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Game One

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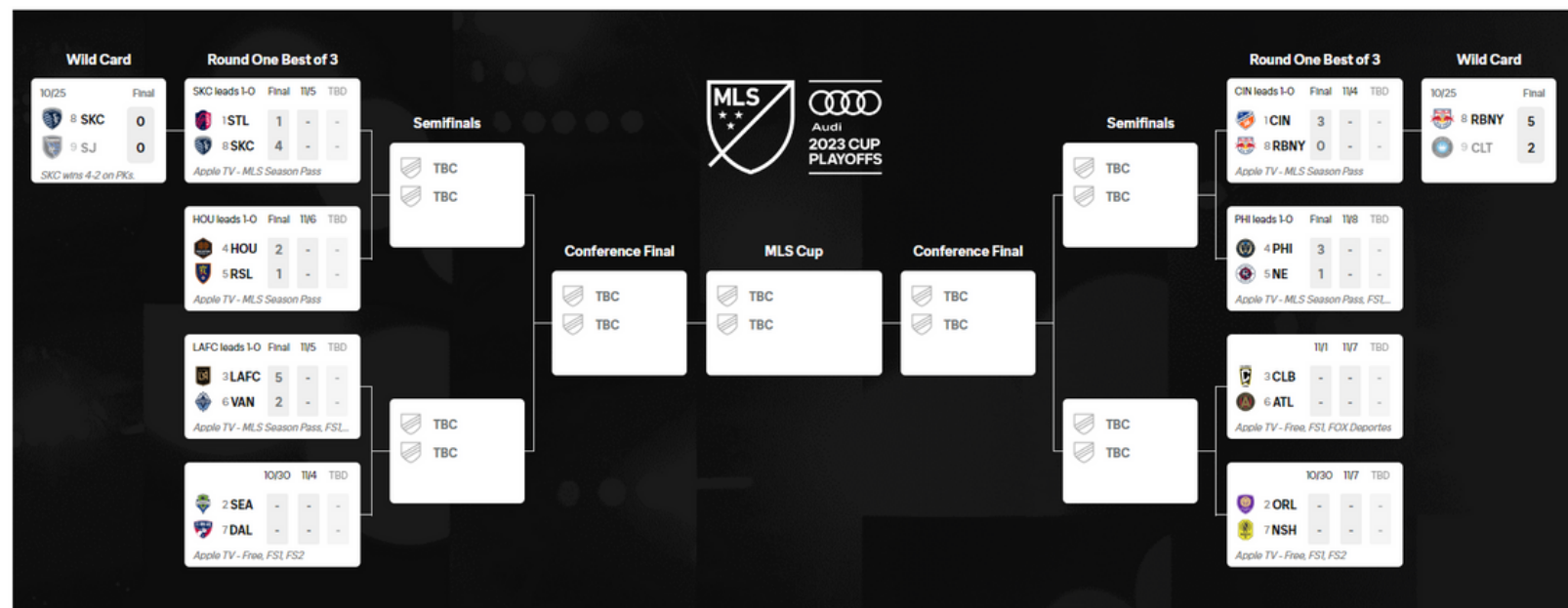
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2023 MLS Cup Playoffs Bracket



GAME 1 - ROUND 1 Columbus Crew vs. Atlanta United

The eighth and final Round One Best-of-3 series of the Audi 2023 MLS Cup Playoffs kicks off Wednesday night when the Columbus Crew (No. 3) host Atlanta United (No. 6) in a highly-anticipated Eastern Conference clash.

How to watch and stream

Apple TV - Free FS1, FOX Deportes

When

Wednesday, November 1 | 7:30 pm ET/4:30 pm PT

Where

Lower.com Field | Columbus, Ohio

This series between the league's top two scoring teams (67 goals for Columbus, 66 for Atlanta) will shift to A-Town for a Nov. 7 showdown at Mercedes-Benz Stadium. Game 3, if necessary, is scheduled for Nov. 12 at Lower.com Field.

If a Round One Best-of-3 series match is tied after regulation time (90 minutes), a penalty kick shootout will determine the winner (no extra time). Big picture, teams are chasing a berth in MLS Cup presented by Audi on Dec. 9.

Columbus Crew

Seed: 3rd in Eastern Conference

Record: 57 points (16W-9L-9D)

First-year head coach Wilfried Nancy has turned the Crew into a full-tilt attacking machine capable of breaking down any rival defense. Their MLS-leading 67 goals are ample evidence of the French manager's tactical impact on a club that thrives in the opposing half of the pitch.

As such, the Columbus game plan revolves primarily around their attacking trio of Cucho Hernández, Christian Ramírez and Diego Rossi – the latter arriving over the summer as a replacement for outgoing club legend Lucas Zelarayán, who was transferred to the Saudi Pro League mid-season.

