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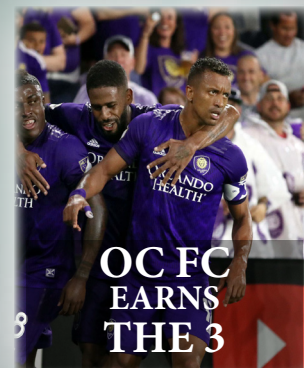
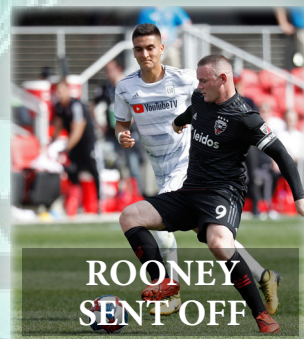
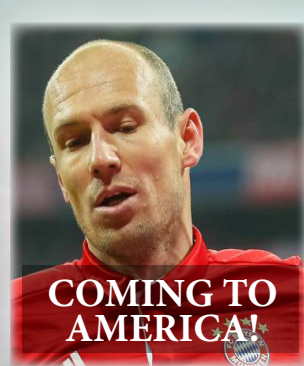
MAGAZINE

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APRIL 2019

WEEK 15

CHICAGO FIRE 2 TORONTO FC 2



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Fire Battles Toronto FC to a 2-2 Draw at BMO Field

The Chicago Fire Soccer Club battled Toronto FC to a 2-2 draw in a hard-fought match at BMO Field on Saturday afternoon. Fire forward CJ Sapong scored his team-leading third goal of the season in the draw, while forward Nemanja Nikolić tallied his first. Additionally, rookie defender Jeremiah Gutjahr and midfielders Aleksandar Katai and Dax McCarty each tallied an assist.

The assist was Gutjahr's first at the professional level, as he made his second consecutive MLS start in Saturday's match.

The Fire's first opportunity of the match came in the 25th minute when midfielder Djordje Mihailović floated a well-weighted ball into the 18-yard box to Sapong. Running onto Mihailović's cross, which was carefully lofted over defender Chris Mavinga's head, Sapong connected with a left footed attempt that went just wide of the target.

With the game beginning to open up, the home side took the lead in the 31st minute of play when midfielder Alejandro Pozuelo drove a cross to the back post for forward Jozy Altidore, who nodded the ball in from close range.

After a tightly contested 45 minutes, the Fire scored the equalizing goal through a direct play one minute into stoppage time in the first half. Receiving the ball near the center circle, Gutjahr lobbed a precise pass over the top of the defense, finding Sapong in stride. After taking a soft first touch, Sapong cleverly chipped the ball with his left foot past goalkeeper Alex Bono to bring the game level (WATCH).



Less than 20 minutes into the second half, the Fire took a 2-1 lead after forcing a turnover in the final third and attacking on the break. With the Men in Red winning the ball near the halfway line, Katai carried the ball down the left side of the pitch, outpacing two defenders, before playing a perfectly placed ball for Nikolić who converted from the edge of the six-yard box (WATCH).

As the end-to-end action ensued, Toronto FC leveled the score in the 76th minute when Altidore clipped the ball to the back post for midfielder Jonathan Osorio, who scored the team's second header of the game.

With the draw, the Fire are unbeaten in its last two matches in league play. The Fire's next match will take place at home on Friday, April 12 against Vancouver Whitecaps FC at SeatGeek Stadium. Beginning at 7:30 p.m. CT, the match against Whitecaps FC will be broadcast live on ESPN+ and transmitted locally on Univision Radio WRTO AM 1200.

Match notes:

Defender Johan Kappelhof recorded his 100th regular season appearance for the Fire on Saturday. Kappelhof has recorded the most appearances for the Men in Red since 2016. Gutjahr notched his first professional assist in just his second MLS start.

Chicago Fire Soccer Club continued...

Sapong scored his third goal of the season, which ranks as the most on the team in 2019.

Nikolić scored his first goal of the season and the 40th of his MLS career. Nikolić won the 2017 MLS Golden Boot award.

Midfielder Nicolás Gaitán made his second straight appearance in Saturday's match coming on in the 69th minute.

Midfielder Amando Moreno made his first appearance for the Fire since joining the team from the New York Red Bulls in the offseason.

Katai and team captain McCarty each registered their first assist of the season.

