

# St. Louis City Gets A Point In Six-Goal Thriller In LA

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CARSON, Cal. - St. Louis City SC was back on the road Saturday night, roughly 1800 miles southwest of CITY PARK in Carson, California to take on the LA Galaxy.

The Galaxy opened and closed the scoring, but six goals were shared evenly for a 3-3 draw in a wild game at Dignity Health Sports Park Saturday night.

Not even three minutes into the game, the Galaxy were on the board. A Galaxy counter-attack caught the City defense off balance, leaving a handful of open attackers for Galaxy left back Julian Aude to find in the box. He chose striker Dejan Joveljic, who blasted a left-footed shot from just left of the penalty spot. The ball was in Roman Bürki's goal before the Swiss shot-stopper could even react.

Not an ideal start for City on the road against a more attacking, more cohesive LA Galaxy team than they saw last year.

Moments later, Bürki was tested again when new Galaxy signing Joseph Paintsil flew down the right wing and crossed a ball into the path of Diego Fagundez, who was running into the City box. Fagundez flashed a short-range effort that Roman Bürki swatted away with a split-second save.

The Galaxy were asking questions early and often and rang the crossbar twice in a matter of seconds in the 13th minute. Star Galaxy midfielder Riqui Puig curled a shot that bounced off the bar, and the rebound effort from Dejan Joveljic also found the woodwork.

The Galaxy was firing on all cylinders, and City needed a bit of a break. In the 26th minute, they got exactly that, when some sloppy passing in defense saw Riqui Puig gift a pass to City's Tomas Ostrak.

Ostrak closed down Puig quickly and suddenly had the ball at his feet at the edge of the Galaxy's 18-yard box. Ostrak put a clinical finish to the left of Galaxy goalkeeper John McCarthy to bring City back into the game.

"It's our identity," said Ostrak, on what led to his goal. "Pressing forward, being on the front foot, being proactive, this is our identity. I think I did well."

On Thursday, in City's pre-match press conference, Bradley Carnell, as he so often does, preached City's belief in the collective. That while City would miss Eduard Löwen, whoever would fill his spot in the lineup would do so with hunger and fire. Tomas Ostrak got the call, and his equalizing goal rewarded Carnell's selection.

The teams went into halftime with the scoreline still level, but City definitely escaped a first half where the LA Galaxy were threatening early and often. LA manager Greg Vanney would probably have thought his team should have been a goal or two up at the break.

The Galaxy took a lead they probably deserved just six minutes into the second half, as right winger Joseph Paintsil left the St. Louis City defense in the dust en route to a breakaway finish Roman Bürki could do nothing about.

Two minutes later, Bürki kept out a third from the Galaxy. Once again Joseph Paintsil flew down the right wing, which he did with frequency Saturday night, as City's left wing had no answer for Paintsil's pace. Paintsil whipped in a cross that Dejan Joveljic got a boot to, but Roman Bürki again came up with a big point-blank save to keep his City side in the match.

Bürki once again came to the rescue with a kick save and a beauty to deny Joveljic again in the 58th minute. The City captain and keeper was largely the reason they were able to stay in the game.

Joao Klauss's first big chance at goal came in the next City attack, and John McCarthy stuck out a right boot to deflect the big Brazilian's shot behind for a corner kick. On the ensuing corner, Joakim Nilsson produced a moment of magic.

Aziel Jackson swung a corner across the face of the goal to the far post, where recent substitute Sam Adeniran was lurking. Adeniran headed the corner back across the face of the goal, and Joakim Nilsson, back toward the goal within the six-yard box, went up for an overhead bicycle kick. Nilsson got enough on his acrobatic kick to find the top corner from short range, his first MLS goal leaving the Galaxy and the 20,000-plus at Dignity Health Sports Park stunned.

"Yeah, I mean, it all went so fast," said City center-back and first-time MLS goal scorer Joakim Nilsson. "It's Sam who heads it, right, and then I kind of felt that I had to do something."

Only 60 minutes of game time had passed at this point, but there'd been more action than most games see over 90 minutes. Both teams were throwing everything but the kitchen sink at each other.

