

St. Louis City Saves A Draw Against Stingy Real Salt Lake

by Nathan Tucker, Sports Reporter
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ST. LOUIS - In 2023, St. Louis City SC marked their arrival in Major League Soccer with five straight wins, wins that set the stage for what would be a historic inaugural season.

On Saturday night, City came out just a bit flat against a defensively sound Real Salt Lake team. The teams shared two goals and shared two points following a 1-1 draw at CITY PARK.

Part of the success in 2023's MLS season opener was Tim Parker, who scored the first competitive goal in City history in Austin last year. In 2024's opener, Tim Parker played just over half an hour before taking a seat at midfield with an apparent injury.



Luckily for St. Louis City, head coach Bradley Carnell said postgame that the vice-captain's injury didn't seem too serious.

"I think (Parker)'s going to be okay, without chatting to our doctor," Carnell said. "Tim knows his body really well, and he said he just felt a very tight muscle."

With Parker needing to be substituted, in stepped Josh Yaro to fill in for Parker alongside Joakim Nilsson, who got his first start after not featuring in the Concacaf Champions Cup game last Tuesday.

Nilsson missed multiple weeks of preseason while he was away in Sweden, sorting out green card paperwork so that he no longer counts as an international player by MLS contract rules.

“It was frustrating, but it benefits me and benefits the club,” Joakim Nilsson said of his time away. “I watched the (preseason) games from overseas, but I’d rather have played. I tried to stay fit, I had access to a gym and an indoor hall with turf, but the hall had no heat so it was like 20 degrees Fahrenheit. I’d rather have been in California.”

For a player who missed a lot of training time, Nilsson looked sharp for 90 minutes. He led the team in passes completed and pass accuracy, and broke up numerous Real Salt Lake attacks on the defensive end.

On the whole, however, City were quite sloppy in possession and in their attempts to move the ball, something head coach Bradley Carnell and City players spoke to postgame.

“We just couldn't get that next pass and that often broke down,” Bradley Carnell elaborated. “We had some transitions going the other way broken down with very cheap giveaways, and yeah, the boys were disappointed at halftime. They know we could do better.”



Striker Sam Adeniran, who watched the first 65 minutes from the bench, was able to break down City's first-half struggles on a tactical level.

"Real Salt Lake is a good team, and we didn't have much of an outlet to move forward," noted Adeniran postgame. "Credit to Real Salt Lake for defending well, for us, being able to use those outlets (passes out wide in build-up) is so important."

A goalless first half, but a first half the visitors were more than happy with. RSL had a few sights at goal, with Roman Bürki making a few solid first-half saves. Neither goalkeeper was too busy, but Bürki had to put in a bit more work throughout the night.

Real Salt Lake put their foot on the gas to start the second half, and at times City were hanging on, defending wave after wave of gold and blue attackers.

Chicho Arango had the ball in the net for RSL in the 65th minute but was coming back from an offside position, so the score remained goalless for the time being. In the 74th minute, he latched onto a pass from new Salt Lake signing and former Middlesbrough midfielder Matt Crooks and slid a shot to Roman Bürki's left to open the scoring.

The Arango goal was the wake-up call that St. Louis City needed. Now forced to play more direct, chasing a tying goal, City opened up space behind the Salt Lake defense.

RSL's lead lasted five minutes. Eduard Löwen chipped a pass for Sam Adeniran to chase, Adeniran beat a Salt Lake defender on the right wing, cut inside the box, and curled a left-footed shot around Zac MacMath in the Real Salt Lake goal.

"I give credit to Edu (Löwen)," said Adeniran on his goal. "Every single time I make a run forward, I know Edu sees me. He always puts it in a great spot. I had to do some work, but he needed to put that ball in there for me to get on to it."



With ten minutes plus eight minutes of stoppage time to play, there was ample time for either side to steal all three points late, and it looked like Real Salt Lake could swing the game back in their favor late on with a series of attacks.

In the 97th of 98 minutes, some sloppy midfield play led to a huge late chance for the visitors. Chicho Arango played in midfielder Anderson Julio, who had fresh legs after being subbed into the game in the 86th minute. Julio fired a shot toward a gaping goal, but it wasn't Roman Bürki blocking this one, it was Jake Nerwinski.

Nerwinski hustled all the way back to defend the RSL attack and threw his body in front of the ball to save a draw for City.

“We thought we had many good looks and gained some form of momentum through that second half,” said City head coach Bradley Carnell. “All of a sudden, they have three guys standing in our box, and (Nerwinski) is salvaging something on our goal line.”

The final whistle blew, the scores level, likely a fair result for City on the night. It was a very different contest than Tuesday's win over Houston, a more physical, back-and-forth contest.

Njabulo Blom chalked that up to Salt Lake's more aggressive style.

“I think it depends on the kind of team we play,” said Blom. “When we know we're playing Houston, they have a slow build up and are a bit more tactical. Today's game was a bit of back-and-forth, back-and-forth.”

Bradley Carnell, while not thrilled with his team's sloppy play through phases of the match, praised the team's resilience to get a point.

“Not all evenings are going to be picture perfect and not all evenings are going to be successful in the eyes of how we imagine things,” Carnell said after the game. “But what I love about this group is the fire and the fight to get back into the game.”

“I see a lot of hungry guys sitting on the sidelines,” Carnell continued. “I see a team who is committed to go to the end. So yeah, while it wasn't pretty, it wasn't the best day at the office, good teams find a way to get a point and a result. Credit to the boys for staying in it and fighting through it. We move on to Tuesday's game. It's a big game in Houston, and we have to be best prepared.”

It's a short turnaround for City, who travel Sunday to Houston ahead of Tuesday's second leg match in the Concacaf Champions Cup against the Dynamo. City hold a 2-1 aggregate lead, and a win, draw, or one-goal loss scoring at least two goals (thanks to the Champions Cup away goals tiebreaker) would see them through to the Round of 16. [Bradley Piros also contributed to this story.](#)