Box Score:

Chicago Fire 2:2 Toronto FC

Scoring Summary:

TOR – Altidore (3) (Pozuelo, DeLeon) 31'

CHI – Sapong (3) (Gutjahr) 45+1'

CHI – Nikolić (1) (Katai, McCarty) 62'

TOR – Osorio (1) (Altidore) 76'



Misconduct Summary:

TOR – Laryea (Caution) 37'

CHI – Katai (Caution) 37'

CHI – Nikolic (Caution) 52'

CHI – Mihailović (Caution) 56'

TOR – Pozuelo (Caution) 57'

CHI – Schweinsteiger (Caution) 81'

Chicago Fire: GK Ousted, D Kappelhof, D Marcelo, D Schweinsteiger, D Gutjahr, M Adams, M McCarty © (Bronico 80'), M Katai (Moreno 90+4'), M Mihailović, M Sapong, F Nikolić (Gaitán 69')

Subs not used: Cleveland, Campos, Lillard, Martínez

Shots: 7 Shots on goal: 3 Fouls Committed: 14 Fouls Suffered: 5 Offsides: 1 Corners: 2

Toronto FC: GK Bono, D Moor, D Mavinga, D Morrow, M DeLeon, M Laryea (Akinola 68'), M Bradley, M Delgado (Chapman 79'), M Osorio, F Pozuelo, F Altidore

Subs not used: Westberg, Ciman, Morgan, Fraser, Hamilton

Shots: 16 Shots on goal: 8 Fouls Committed: 5 Fouls Suffered: 14 Offsides: 1 Corners: 5

Referee: Armando Villareal

Assistant Referees: Jeffrey Greeson, Jeremy Kieso,

Fourth Official: Ramy Touchan

VAR: Sorin Stoica

Attendance: 26,256

Arjen Robben Reportedly Will Move to MLS

Bayern Munich winger Arjen Robben reportedly prefers the thought of a move to Major League Soccer over joining Italian giants Inter Milan when his contract in Germany expires this summer.

Robben, 35, is approaching the end of his 10th and final season at the Allianz Arena, and Calciomercato.com (h/t Sports Illustrated) reported the veteran is more in favour of a switch to the United States.

His former Bayern team-mate Bastian Schweinsteiger has found success with Chicago Fire since joining the club in 2017.

The Nerazzurri may be disappointed to learn Robben would shun them for MLS, where the level of competition would be considerably lower. Sportswriter Nebojsa Markovic noted the havoc Robben could wreak if he was able to rediscover his old ways in North America's top competition:

-- Nebojša Marković @MarkovicNeb
If Robben does go to #MLS: Cut inside and shoot = 35 goals in MLS 2020--

Robben told reporters in December that this would be his last season with Die Roten, which came as little surprise given the recurring injuries that have restricted him to just 15 appearances in all competitions this season.

Five separate injury and illness absences have resulted in an underwhelming sendoff season for the player, per Transfermarkt. That's after the seven separate absences he endured in 2017-18.

Therein lies the concern in signing the 96-times capped former Netherlands international, as FOX pundit Alexi Lalas highlighted when Robben was linked with a similar move in 2018.

Despite making only 15 appearances this term, Robben has five goals and two assists to his name, equating to a little less than one direct goal involvement every other game.

The rigours of Major League Soccer might allow for the wizened winger to play under fewer pressures, but potential suitors may also expect their headline name to feature prominently.

Bayern's other stalwart wide man, Franck Ribery, is also expected to leave Bayern when his deal runs out in June, with young guns Kingsley Coman, 22, and Serge Gnabry, 23, expected to take over the reins.

In an ideal scenario, MLS would provide Robben with a stage on which to launch a late career revival, having carved out a reputation as one of the best to play his position, via BT Sport (UK only).

Bayern have travelled to the United States for pre-season contests in the past, but fans across the pond may look forward to getting a closer look at Robben's talents in the near future.



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Seattle Sounders FC 1, Real Salt Lake 0

Quality chances were few and far between on Saturday night at CenturyLink Field, though Seattle Sounders FC made their count in a 1-0 home win over a visiting Real Salt Lake team.

The breakthrough, as it so often does, came through a moment of brilliance from Nicolas Lodeiro. The Uruguayan midfielder, falling down, volleyed home a looping cross from Cristian Roldan in the 18th minute, leaving RSL goalkeeper Nick Rimando with no chance.

The visitors stuck in the match, though, and looked to have their equalizer in the 73rd minute when Jefferson Savarino burst through Seattle's back line. However, the Venezuelan's strike smashed off the woodwork, preserving Stefan Frei's bid for a third shutout in 2019.



With the result, Seattle ended a three-game losing streak against RSL – a stretch in which they were outscored 5-0. The Sounders are now five games unbeaten in 2019 and would be first in the Western Conference if it weren't for Los Angeles Football Club topping the Supporters' Shield race early on.