Nancy, a Sigi Schmid MLS Coach of the Year Award finalist for a second-straight season, also has the Crew riding a six-game unbeaten streak (3W-0L-3D) heading into their Audi 2023 MLS Cup Playoffs debut.

Atlanta United

Seed: 6th in Eastern Conference

Record: 51 points (13W-9L-12D)

Arguably the only team that can compare to – or even surpass – the Crew's high-flying offense, Atlanta scored 66 goals over the course of the regular season. Fueled in large part by Argentine playmaker Thiago Almada and DP winter signing Giorgos Giakoumakis, the Five Stripes hit another gear over the summer with the Secondary Transfer Window arrivals of Tristan Muyumba, Xande Silva and Saba Lobjanidze

As good as their attack has been, Gonzalo Pineda's side has a clear weak spot: their 53 goals against in 2023 are worst among all playoff teams. These defensive flaws were laid bare in their first and only visit to Columbus this season back in March, when they suffered an ugly 6-1 loss at Lower.com Field.

Add to that Almada's suspension for Game 1 after getting a Decision Day red card, and Atlanta appear to have a steep uphill battle to climb. But if any team is capable of going tit-for-tat offensively with the Crew, it's the Five Stripes.

2023 Matchups

March 25: 6-1 Columbus win (regular season)

Oct. 7: 1-1 draw (regular season)

BEARS BREAK DOWN



Article by: Larry Mayer - Bears Senior Writer

Bears lament tackling issues in loss to Chargers

Fundamentally-sound tackling helped fuel three straight strong performances by the Bears defense, but the unit faltered in that area in Sunday night's 30-13 loss to the Los Angeles Chargers.

"The last three weeks our tackling has been really good," said coach Matt Eberflus. "But today wasn't what we needed it to be. We've been working our tail off on it in practice, been working on our angles, been working on that exact thing and it's been paying off for us, and today it did not."

Two of the costliest missed tackles came on Justin Herbert touchdown passes of 39 yards to running back Austin Ekeler midway through the first quarter and 11 yards to tight end Donald Parham Jr. late in the first half.

"We did a terrible job tackling in the first half," said cornerback Jaylon Johnson. "Just too many missed tackles, too many missed leverages that led to big plays. We know what to fix. We've just got to do it better."

"It was frustrating because we know we can do better. It's not something that you've got to learn or figure out what it is. You've just got to do it better."

Quick start: The Bears offense started off with a bang Sunday night, with Tyson Bagent completing a 41-yard pass to Darnell Mooney to the Chargers' 38 on the game's first play from scrimmage.

But the Bears were forced to punt after D'Onta Foreman was held to a 1-yard gain, Trent Taylor was dropped for a two-yard loss on a jet sweep and Bagent was sacked by Joey Bosa for a 10-yard loss.

"You get a big explosive play, and we don't take advantage of that," Eberflus said, "take that opportunity and create a scoring opportunity, at least a field goal. We got behind the sticks there."

"I feel like any time there's an explosive play, you want to try to finish a drive with points, whether it's three or six," added running back Darrynton Evans. "We're just going to have to go back to the drawing board and clean it up in practice and come out next week and try not to let it happen."

Stepping up: Evans scored the Bears' first touchdown on an 11-yard run that cut the deficit to 17-7 with 1:47 remaining in the first half. He took a pitch and raced around right end for the first rushing TD of his four-year NFL career. His only previous TD had come on a 3-yard reception Dec. 20, 2020, when he played for the Titans in a 46-25 win over the Lions.

"Great play call," Evans said. "Everyone did a good job on the outside blocking. After that it was easy, just following the parade and running to the end zone."

Ground up: The Bears defense continued to excel against the run. After allowing 29, 46 and 39 yards on the ground in its previous three games, the unit limited the Chargers to 54 yards on 25 carries, an average of just 2.2 yards per attempt.

Ekeler was held to 29 yards on 15 carries but did his damage as a receiver out of the backfield, catching seven passes for a game-high 94 yards.

Tight coverage: Chargers star defensive end Khalil Mack didn't make much of an impact in Sunday's game, recording one tackle, one tackle-for-loss and no sacks. But the perennial Pro Bowler may have saved a touchdown in the second quarter when he snuffed out a trick play.

After receiving a shotgun snap on second-and-7 from the Chargers' 14, Bagent handed off to Mooney and then tried to slip around left end and into the end zone. Mooney looked to throw the ball back to Bagent, but Mack was plastered to the Bears quarterback.

"He's one of the greatest players in this league," Bagent said. "High IQ. And it's a good thing [for the Chargers] he did [read the play] or that would have been a touchdown."

On the shelf: Quarterback Justin Fields (thumb), right guard Nate Davis (ankle), cornerback Terrell Smith (illness) and safety Jaquan Brisker (illness) were inactive. Defensive end Dominique Robinson was a healthy scratch.

Safety Eddie Jackson was active but did not play due to a foot injury. Elijah Hicks and Duron Harmon started at safety for the Bears.

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