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MAGAZINE



# 2019 USL CHAMPIONS

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# Real Monarchs SLC win 2019 USL Championship title, five Real Salt Lake players feature

For the second time in USL Championship history, an MLS affiliate has taken home the ultimate trophy.

Real Monarchs SLC join New York Red Bulls II (2016), winning the second division USL Championship final in an upset road win over Louisville City FC. The Real Salt Lake affiliate beat the two-time USL champions 3-1 at Lynn Stadium on Sunday night.

Five current RSL players featured in the starting XI for the Monarchs. Homegrown David Ochoa started in goal, Erik Holt was one of three center backs, as Luke Mulholland, Justin Portillo and Tate Schmitt played in midfield.

Louisville opened the scoring in the sixth minute before Jamison Olave's team came back to score in two in the first half off set pieces. Holt scored the first with a beautiful strike from distance while Mulholland assisted on the second. Noah Powder, who was a member of the NYRB II team that won the title in 2016, added an insurance goal in the second half.

Olave helped RSL win MLS Cup in 2009, the organization's only other trophy, and was critical in their run to the Conca-caf Champions League final in 2011. The former center back was named interim coach of the Monarchs on July 1, 2019, after Martin Vasquez left the club.

The Monarchs are the second MLS affiliate to win a title this year as FC Dallas's USL League One affiliate, North Texas SC, won the third division championship last month.

## All-time USL champions

2011: Orlando City

2012: Charleston Battery

2013: Orlando City

2014: Sacramento Republic FC

2015: Rochester Rhinos

2016: New York Red Bulls II

2017: Louisville City FC

2018: Louisville City FC

2019: Real Monarchs SLC



## Is MLS becoming world soccer's new runway for aspiring coaches?

Not so long ago, Major League Soccer appeared to be a “closed shop” when it came to head coaching hires.

In the early years of this decade, playing experience in the league looked to be not merely one criteria for coaching hires but the dominant one, as the likes of Jason Kreis, Ben Olsen, Jay Heaps, Carl Robinson, Mike Petke and Pablo Mastroeni were fast-tracked from influential players to head coaches, even with scant resumes in their new line of work.

Even for clubs who put a heavier weight on coaching experience, the list of viable candidates appeared quite short, with old hands like Sigi Schmid, Dom Kinnear, Curt Onalfo and Frank Yallop given multiple opportunities.

MLS's unique quirks and intricacies made it so distinct from other leagues, according to the conventional wisdom at that time, that outsiders needed years just to adapt, much less thrive – as was seemingly proven by the low numbers of, and short leashes for, foreign coaching hands.

The picture has changed dramatically as 2020 looms and the league prepares to celebrate a quarter-century of existence.

As Graham Ruthven wrote for *The Guardian* this week on the occasion of the Montreal Impact's buzzy hiring of Thierry Henry as their new coach, “This is a league that's starting to earn itself a reputation as a proving ground for young managers. Not so long ago, MLS struggled to attract high-caliber coaches.”

As much as increased spending on salaries and transfer fees has prompted a marked rise in the quality and reputation of star players in MLS, a new crop of big-name managers may be just as influential on the league's progress.

Some arrive looking for new challenges; others seek to refurbish reputations dinged by setbacks elsewhere. Most bring dramatically deeper and more diverse outlooks and skillsets, and all serve to elevate the level of North American coaching to one extent or another.

Tata Martino arrived in Atlanta with Argentina and FC Barcelona on his resume. Patrick Vieira carried a world-class playing background and cultured philosophy of play to New York City FC, and set a once-woeful expansion side on the upward trajectory that they still maintain today. His replacement, Domenec Torrent, left behind a longstanding role as Pep Guardiola's right-hand man to try his hand in the United States, and mostly thrived.

Matias Almeyda hit San Jose as Concacaf's reigning Coach of the Year and CCL champion, and oversaw one of the most dramatic year-over-year improvements in league history. Guillermo Barros Schelotto left Boca Juniors to return to the league he graced as an MLS Cup champ in Columbus, and steered a proud LA Galaxy franchise back to the postseason they once regarded as their birthright.

And the list goes on: Frank de Boer, Adrian Heath, Henry's Impact predecessor Remi Garde. Even those regarded as failures, like Owen Coyle, Mikael Stahre and Anthony Hudson, underline the increasingly global purview of the league's approach to coaches, and correspondingly, the global game's evolving regard in response. The names being batted around in connection to expansion newcomers Inter Miami are even more head-turning.

A key factor in all this: Just as the perception and appeal of MLS to top players is shifting from something to the effect of “a good place to end your career” to “a fast track and shop window to the world's elite leagues,” a similar path has materialized for coaches.

