,” said Nerwinski in recent media availability. “And that was a big relief for me.”

What City fans have seen with Nerwinski playing in a position more comfortable to him is a Jake Nerwinski that’s more comfortable on the pitch, and specifically on the ball on his right foot, and full backs with skill on the ball are crucial in Bradley Carnell’s system.

This was possibly most on display in City’s recent road victory in Minnesota, where Nerwinski and Klauss linked up for the Brazilian’s game-winning goal.

“I think it’s a testament to our playing style, our principles that we’ve been taught over the course of this season,” said Nerwinski this week. “We know where we’re supposed

to be at all times, on the ball and off the ball, and I think that's the chemistry we've built from preseason."

Jake Nerwinski and the rest of St. Louis City head north of the border to take on the Vancouver Whitecaps Wednesday night, with kickoff just after 9:30 pm central time. The game is streaming for free on Apple TV, and local radio broadcasts can be found on KYKY 98.1 FM in English and KXOK 102.9 FM in Spanish