Goals

18' – SEA – Nicolas Lodeiro | WATCH

Three Things

THE BIG PICTURE: For the first time in four matches, Real Salt Lake finished with all 11 players on the field, as red cards previously pegged head coach Mike Petke's squad back for three straight losses. However, a road trip to CenturyLink Field left RSL with their fourth defeat in as many games, even if there were spells of possession and attacking play.

MOMENT OF THE MATCH: Soccer is often a game of inches, a fact that left Seattle thanking its lucky stars and RSL wishing the fractions fell their way. Such was the case in the 73rd minute, when Jefferson Savarino's shot ricocheted off the post. If it were a hair or two to the left, it would have been a leveled match that concludes with an entirely different tone.

MAN OF THE MATCH: Cristian Roldan grabbed an assist and was all over the field on Saturday night, pulling the strings and dictating the tempo in midfield. The Sounders didn't have the killer instinct that would have made it a less-stressful evening for head coach Brian Schmetzer, so a dose of professionalism was needed. Roldan provided that and then some.

CREDIT: MLS SOCCER Jonathan Sigal Contributor

San Jose Earthquakes 3, Portland Timbers 0

Danny Hoesen opened his 2019 scoring account in his first start, Shea Salinas and Cristian Espinoza also scored, and the San Jose Earthquakes defeated the Portland Timbers 3-0 on Saturday at Avaya Stadium for their first points under first-year coach Matias Almeyda.

After conceding 14 goals through their first four matches of the season, including five last week in a loss to LAFC, Daniel Vega made four saves to keep San Jose's first clean sheet of the new campaign. His most important came early in the second half, when he stretched out his leg to thwart Diego Valeri's penalty.

The victory snaps a 13-match winless run in total for the Quakes, dating back to last season.

Jeff Attinella made 10 saves for the Timbers, who still have a solitary point five matches into their 12-match road trip to begin 2019. They'll return to a renovated and expanded Providence Park on June 1.

Goals

15' - SJ - Shea Salinas
33' - SJ - Danny Hoesen
34' - SJ - Cristian Espinoza



Three Things

THE BIG PICTURE: Traditionally, teams that begin the season with long away stints because of stadium construction buck conventional wisdom to make the postseason. But the Timbers had better earn find a way to earn a few points on the road soon. So far they haven't been close, losing three times by three goals during a four-match losing streak.

MOMENT OF THE MATCH: It actually happened moments before kickoff, when Quakes Homegrown Player Tommy Thompson spoke to NBC Sports Bay Area's Danielle Slaton. While players often appear to go through the motions in such chats, Thompson took the opportunity to deliver a very serious and earnest message to San Jose fans.

MAN OF THE MATCH: Cristian Espinoza. Despite substantial changes to the lineup around him — or perhaps because of them — Espinoza played his most complete match since his arrival from Villarreal, setting up Salinas' opener before putting the game out of sight after just 34 minutes.

CREDIT: Ian Quillen Contributor

Orlando City SC 4, Colorado Rapids 3

Saturday night's match between Orlando City SC and the Colorado Rapids had it all, ranging from an hour-plus weather delay, lead changes, superstar controversy and history made. When all was said and done, the Lions escaped with a 4-3 win over the Western Conference visitors, earning their first home victory of the 2019 season.

Matters got underway in the 9th minute, when Kei Kamara capitalized on an Orlando miscue at the back to make it 1-0. That strike, which pushed Kamara up fifth on the all-time goals scored list in MLS, was quickly negated before half-time. Nani scored his first-ever goal in MLS in the 31st minute, heading at the back post, only for Tesho Akindele to add another in the 33rd.

During halftime, lightning prompted a weather delay of one hour and one minute, from which Colorado emerged as the aggressor. That provided a platform for Nicolas Mezquida heading home an equalizer in the 61st, then Cole Bassett curly home a left-footed beauty to make it 3-2 in the 71st.

Orlando, no stranger to high-octane games at home, roared back once second-year winger Chris Mueller was subbed in. The University of Wisconsin product slotted home in the 81st, only for Nani to bag the eventual game-winner in the 89th minute on a penalty kick.

Goals

9' – COL – Kei Kamara
 31' – ORL – Nani
 33' – ORL – Tesho Akindele
 61' – COL – Nicolas Mezquida
 71' – COL – Cole Bassett
 82' – ORL – Chris Mueller
 89' – ORL – Nani (PK)

Three Things

THE BIG PICTURE: For the first time in the 2019 season, Orlando City earned all three points at home, ending a stretch of two-straight losses before a friendly crowd. They had to crawl out of yet another early hole, but proved gutsy in a topsy-turvy encounter that had more twists and turns than a Hollywood thriller. As for Colorado, they surely feel like points were left on the table after leading as deep as the 80th minute.



