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There are some things you notice being in Paris other than the monuments and statues, the architecture, cuisine and fashion. For instance, most everyone seems to smoke like it's an old Humphrey Bogart movie. There's about three cafes on every block, and even in winter with this week in the 30s and 40s, most everyone is sitting outside. The residents seem to be speed walking all the time. Hey, don't they know about all the buildings? Bicycles, motorbikes and cars are zipping in every direction on the criss crossing streets and amazingly there's hardly ever an accident.

And the Bulls just can't lose, this time Thursday a never-in-doubt 126-108 victory over the Detroit Pistons.

It's the third game the Bulls have played in Paris, this being the first regular season game, with every one a win.

So just playing on the wrong continent?

Maybe not for long, says DeMar DeRozan, who with 26 points backed Zach LaVine's 30 points in the methodical dissection of the baby Pistons.

This isn't the 80s anymore. Bulls/Pistons doesn't induce the visceral reactions you might feel while constipated. Or looking at Bill Laimbeer. The Pistons are in yet another rebuilding project with 2021 overall No. 1 pick Cade Cunningham out for a season that's about trying to get the No. 1 pick and Frenchman Victor Wembanyama. Pistons coach Dwane Casey declined to talk about him when asked by media. It's not allowed by NBA rules, and Wembanyama may be living in Casey's basement, anyway.

The Pistons are in the Eastern Conference basement, but at 21-24 the Bulls believe with this sort of play after Sunday's pre-trip win over Golden State they may finally be seeing the light of this NBA season.

"It's gut cuttin' time now," said DeRozan. "Every single game is that much more important, and that's the challenge we have to approach it as. We showed in the first half of the season we can compete with the top teams in the league. Now it's about putting it together every single night no matter who we're playing because these games you can't get back. As long as we understand the importance of every single game here on out, we have a chance to put ourselves in a good position.

"We feel like we're getting there," DeRozan said after missing three games with a quad strain. "We show spurts of it, but now it's about being consistent and doing it every single night. Every single night the second half of the season is critical for us, and as long as we approach those games like must win we'll be fine."

Which actually this was.

Because who wants to fly 4,000 miles and hang around five days to take a loss and then back another 4,000? It would be like going to Paris and forgetting to look up.

"It wouldn't be a bit worth it at all if we didn't get the win coming home," said LaVine. "Now we get to go home and keep up this chemistry."

It has to be a bit easier against the Pistons, but with the Bulls this season, as we know, nothing is a sure thing.

This one seemed to be from the start with an expectant crowd roaring with every basket.

It was technically a Pistons home game since they gave up a home game to play in Paris. So their players were introduced last and got the lights down treatment, and that annoying Dee-troit basketball guy was p.a. announcer. He didn't say it much because the Bulls didn't give him much chance.

The Bulls were off to a 9-2 start as DeRozan drove in and dunked and the Pistons called time. The quad seemed fine.

The Bulls were team dunk-a-lot this time with Derrick Jones Jr. combining with four different Bulls players on dunks, three on lob passes as the Bulls continued to improve passing. And Detroit didn't seem to know Jones Jr. dunked and DeRozan pump faked. Kids! Nikola Vucevic had a hot shooting start with eight points as the Bulls led by 11 and 31-24 after the first quarter. Vucevic finished with 16 points, 1t rebounds and six assists. The Bulls had seven players in double figures with Jones dunking in a dozen.

There were some technical issues with the arena scoreboard flashing all sorts of equations in the second quarter as the Bulls knew they had a big lead but couldn't prove it.



Fans began chanting "MVP" for DeRozan when he shot free throws. There were some Pistons jerseys, but not many. Red is a dominant color that draws the eye. Look into pile of clothes or books or shoes and the red one will draw your eye first. It seemed to blind the Pistons as the Bulls moved ahead 65-56 at halftime as Patrick Williams was mostly unerring with his shot. The Bulls looked like they were about to make the Pistons give up with an 80-62 lead five minutes into the second half when the Bulls had one of those droughts.

"I thought we had some opportunities in the third to push out the game," said Donovan. "They got on the glass and we fouled them too much and let the game stay relatively close through most of the fourth quarter."

The Pistons had three offensive rebounds and a steal on one possession, forcing a Bulls timeout, and some of the issues that have beset the team appeared. Pistons players found wide crevices for drives to the basket, finishing with a 60-54 inside points margin. The young Pistons with Bojan Bogdanovic scoring 25 points—someone's got to be trading for him—at least kept Marco Simonovic an Carlik Jones on the bench a bit longer.

Alex Caruso had just two points, but he had a steal and drew a charge late in the third when the Pistons got within 10 and then two more of his four steals (and three blocks) late in the fourth quarter to head off any Pistons thinking.

