

City "Huff And Puff," But Can't Blow Dallas Down In Goalless Draw

by Nathan Tucker, Sports Reporter
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ST. LOUIS - St. Louis City SC welcomed a wounded and wobbly FC Dallas to CITY PARK on Saturday night. Both teams came into the contest winless in their last four.

City “huffed and puffed” according to head coach Bradley Carnell, but couldn’t break Dallas down in 90 minutes. Heroics from keeper and captain Roman Bürki kept Dallas off the score sheet, and the two teams played out a goalless draw.

While there were no goals on either end, the game saw plenty of action, plenty of shots, especially from City, who dictated play with the ball at their feet for long spells over 90 minutes. City fired 24 total shots toward Maarten Paes in the FC Dallas goal, but only seven of those, less than a third, found the target.

It was indeed a night for the goalkeepers to take center stage, with Paes and Bürki combining for 12 saves that left attackers on both teams frustrated, wondering what they had to do to break down the brick walls that were in front of the goals at CITY PARK last night.

Bürki sprung into action defending a Dallas free kick just outside the box right before the half-hour mark. Dallas winger Dante Sealy put his left foot through the dead ball, forcing Bürki into an acrobatic lunging save to his left.

City's best scoring chance in the first half fell to the right foot of the left-footed fullback Anthony Markanich. Markanich connected with a Tomas Totland cross, directing a shot on goal, but couldn't quite get enough power behind the shot to beat Paes, who dove to the ground on his right to deny the City defender.

Tomas Ostrak almost scored a sensational swerving goal right before halftime, but just couldn't keep the shot down. Ostrak said after the match that those tend to go in on the training ground.

"You have to shoot, if you don't try, you're not going to score," said Ostrak postgame. "So I tried a few times tonight but I was a bit unlucky. I'm a bit luckier on the training ground."

Ostrak had a great game filling in for City's designated player and midfield creator Eduard Löwen, who is still nursing a hamstring injury and missed training this past week to deal with a personal matter. Ostrak covered just about every blade of grass, playing as a holding midfielder but also getting out on the wing to create space and try to break down Dallas's defensive block.

"I'm a flexible player, so, for me it doesn't matter where I play," said Ostrak. "I just want to give my best and help my teammates and just show (head coach Bradley Carnell) that I'm flexible. So, it's better for me that I'm flexible and that I can be useful for the team at these two positions."

Unusually for them, City dominated the possession game Saturday night. Per Major League Soccer's recorded statistics, City finished the 90 minutes with 64.3% possession. They also more than doubled Dallas's number of total passes, 531-258.

City came out of the halftime break with a bit more energy than their opponents, pressing for a moment of magic to break the goalless deadlock. Joao Klauss fired a missile from about 23 yards away from goal that likely produced the toughest save Paes had to make in the game.

Klauss has become the subject of a narrative with City's failure to win games over the past month. Onlookers, rightly or wrongly, point to missed chances on goal as the difference between winning, losing, or most often in City's case in 2024, drawing.

To his credit, Saturday was a great game for Klauss. He looked sharp with the ball at his feet, taking on allcomers with dribbles, creating space and playing passes for his teammates, and he was a big factor in City's high-press defense.

Unfortunately, for a striker, good games without goals don't win you plaudits or awards. Klauss even beat Paes with one shot Saturday, unfortunately for City's big Brazilian it was smashed off the crossbar.

FC Dallas thought they had found the game's opening goal around the 70th minute, after Omar Gonzales headed home a free kick, but the linesman's flag was raised on the far side of CITY PARK, to the joy of the nervous 22,000-plus in attendance.

Looking for a bit of added firepower late, City brought on another striker in Sam Adeniran. Adeniran had the best chance of anyone on the field to score when he was running in behind the Dallas defense in stoppage time, but chose to shoot with the outside of his left foot, poking his shot wide of the Dallas goal, much to the relief of Paes.

When the full-time whistle blew, the sold-out crowd didn't really know what to make of the game they saw. It was a game that City dominated on paper, but also had moments where it looked like they could have easily lost the game.

"Yeah, really, I would say an entertaining 0-0 draw where today I felt a little of control, a level of comfort on the sidelines," said Carnell, assessing the game.

"Just unfortunate we couldn't score a goal tonight. I thought we did enough. I thought the boys put in an excellent effort on both sides of the ball. Just that last bit of momentum, the last bit of, I don't want to say luck, but yeah, just something was keeping the ball out of the net tonight."

On the whole, Carnell and City were pleased with the performance, just disappointed they couldn't get the goal. In just about every statistic other than goals in the net, City were the better team than FC Dallas in Downtown West on Saturday. But goals win games, and City's inability to put away chances ultimately cost them a victory.

"After the last few weeks, it feels good to have a clean sheet," said Bürki following the draw. "But we should have definitely won that game."

Bürki was the most vocal following the game about City needing to find the edge that won them games in 2023.

“We definitely have to get back to being a team that is hard to beat,” said Bürki.

“The past few weeks, we weren’t that team. Today we were dominating the game, 100 percent, we had more phases where we were putting them under pressure. But to be a really good team we have to win games, we have to be clinical in front of goal. We have to decide the games earlier, we have the chances to (score). If you don’t (take chances) the other team will still smell a little bit of hope.”

Asked about the great performance of both goalkeepers, Bürki pointed to City’s 17 shots off-target.

“If you look at (Paes’s) saves, mostly we just didn’t hit the goal,” admitted City’s frustrated captain and keeper. “We can only win games if we score.”

Carnell took the more optimistic approach.

“If you can't score, don't concede. And I think that's what we did tonight, a really good, solid performance defensively,” noted Carnell.

“I thought the game was played exactly the way we wanted to play, against a very stingy, greedy Dallas team who usually are difficult to play against. And we've seen this before. But credit to the boys. I think it was 27 shots if I'm not mistaken. We huffed and we puffed but we just couldn't break (Dallas) today, but I thought it was a really good performance.”