Thus Martino parlayed his MLS Cup-winning work in ATL into the Mexican national team's No. 1 spot, quite possibly the biggest job in the hemisphere. Vieira leaped from the blue half of New York to a promising gig in Ligue 1. Oscar Pareja built FC Dallas into a Homegrown-powered force to be reckoned with and got a shot in Liga MX with Club Tijuana. Jesse Marsch earned the trust of the Red Bull global empire with his work at RBNY and is now leading RB Salzburg, including on perhaps the world's biggest stage, UEFA Champions League.

The upshot: Prosper in MLS, and the soccer world will take notice. And that's surely a tempting lure for coaches and players alike.



## Houston's Mauro Manotas eyeing move to European club after scoring exploits in MLS

TRANSFER TRACKER STATUS: Reports

After scoring 42 goals over the past three seasons for the Houston Dynamo, Mauro Manotas is looking for a change and a switch to a European league, expressing hopes that he could leave as soon as the upcoming January transfer window.

The Colombian striker shared those thoughts with several media outlets in his homeland this month, while also underlining his optimism about the Dynamo's new look for 2020 with the arrival of new head coach Tab Ramos and recent acquisition of his countryman Darwin Quintero via a trade with Minnesota United.

El jugador colombiano se encuentra en Barranquilla y preparado para disfrutar de las fiestas de fin de año con su familia.

"It was a positive year, my objectives were met, and I hope that next year will be much better," Manotas told *El Ambito*, pronouncing himself "100% adapted to football in the United States" and targeting a run at the MLS Golden Boot presented by Audi next season, while also revealing that his dreams of Europe are as strong as ever.

"I want to go to Europe," added the 24-year-old, who has bagged 48 goals and 15 assists in 129 career regular-season MLS appearances (92 starts) since joining Houston in 2015. "The [Dynamo] managers and the president know it and I hope it will be soon. I have spoken with my agent, things have not happened."

Manotas was widely reported to be the subject of transfer bids in the high seven figures over the past year, with Liga MX giants Cruz Azul linked to an \$8.5 million offer and an unnamed European club apparently having tabled a comparable proposal. Colombia manager Carlos Quieroz recently stated that he's also moving onto the radar of his national team, which kicks off South American 2022 World Cup qualifying in March.



CREDIT: Charles Boehm Contributor

## Mexico falls to Brazil 2-1 in U-17 World Cup final

Mexico's U-17s saw their run at the FIFA 2019 U-17 World Cup come to an end in heartbreaking fashion, as two late goals sent Brazil to a 2-1 victory in the tournament final between the sides on Sunday.

After a scoreless first half, Mexico jumped on top after a goal from Bryan Gonzalez in the 66th minute, putting them on the doorstep of knocking off the host country and completing a magical run. But a hotly contested penalty kick call afforded Brazil the equalizer in the 84th minute before a dramatic winner in second-half stoppage time from Lazaro Vinicius Marquez would seal the 2-1 final.

For fans of MLS, the big storyline to keep an eye on was the performance of Mexico midfielder Efrain Alvarez of the LA Galaxy, who scored a free-kick golazo that allowed Mexico to eventually top the Netherlands in penalty kicks in the semifinals. The wunderkind wasn't able to replicate the feat in this contest, as Mexico struggled to get generate many attacking fireworks outside of the goal, which was the only shot out of 12 that they managed to get on target.



CREDIT: Ari Liljenwall Contributor

## MLS coaching vacancies update: Montreal make a splash, Chicago start over

MLS Cup 2019 is in the books, the Expansion Draft is nigh, the winter international transfer window is fast approaching and players begin reporting for preseason camps in about two months. So where do MLS coaching vacancies stand? Here's a quick update.

### Chicago Fire

Veljko Paunovic | USA Today Sports Images

After initially expressing faith in Veljko Paunovic after season's end, the Fire elected to tack in a new direction on Nov. 13, parting ways with the Serbian coach and his entire technical staff after four years in charge.

Paunovic departs with a 41W-58L-37D record over 136 MLS regular-season matches, leading the Men in Red to the post-season in one (2017) of his four campaigns and overseeing runs to the U.S. Open Cup semifinals in 2016 and 2018.



His exit is one change among many for the Fire, who have bid farewell to key starters Bastian Schweinsteiger, Nemanja Nikolic and Dax McCarty in recent weeks in the midst of a dramatic off-field evolution this winter as they relocate from SeatGeek Stadium in Bridgeview, Illinois to Soldier Field, their NFL-proportioned former home on Chicago's downtown lakefront.