"It was an excellent advertisement for the league," said Carnell. "Two good teams going at each other."

For all the goals, Roman Bürki was once again at his very best. Another big save in the 73rd minute denied Galaxy center-back Martin Caceres, who connected with a header off an LA set piece.

A trend that developed early in 2024 has been a defensive vulnerability on set pieces and corner kicks for City, something Bradley Carnell has said the team has to adjust moving forward.

In the closing stages, the 88th minute to be exact, City won a corner kick of their own, a chance to take a late lead. With striker Joao Klauss subbed out for defender Kyle Hiebert, partly to shore up the defense on set piece plays, Hiebert was tasked with Klauss's responsibility of crowding the opposing keeper on the offensive end.

Hiebert's proximity to Galaxy goalkeeper John McCarthy, forced McCarthy into a bad punch when the ball came fizzing into his six-yard box. The ball glanced off the bottom of McCarthy's right fist, and backward into the Galaxy goal.

City were ahead on the road, and probably had no business to be, but some fine goalkeeping from Roman Bürki and a bit of luck had given them the lead just before the 90 minute mark.

Unfortunately for St. Louis City, the clock does not strike zero in soccer, and eight additional stoppage time minutes after the 90 gave the Galaxy plenty of time to create an equalizer. In the 95th of 98 minutes, the Galaxy found that equalizer.

Once again, it was Joseph Paintsil setting up the chance, this time on the left side after some LA substitutions forced him to switch wings. Paintsil ran at, and then beyond, City's Rasmus Alm, who had the freshest legs of any player on the field. Alm fouled the Ghanaian winger on the edge of the City 18-yard box, setting up another dangerous set piece.

Dangerous set pieces have not worked out well for City's defense in 2024, and that trend continued. Gaston Brugman's free kick cleared the two-man City wall and veteran center back Maya Yoshida put a diving header on the cross that deflected the ball beyond Roman Bürki.

20,000-plus in Carson, California were going crazy, and City saw a huge MLS win slip through their grasp because of yet another poor defensive set piece. City would get one set piece chance themselves after 100 minutes, after Martin Caceres rugby-tackled Sam Adeniran and saw a straight red card.

This is a spot where City could have used their set piece specialist, Eduard Löwen. Instead Celio Pompeu swung in a harmless cross that was collected by John McCarthy. The final whistle blew, and City left Southern California with a point.

“Obviously, very disappointed right after the final whistle,” said Joakim Nilsson after the draw. “It’s a set piece where we want to be strong, where you don’t want to concede those annoying goals. After the final whistle and after the game, you have that feeling of losing two points, but in the end with the full game, we showed character and a lot of good things in this game that we can take with us.”

“It’s been a good week, a turbulent week,” said an exhausted Bradley Carnell postgame. “Pretty much on the eve of the game we lose Eduard Löwen and Tim Parker, but still we come to Los Angeles full of belief, full of hunger and full of passion. I think for many moments of this game, you could see this.”

As Carnell notes there, Tim Parker was a late absentee from the City squad, and was left out due to an injury suffered in training late this week.

Given they had the lead late, City could feel like they were unfortunate to give up a 95th-minute game-tying goal. But on the run of play over 90 minutes, a draw is probably the best result the team deserved, kept in the game by stellar goalkeeping from Roman Bürki. Bürki made a season-high six saves Saturday night.

“(Bürki) was massive for us tonight,” lauded Carnell. “To shut down that whole team for 90 minutes, it’s pretty much impossible, even by the principles that we play by. (LA) is really dangerous in transition, really dangerous with the combinations, and to mitigate for that amount of time that we did, truly proud. And when Roman had to come up big, he did.”

The third meeting between St. Louis City and the LA Galaxy, and both teams are still searching for the first win of the series. It’s a bit of a wait until their paths cross again, as the two teams will meet at CITY PARK in September.

Importantly, City remains undefeated in MLS play through four matches but will want to turn some of their draws into wins. Up next for City is a matchup against DC United at CITY PARK this Saturday evening, a reunion for Jared Stroud, who was part of a trade to DC that brought Chris Durkin to City.