

# St. Louis City Opens 2024 With Champions Cup

by Nathan Tucker, Sports Reporter  
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**ST. LOUIS** - The curtain rises on St. Louis City SC's 2024 season on Tuesday night, as they welcome 22,000-plus soccer fans into CITY PARK. They'll also welcome the Houston Dynamo, their first-ever opponents in continental competition.

While it's opening night for City and the visiting Dynamo, it is not the start of the MLS season. Tuesday's clash is in the Concacaf Champions Cup, where 27 teams from all over the Concacaf region (North America, Central America, and the Caribbean) are put

into a single-elimination bracket. 22 teams meet in the first round, while five teams, the winners of MLS Cup, Liga MX, Leagues Cup, Caribbean Cup, and Central American Cup get first-round byes.

Whoever advances after the two-legged matchup between City and the Houston Dynamo will take on MLS Cup winners, the Columbus Crew, who await them in the round of 16. City are hosting the first leg, with the second leg in Houston next Tuesday.

St. Louis City qualified for the Concacaf Champions Cup by way of their first-place finish in the MLS Western Conference regular season, despite their untimely playoff exit. Houston qualified for the Champions Cup by winning last year's US Open Cup.

That berth in the competition is at risk in 2024, as Major League Soccer and the nation's longest-standing soccer tournament have remained at odds since the league attempted to pull out of the tournament in mid-December. MLS proposed to replace their clubs with MLS NEXT Pro reserve teams.

US Soccer rejected this, but as of this point in time, the split between Major League Soccer and the US Soccer Federation has put the country's most storied soccer competition in danger for at least 2024.

Arthur Mattson resigned from his post as chairman on the US Open Cup committee within United States Soccer Federation (USSF). According to ESPN soccer reporter Jeff Carlisle, was told to "stand down" by higher ranking officials within US Soccer when it comes to Major League Soccer's participation in the Open Cup. Mattson also told Carlisle that the Open Cup was in "grave danger".

It would be a shame, given so much of St. Louis's soccer history is tied to the US Open Cup, for the team and the city not to be able to participate in the tournament moving forward. Unfortunately, at this time it looks like St. Louis won't be in the 2024 Open Cup, if there is a 2024 Open Cup.

With a chance at one trophy seemingly vanishing for MLS clubs, that makes the Concacaf Champions Cup even more significant for City and the other MLS teams that have qualified. It wouldn't be too surprising for City and the Dynamo to field something close to their first-choice squads Tuesday night.

For City, their continental debut is another "first" for the club after an inaugural season full of them. Head coach Bradley Carnell said that Tuesday's match is a "celebration" for what the team and the city has achieved so far.

“We’re trying to treat this as an experience,” Carnell noted. “The experience of playing in the Champions Cup. It’s a celebration of us and St. Louis and it’s another first we’ve never had. It’s something to embrace, and something for us to enjoy as well.”

Carnell also updated that Rasmus Alm was dealing with an injury and the team was “trying to get him along”, but otherwise the team was fit and ready to play Tuesday. That includes star midfielder Eduard Löwen, and central defender Joakim Nilsson, who were away from the team during preseason getting green cards but rejoined training last week.

With green cards, Nilsson and Löwen no longer take international slots on the City roster, opening those slots up for Sporting Director Lutz Pfannenstiel. Without getting too far into the weeds of MLS contract intricacies, those slots can be used for players or sold/traded to other MLS teams.

All of City’s new arrivals are “roster ready” as well, including the later-arriving Danish left back Nikolas Dyhr. The new City arrivals solidify depth in needed areas, the wide defensive areas and central midfield.

“It’s a good problem to have,” Bradley Carnell said of the depth of City’s squad. “We want to be two deep in every position, and credit to the guys, competition has been healthy. We’ve been pushing each other hard in training. We’ve been demanding a lot of the boys with some new concepts that we’ve been trying to train and do.”

Speaking of new concepts, City’s away kits got an overhaul from last year’s road grays for the 2024 season. The new “Confluence Kit” is white and red, with a light pattern that represents the flowing rivers of the St. Louis area.



While we won't see the new kits Tuesday night at CITY PARK, they'll likely make their debut in Houston, in the second leg of the Champions Cup next Tuesday.

For the Dynamo, their offseason has been largely unfortunate to say the least. Star Mexican midfielder Hector Herrera is missing the start of the season due to a knee injury, and starting winger Nelson Quinones is officially missing the whole season due to his own knee injury suffered on international duty with Colombia.

Both Herrera and Quinones were key parts of Houston's run to the MLS Western Conference final last season, both starting in that 2-0 final loss to LAFC. Also gone from that team is striker Corey Baird, who left as a free agent to FC Cincinnati in the offseason.

Unfortunately for Houston, it doesn't seem like there's an immediate replacement coming for the skill they're missing from last year's team. It should soothe Dynamo supporters that the team re-signed midfielder Coco Carrasquilla, who has only gotten better in Houston since arriving from Spanish side FC Cartagena on loan in 2021.

In two MLS meetings last season, City won 3-0 over the Dynamo at CITY PARK, and drew 1-1 in Houston. Eduard Löwen and Niko Gioacchini penalty kick goals decided the home win, and a Joao Klauss header in the 88th minute stole a point for City in Houston last September.

A short offseason comes to an end Tuesday night when St. Louis City SC hosts the Houston Dynamo in Concacaf Champions Cup opening round action. The game will be televised on FS2 at 7 pm, with radio broadcasts available on KYKY 98.1 FM in English and KXOK 102.9 FM in Spanish.