MOMENT OF THE MATCH: When Kei Kamara entered the 2019 season, Ante Razov was next up to pass on the all-time goals list in MLS. Consider it mission accomplished for the 34-year-old striker, whose 9th minute goal gives him 115 for his career. Add in playoff strikes and Kamara has 126 throughout 332 career games in MLS – spanning seven different clubs.

MAN OF THE MATCH: If nothing else, Nani made the price of admission worth it. The Designated Player bagged a brace – his first two goals in MLS – and provided some controversy deep into the second half. He looked to head-butt two different players on the Rapids, but head referee Jair Marrufo didn't pull out the red card. The moment is bound to be debated for days to come.

FC Cincinnati 1, Sporting Kansas City 1

A heavily-rotated Sporting Kansas City side came to Cincinnati and earned a point, thanks to a second-half strike from Gianluca Busio.

FC Cincinnati took a first-half lead from the penalty spot, after Roland Lamah was fouled by Andreu Fontas following a miscue from Sporting 'keeper Adrian Zendejas. Darren Mattocks stepped up to coolly finish the first penalty kick in FCC's MLS history, but it wouldn't be enough to give his team the three points.



After stepping up the pressure to start the second half, Sporting got their equalizer after a miscue between Cincy's Greg Garza and goalkeeper Spencer Richey. After a cross-field ball looked to bounce just beyond Busio's reach, Garza and Richey both came for the ball, only for Garza to touch it away from both of them, allowing the 16-year-old Busio a simple finish for his second goal of the campaign.

Both sides also missed notable chances, with Kelyn Rowe skying a wide-open look in the first half and Kekuta Manneh missing on the same goal when he somehow put a one-on-one look wide just after the hour mark. Nick Hagglund did have the ball in the net late in the game for Cincinnati, but his header was ruled out for offside.

Goals

19' – CIN – Darren Mattocks

62' – SKC – Gianluca Busio

Three Things

THE BIG PICTURE: All things considered, Sporting will take this. The suffered a hugely demoralizing defeat in CCL on Thursday and heavily rotated their squad, but still managed a point in a tough away trip. Given the balance of the play, a draw was probably a fair result, but FCC will probably be a little more disappointed after taking the lead and missing a chance to join the second-place logjam in the Eastern Conference.

MOMENT OF THE MATCH: With such a tight battle between these two teams, we're going to fudge it and point to four moments that illustrate just how even things were, two on each side: the mistakes that led to the Mattocks penalty and Busio goal, plus the sitters missed by Rowe and Manneh.

MAN OF THE MATCH: The honors go to Mattocks in this one – he scored the PK, hit the post and provided a ball to Manneh that should've ended up in the back of the net.

DC United 0, Los Angeles Football Club 4

Diego Rossi scored his first MLS hat trick, Carlos Vela added a goal and an assist, and LAFC issued a clear statement of intent to any club that considers itself among the league's best with a 4-0 thrashing of D.C. United at Audi Field on Saturday afternoon.

The performance gave Rossi six goals for the season, one shy of Vela's seven, and pushed Western Conference leaders LAFC to six unbeaten to start the new campaign. In the process, they snapped the 15-match unbeaten run of a D.C. team that entered the weekend leading the East.

Bad went to worst for hosts shortly after halftime, with star forward Wayne Rooney sent off for his challenge on Rossi following Video Review, meaning he'll be out on Tuesday for D.C.'s quick turnaround against the Montreal Impact.

The only sour spot for LAFC came moments after Rossi's first goal, when Adama Diomande exited with a hamstring injury.

Goals

15' - LAFC - Carlos Vela
27' - LAFC - Diego Rossi
32' - LAFC - Diego Rossi
76' - LAFC - Diego Rossi



Three Things

THE BIG PICTURE: For once, he wasn't the star of the show, but Vela is increasingly becoming the odds-on early favorite for the Landon Donovan MLS MVP award. With his early strike and assist on Rossi's first, he now has seven goals and five assists through six matches, and seems ready to challenge for the first 20-20 season in MLS history. Toronto FC's Sebastian Giovinco made the last effort at that in 2015, hitting 22 goals and adding 16 assists in his maiden MLS campaign.

MOMENT OF THE MATCH: LAFC's second was pure class on both ends, with Vela providing a stylish outside-the-boot cross and Rossi hammering in a perfect finish.

MAN OF THE MATCH: Rossi. After making a big splash with his introduction a year ago, the young Uruguayan has been plagued by moments of inconsistency, but he was immaculate here. He even got the better of Rooney's frustrations. The English superstar had only once before been dismissed from a club match.



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