### D.C. United

It appears that no vacancy is afoot in the US capital city, where the Washington Post cited three inside sources to report on Nov. 13 that Ben Olsen, United's longtime head coach and face of the franchise for most of the past 20 years, will remain in his post despite playoff disappointments for two years running.

"We've got a lot of faith in [Olsen's] leadership, and it sends a message to everyone in the organization when we stand by our leadership," club co-chairman & CEO Jason Levien told the Post last month. "But the results haven't been there. We have to evaluate this stuff."

The report noted that Olsen's current contract has another two years to run. Olsen has a career regular-season record of 111-128-79 in charge of the Black-and-Red, including an interim stint in 2010, and is facing both greater spending and raised expectations since the club's move into Audi Field.

### Inter Miami CF

Zinedine Zidane | USA Today Sports Images

Tick tock: The clock is humming loudly over the heads of 2020 MLS expansion debutants Inter Miami, who are hustling on multiple fronts with less than four months to go until they take the field for their inaugural match:

Construction is ongoing on their temporary stadium and training facility on the site of the former Lockhart Stadium in Fort Lauderdale

The long process of finalizing and progressing on their planned permanent home at Miami Freedom Park near Miami International Airport



And they still have yet to name a head coach, despite having eight players and counting on their roster and the Expansion Draft to navigate this week.

The Athletic recently spoke to Inter sporting director Paul McDonough about the situation, laying out some potential candidates, including the previously-reported Santiago Solari, River Plate's Marcelo Gallardo and even Real Madrid's Zinedine Zidane. Notably, McDonough stated that there'd be little urgency to appoint a foreign coach in time for the Expansion Draft given that hire's likely limited knowledge of the player pool involved with it.

#### Montreal Impact

The Quebecois club made a sudden splash this past week, stunning observers both at home and abroad by unveiling Thierry Henry as their new head coach. One of the most talented players ever to grace MLS, the former New York Red Bull has a far shorter and less glowing managerial resume and returns to North America with plenty to prove.

That said, IMFC's faith in the striker once globally revered as TH14 appears substantial given the subsequent revelation that he was the only candidate interviewed. His hiring instantly made the Impact the topic du jour across Canadian sports and his arrival in Montreal turned the international arrivals section of the city's airport into a mini-maelstrom of fans and media on Thursday.

Even the mighty Montreal Canadiens, the de facto kings of the City of Saints, provided Therry with a warm welcome as he took in some hockey on Saturday night.

#### New York City FC

Giovanni van Bronckhorst | Reuters/Action Images

Dome Torrent made his Cityzens departure official on Nov. 8, leaving the club after a year and a half in charge. The Spaniard's next move is not yet known, though the international rumor mill quickly cranked up talk of his successor.

The top name mentioned: Dutchman Giovanni van Bronckhorst, a friend and former teammate of NYCFC sporting director Claudio Reyna and the owner of a fairly solid track record at his first and only head coaching gig to date, Eredivisie heavyweights Feyenoord, where he amassed a 107-26-43 record over four seasons in charge.



You can learn much more about Van Bronckhorst here.

#### Orlando City SC

Like their expansion siblings NYCFC, the Lions remain coachless at present, and with precious little reporting or scuttlebutt emerging about their leading candidates of late.

Club Tijuana boss Oscar Pareja remains the most-mentioned possibility, thanks in no small part to his respected work alongside Orlando EVP of soccer operations Luiz Muzzi at FC Dallas from 2014-18.

#### Real Salt Lake

Jason Kreis | USA Today Sports Images

It's been similarly quiet along the Wasatch Front, as Real Salt Lake remain in need of both a general manager and permanent head coach.

After word got out that former RSL coach Jason Kreis – currently on the books at Inter Miami as well as the US Under-23 men's national team – had interviewed for both posts, there's been little to no public movement around the Utah club. Technically speaking, Freddy Juarez remains RSL's interim coach.



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## Canada admit early USMNT goal in loss was "worst thing that could have happened"

Canada's dreams of humbling the US men's national team for a second time in as many months were thrown out the window under two minutes into Friday night's meeting at Exploria Stadium.

Jordan Morris finished at the back post following a corner kick, and that set a 4-1 win in motion. It was a gut punch of sorts, according to Canada midfielder Samuel Piette.

"That was the worst thing that could have happened to us," said Piette, who plays for the Montreal Impact. "When you concede the first goal, it's always hard mentally and psychologically. That was the worst thing that could have happened to us."



