

# Célio Pompeu Saves A Point For St. Louis In Austin

by Nathan Tucker, Sports Reporter  
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AUSTIN, Texas - St. Louis City got their historic inaugural season started with a come from behind win in Austin last February. On Saturday night, City went back to the scene of that memorable evening to take on Austin FC.

Just like that fateful February evening, City had to come from behind on Saturday. Just like last year, City stole a result in the final moments, this time saving a 2-2 draw in stoppage time.

The hosts got out to an early lead in the 14th minute, when some pressure in City's defensive third resulted in a corner kick. Austin's Zan Kolmanic whipped in a corner that Matt Hedges put a glancing header on, leaving Roman Burki rooted to his spot and the ball bounced beyond him to his right.

City spent much of the first half pushing for an equalizer, and their relentless pressing kept creating more and more opportunities. Though Austin was ahead on the scoreboard, City spent plenty of time on the ball trying to create a breakthrough.

"I felt we started off the game a little bit slower than usual," said City head coach Bradley Carnell postgame. "You could see the intensity of the game, you could see how deep they were sitting back - you could just see that they were just trying to bunker in to survive a moment. And within that we kind of fell into that trap of trying to dictate the play and trying to dictate the terms. I think it took a while for us to start implementing our game."

Indiana Vassilev had a chance rushing beyond the Austin defense, but couldn't chip a shot over Austin's goalkeeper Brad Stuver. Eduard Lowen looked a constant threat, and City are typically firing on all cylinders when their midfield maestro is playing his best game.

Lowen just missed opening the scoring about 10 minutes before half when Celio Pompeu chased down a long through ball that drew Brad Stuver out of his goal. Pompeu, covered by Stuver and an Austin defender, played a sharp pass back to Eduard Lowen. Lowen fired a shot just over the frame of goal, with Stuver nowhere to be seen.

As City piled on the pressure toward the end of the first half, it looked like Eduard Lowen had the ball beyond Brad Stuver and the Austin FC goal line, but referee Guilherme Ceretta didn't point to the center circle.

Unlike the Premier League and the World Cup, there is no "goal line technology" in MLS, meaning that there isn't an automated ball-spotting system that sends a signal to the main referee when a ball crosses the goal line.

Löwen curled in one of his trademark dangerous free kicks, which bounced in the six-yard box, bounced off one post, deflected off Brad Stuver, looked to cross the line and be in the net, and Stuver slung the ball away from goal. City players protested that the ball had indeed crossed the line.

"I don't know," said Eduard Löwen, on his potential goal that wasn't. "For me it seemed at least very, very close and the ball might have been in. I don't know. I honestly was waiting for the referee, I was thinking he could check it on his watch with (goal line

technology). But, yeah, at the end of the day, he said they checked it, they said it wasn't in.”

While it looked like the ball had crossed the goal line on replay, and according to the Apple TV broadcasters, no referee at Q2 Stadium saw things that way, and City went into the halftime break down a goal that they might have scored.

“I thought we got ourselves back into the game the last 10 minutes of that half,” Bradley Carnell noted. “I think that looked exactly like the game we planned for and how we wanted to get through the (defensive) lines, between the lines and finish up with final plays (attempts on goal).”

City kept executing that plan to open the second half, and quickly found their equalizer two minutes into the second half, Aziel Jackson took a pass just on the inside of the Austin 18-yard box, and was chopped down by Austin defender Alexander Ring. Eduard Löwen stepped up to the penalty spot and calmly converted to tie the game at one.

That scoreline lasted about two minutes. Julio Cascante found far too much open space in front of Roman Bürki’s goal and Alexander Ring, minutes after giving up a penalty that leveled the scoreline, chipped a cross to Cascante who buried a header beyond Burki.

A disheartening goal to give up for St. Louis City, but like the first half, City were forced to attack to get something out of this game.

“Two critical moments that we gave away, we have to look at that,” admitted Bradley Carnell. “It is unfortunate because a performance like this deserves three points.”

Bradley Carnell switched Sam Adeniran for Joao Klauss for a fresh striker, hoping to ask different questions of the Austin FC defense. An Austin FC defense that was, visibly, tiring as the game went on.

By nature, City’s high-press, powered by their physicality in tackles and their energy to get to loose balls, wore down Austin FC. As the clock ticked past 90 minutes, City were still looking for a game-saving goal, and Austin looked increasingly weary.

In the 93rd minute, the third of five added minutes, City had the ball and were piling numbers into the attacking third of the field. Tomas Ostrak played a pass to his fellow Tomas, Tomas Totland, who was making a run inside the box to the left of Brad Stuver’s goal.

Nine Austin FC defenders were in the box, but none of them were tracking Célio Pompeu on the weak side of play. Totland spotted Pompeu, chipping a pass back to City's Brazilian winger. Pompeu cranked his right foot back in anticipation, and smacked a shot toward goal that deflected off Austin's Ethan Finlay and beyond the diving Brad Stuver into the back of the Austin goal.

“Oh, this comes from a lot of communication between me and (Tomas Totland) Tots during practice,” said Pompeu after the game. “Tots loves those crosses. They're very good crosses. He always tells me, ‘Célio, always go to the second balls, always go to the second balls. One ball is going to come to you.’”

After what many called a “breakout” performance from Célio Pompeu in last Saturday's 2-0 win over New York City FC, his game-winner in Austin on Saturday night will only spread the legend further. A player that City found while he played at Virginia Commonwealth University, Pompeu joined CITY2 in 2022 and has been on an upward trajectory with the club since.

Guilherme Ceretta blew his whistle for the final time, and City stuck to their principles, huffing and puffing longer than Austin FC could, and they were rewarded with a point. A point that keeps City in fourth place in the MLS Western Conference at this early stage of the season.

“I think this was a total team performance for 65 minutes and it's just a pity we couldn't walk away with three points,” Carnell said following the draw.

“But I love the determination of the group to fight till the bitter end. This is what defines us over the course of the season. We are three games in now and we spoke about collecting up points. No team in this league is an easy walkover.”

Next week, City is set for a battle in Los Angeles, as they head to California to take on the LA Galaxy next Saturday night. The Galaxy have been a pleasant surprise so far, drawing with the Lionel Messi-powered Inter Miami despite being down to 10 men, and cruising to a 3-1 win in the California Classico against San Jose.