"It was amazing," DeRozan said, though not exactly about the victory. "Tonight was one of those games I know for me you'll look back years and years and realize how great of a moment it was, having the commissioner here, Magic Johnson here; it definitely was a beautiful atmosphere and a privilege being a part of this whole thing."

Plenty to smile about for now.



## Chicago Fire FC to Face Puebla, Minnesota United FC in Group Stage of Leagues Cup 2023

Chicago Fire FC and Major League Soccer today announced that the Club will face Puebla (LIGA MX) and Minnesota United FC (MLS) in group Central 2 of Leagues Cup 2023. The inaugural edition of the World-Cup style tournament includes 47 clubs – 18 from LIGA MX and 29 from MLS – and will take place from July 21 to August 19. The champion, as well as the second and third-place finishers, will qualify for the Concacaf Champions League and have an opportunity to earn a spot in the FIFA Club World Cup.

The Leagues Cup 2023 groups are based on each team's 2022 performance along with their geographic regions. Chicago will face Western Conference rival Minnesota United for the second time in 2023 when the two sides meet in the tournament, following an MLS regular season matchup on Saturday, April 8, at 7:30 p.m.at Soldier Field. The Club's fixture against Puebla will mark the first-ever meeting between the two teams in an official competition. The complete Leagues Cup 2023 bracket and schedule will be announced in the coming months. Chicago Fire FC Season Ticket Members will have access to the Fire's first home match of the tournament as part of their annual membership. Season Ticket Members can access their Account Manager here for additional information once it becomes available, and fans who wish to purchase a Season Ticket Membership can do so here.

The Leagues Cup 2023 groups are based on clubs' 2022 performance along with their geographic regions. The 15 groups will be broken up into four regions: West, Central, South and East. Each region will have four groups, except the West, which will have three groups due to LAFC's entrance in the Knockout Stage. Pachuca will enter the Knockout Stage in the South, opposite side of the bracket from the MLS Cup Champion and opposite quadrant from the top MLS seeded club based on the final 2022 Supporters' Shield standings. Since LAFC won the 2022 Supporters' Shield, the club in the opposite quadrant will be the team that finished second – the Philadelphia Union, who will be in Group 1 in the East Region (East 1).

As the 2022 MLS Cup champion, Los Angeles Football Club qualified directly into the Round of 32 of Leagues Cup 2023. LIGA MX champion Club de Fútbol Pachuca earned the bye as the LIGA MX champion with the most combined points accumulated across the Clausura and Apertura seasons in the 2022 calendar year. The top 15 MLS clubs – excluding the MLS Cup champion – have been placed in their corresponding geographic region first, and then based on their position in the final 2022 Supporters' Shield standings. The top 15 LIGA MX teams, based on the combined Clausura 2022 and Apertura 2022 standings – excluding the LIGA MX champion as described above – have been paired in reverse order with the top 15 MLS clubs (No. 15 LIGA MX seeded club has been paired with No. 1 MLS seeded club and so on).

Continuing with the competitive balance criteria, the remaining 13 MLS clubs have been placed in the groups, again based first on their geographic region, and then based on their position in the final 2022 Supporters' Shield standings.

With the MLS clubs placed into groups, the South and East regions have one remaining slot each. Based on the combined Clausura 2022 and Apertura 2022 standings, the last two remaining LIGA MX clubs, FC Juarez and Querétaro, have been placed in the open positions in these two regions to complete the groups. Placed in reverse order from the highest seed in each group, Querétaro (No. 17 LIGA MX) and FC Juarez (No. 16 LIGA MX) have been respectively paired with Philadelphia Union (No. 1 MLS) in the East and Austin FC (No. 3 MLS) in the South. Every team will play two matches in the Group Stage, with the top two teams from each group, as determined by points, advancing to the Knockout Stage Round of 32. No matches in the Leagues Cup Group Stage will end in a tie. If a game is tied after 90 minutes, the game will proceed to a penalty shootout. For tiebreakers and other competition items, the Leagues Cup 2023 Competition Guidelines will be published in the coming months. The Leagues Cup 2023 bracket and schedule will be announced in the coming months.

Beginning in 2023, MLS and LIGA MX will pause their respective league seasons each summer and all 47 first division clubs in Canada, Mexico and the United States will compete in the World Cup-style tournament, which is an official Concacaf competition. The inaugural Leagues Cup will consist of 77 matches, kicking off on Friday, July 21, with the final taking place on Saturday, August 19. The tournament will be played across the U.S. and Canada. The champion, as well as the second and third-place finishers will qualify for the Concacaf Champions League and have an opportunity to earn a spot in the FIFA Club World Cup.



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