Before the encounter, Canada spoke proudly about the potential impact on the program's hopes in the Concacaf Nations League. More pointedly, they reflected on how the result could impact their quest to make the World Cup qualifying Hexagonal and have a more straightforward path to qualification for the 2022 World Cup.

But, as has proven to be the case before, the thought of Canada just needing a draw was a death knell. They held the advantage in possession (63.6% to 36.4%) and passes (520 vs. 301), but Canada faced a resurgent American side that had their pride hurt a month ago in Toronto.

"I think their approach was different," said Piette. "They all came back and basically played a deep block, and it was hard for us to find the space in behind. They let us have the ball more than the previous game, and I think we managed the ball well. In the final third we couldn't create anything."

Morris's early goal put Canada on the back foot. They clawed a goal back in the 72nd minute via Steven Vitoria off a set piece, but that only made it 3-1 before Gyasi Zardes volleyed home to complete his brace.

"We came in here to get a result," said head coach John Herdman. "We didn't dump it down, we came in on the front foot, we pressed them for 90 minutes. We controlled the game for periods of time and I think there were a lot of positives. We just weren't clinical. They were very clinical."

Qualification in tournaments like the Nations League and World Cup often comes down to away form. But for all the talk of a reinvigorated Canadian program, that old demon haunted them once again.

"We tried playing a style today which was different from what we did in Toronto, but it felt a bit forced," said Derek Cornelius, who came on for the injured Doneil Henry in the second half. "I think that's what played into their hands in the first half. A lot of what we wanted to do, we tried to force it when it wasn't on and just gave them opportunities from nothing."

## What USA, Canada need to do to reach Concacaf Nations League semifinals

The US national team and Canada are still in the running to make the Concacaf Nations League semifinals after their head-to-head match in Orlando.

But only one will make it.

Here's how the Group A standings shape up after the 4-1 win for the Americans at Exploria Stadium :

League A / Group A

	GP	W	L	D	GF	GA	GD	Pts
Canada	4	3	1	0	10	4	+6	9
USA	3	2	1	0	11	3	+8	6
Cuba	3	0	3	0	0	14	-14	0



The top spot is still up for grabs and it will all come down to Tuesday's Group A finale between the USA and Cuba to be played in the Cayman Islands (7:30 pm ET | FS1, UniMás, TUDN).

Only the group winner advances to the Nations League semifinals to join Mexico (Group B winner), Honduras (Group C winner) and the winner of Group D which will come down to the final match between Costa Rica and Haiti on Sunday. The formula is simple: If the USA lose or draw the finale in Cuba, then Canada will head to the Nations League semis. A win for the USA, and it will be the Americans who will join the three other teams for the inaugural Nations League title. In the latter scenario, the USA would finish tied with Canada on points, but they would overtake the Canadians due to a superior goal difference which would be the first tiebreaker per competition regulations.

CREDIT: Alicia Rodriguez Contributor

## Columbus Crew striker Gyasi Zardes shines for US men's national team under Gregg Berhalter



Though oft criticized, Gyasi Zardes has delivered in big moments for the US men's national team under the direction of coach Gregg Berhalter.

The USMNT's leading scorer with six goals this calendar year, Zardes has the trust of his former Columbus Crew SC coach in Berhalter.

Zardes has started in 10 of the USMNT's 17 matches in 2019, featuring in all but two of them. His speed, holdup play and strength to win duels against defenders is a big reason why Zardes earned the start in a pivotal Concacaf Nations League showdown against Canada Friday night.

And while Zardes isn't the most consistent or most polished scorer, he's helped the USMNT get results this year, including a brace in the 4-1 victory at Exploria Stadium.

Previous to his breakout 2019, Zardes had only scored four goals for the USMNT, but under Berhalter, that number has more than doubled.

It appears the bond and trust between the striker and the coach who signed him after his first five seasons with the LA Galaxy has carried over to the international stage.

After helping the USMNT earn a measure of revenge against Canada, Zardes didn't speak much about his own accomplishment, but rather lauded the coaching staff for putting him in a position to succeed.

"Our coaching staff, they sacrifice a lot of time analyzing our opponent's previous games. ... They set the standard in training sessions," Zardes said. "We know the job is not done. And now we're going to start focusing on Cuba, you know, because the Cayman Islands is going to be a difficult environment where away from home, but it's a great challenge and a great opportunity for us to get the job done."

Zardes will have one more chance to tack onto his team-leading 2019 goals total when the USMNT meet Cuba Tuesday (7:30 pm ET | FS1, UniMás, TUDN) with an opportunity to top Group A and reach the Nations League semifinals.

CREDIT: Austin David Contributor



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