

City Hosts FC Dallas With Both Teams Desperate For A Win

by Nathan Tucker, Sports Reporter
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ST. LOUIS - St. Louis City SC returns home to CITY PARK on Saturday night, hosting FC Dallas on an evening where both teams could really use a positive result.

If you're reading this, you're likely aware of City's struggles in 2024. One win through six matches, and City currently boasts a four-game winless streak heading into Saturday night's contest. Optimistically, one can also say that City were unbeaten until just last week.

That much cannot be said of Saturday night's visitors from the Lone Star State. FC Dallas has lost their last four, which is tied for the longest losing streak in the team's nearly 30-year history, dating back to when they were known as the Dallas Burn and played at the Cotton Bowl.

It's only early April, but Saturday's matchup between the two struggling sides is pivotal for both. City head coach Bradley Carnell went as far as saying his team has "two finals" in their next home games at CITY PARK.

Carnell and the City coaching staff try to view the lengthy MLS season in five-game "blocks", seeing how the team evolves over the course of the arduous regular season schedule that spans from February through late October.

On Thursday, in City's pre-match press conference, Carnell noted that the team was just a few points short of their goal for their first five-game block.

"We were just a bit shy of where we wanted to be in those first five games," said Carnell, assessing his team through the early stages of the MLS season. "I think we were two points off, if I'm not mistaken. So there or thereabouts.

"(The match against Real Salt Lake last week) gets away from us away from home. Now we have another two finals, I would say, here at home, with two away games following in this five game stretch."

The absence of City's midfield monster Eduard Löwen could be cited as a reason City are on a winless skid. While his presence in midfield is obviously missed, Bradley Carnell has liked what his holding midfielders have offered while filling in for City's #10.

"I've seen variability," Carnell said. "I've seen a lot of options and guys that are posing me a lot of problems, because they show the best versions of themselves in training and in games. Now it's just pieces of the puzzle, who's going to fit who, against which opponent.

"We have good energy with those guys in the six (holding midfield role), and we're excited about our options. Sometimes we can be more attacking with certain options and sometimes we can stabilize and consolidate a bit more as well. There's a lot of competition, and that's what I like."

That leads me to Eduard Löwen himself, who was away from the team and away from training this week.

“(Löwen) has been given some space to take care of some things off the field,” noted Carnell. “I’d like to leave it at that.”

Löwen is still recovering from a hamstring injury, and barring a miracle of modern medicine wasn’t going to play Saturday, so it doesn’t necessarily change his immediate status. However, a week or perhaps more away from the training ground will likely be a setback in his recovery, and could prolong his absence from the City matchday squad further.

Joakim Nilsson, who had a rib cracked against DC United two weeks ago, is “progressing well”, but still not fully healed and ready for game action just yet. Otherwise, City is fit and roster ready for Saturday evening.

While Löwen and Nilsson are both big misses from City’s starting eleven, one could argue that FC Dallas are missing even more important players in their own right. Their own midfield metronome, Asier Illaramendi, who was a UEFA Champions League winner with Real Madrid a decade ago, is out with an abductor strain that he’s been dealing with since the second match of the season.

US National Team striker Jesús Ferreira, Dallas’s leading scorer over the past two seasons, will also not make the trip to CITY PARK Saturday as he is dealing with a hamstring injury. Without their leading scorer and top playmaker, FC Dallas will be looking for players to fill the void and end this aforementioned four-game losing streak.

If there’s an obvious answer to point to, it’s big offseason signing Petar Musa. FC Dallas splashed the cash (\$9.7 million that could turn into \$13 with add-ons) to lure the striker away from Portuguese giants Benfica. Musa was a backup to Portuguese star Gonçalo Ramos in the Benfica squad, and was signed by Dallas to play alongside Jesús Ferreira in an attack-heavy lineup.

Bradley Carnell would refer to FC Dallas’s injury woes as “things they can’t control”, and after their rough stretch, City’s head coach said training this week was about focusing on what they can control.

“What we can control is us, that’s the big emphasis this week,” said Carnell Thursday.

“Before we start thinking about the opponent, we have to focus on ourselves in various scenarios that will help and assist us in the 90 minutes.”

St. Louis City SC will hope that interior focus pays off Saturday night with a needed result in Downtown West when they host Western Conference foe FC Dallas.

Kickoff is set for just after 7:30 pm, streaming on MLS Season Pass through Apple TV.

Local radio broadcasts can be found at KYKY 98.1 FM in English and KXOK 102.9 FM in Spanish.