

St. Louis City Heads To Austin, Where The Magic Began

by Nathan Tucker, Sports Reporter
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ST. LOUIS - After a bit of a hectic start to the 2024 season, St. Louis City SC had their first full week of training uninterrupted by a Tuesday game and the subsequent recovery from playing 90 minutes twice a week.

Coming off a full week of training fresh and focused, City heads to Texas to take on Austin FC in their first away match in MLS play. It's also a reunion of sorts, as Austin's Q2 Stadium was the site of City's first MLS win last season.

It's the site where Tim Parker etched his name into St. Louis sports history by scoring City's first-ever goal. It's where City came from behind to overcome a wonderful goal from Austin's star man Sebastian Driussi.

Throughout the past year, players and Bradley Carnell alike have mentioned how important that game was, a stepping stone for their unprecedented inaugural season.

"The way we came back, the way we showed our character, the way we showed resolve," said Carnell this week. "we go up, we go down, we fight back up and we get the game-winner at the end. Those emotions carried us through the next couple of weeks, and we went 5-0, but that's history."

"It was an emotional start for all of us, on this journey of a new franchise, a new team. What are the internal expectations? What will the outside world perceive us to be? I think we've developed (since the first game in 2023), and now it's business. Now we're just going there to get three points," Carnell said.

"A lot of positive memories," said City midfielder Eduard Löwen. "My first MLS game, a really great atmosphere in the stadium, immediately had our first win. Just a lot of good memories."

While those memories of 2023's sensational start will live long for City and their fans, 2024 has been different. For City's first three games of this calendar year, Bradley Carnell's team didn't quite look like the fearless side that took MLS by storm.

It took a moment of brilliance in the 90th minute from MLS SuperDraft pick Hosei Kijima to grab City a win in the first leg of their Concacaf Champions Cup tie against the Houston Dynamo. That was followed up by a 1-1 draw in their MLS opener against Real Salt Lake, where Sam Adeniran bailed City out with less than 20 minutes to play.

Then there was the second leg of the Champions Cup in Houston, a game in which City barely created any offensive opportunities and one that was ultimately lost by some defensive confusion on a set piece. City lost 1-0 and was bounced out of their first-ever continental competition.

A 1-1-1 start through three games. It is not alarmingly terrible, but seemingly a different St. Louis City than we collectively saw in 2023.

That changed last Saturday against New York City FC, where City had their first performance that looked like "City" en route to a comfortable 2-0 win at CITY PARK. NYCFC had a few half-chances, but City were playing their style of soccer again. There was an urgency and an intensity that was seemingly lacking from their previous displays.

“We came out today to send a message to show that we were a little bit angry with ourselves in the past performance, and to set things straight,” opened Bradley Carnell last Saturday night after the win at CITY PARK.

Coming off a convincing win and a full week of training, City have largely set things straight and looks to be in a better place than they were this time last week.

Unfortunately, there are still injury concerns for Bradley Carnell to work around when constructing his matchday squad.

While Tim Parker and Joakim Nilsson are your presumed starting center-backs for Saturday evening, Kyle Hiebert and Josh Yaro both look likely to miss the match. Hiebert is still on the mend from a knee injury suffered in training, while Josh Yaro is dealing with a strain in his hamstring.

Njabulo Blom will also be missing Saturday’s contest as he recovers from a knock in training as well. That likely puts Chris Durkin back alongside Eduard Löwen in City’s midfield, which worked well for the team last weekend.

“Both (Blom and Durkin) are more defense-oriented,” said Eduard Löwen on Thursday. “Which is good for me, that gives me a little bit more freedom. That’s what Chris (Durkin) told me before the game, that he’s trying to give me as much freedom as he can.

“It was really good to play next to him, we were pushing each other on the field to go back and forth, to keep running all 90 minutes. I enjoyed playing next to him a lot, and I think we played a good game together.”

One longer-injured name that looks to make a comeback Saturday evening is Rasmus Alm, a player that Bradley Carnell has lauded for his energy and enthusiasm in training in his efforts to come back to game action.

“He’s been cleared and he’s feeling good,” said Carnell.

For the hosting Austin FC, who are looking for their first win of 2024, they could be without their star-attacking midfielder Sebastian Driussi. Driussi set the league alight with 22 goals in MLS play in 2022, while he cooled off a bit with 11 last season, he scored each time St. Louis City and Austin FC met.

City travels to Texas to tussle with Austin FC on Saturday night, with kickoff just after 7:30 p.m. The game is available for streaming through MLS Season Pass on Apple TV, and local radio broadcasts can be found on KYKY 98.1 FM in English and KXOK 102.9 FM in Spanish.

