

MLS POST-GAME QUOTES

Portland Timbers vs. Columbus Crew
Feb. 21, 2026 – Providence Park (Portland, Ore.)
Final: Portland Timbers 3, Columbus 2

Portland Timbers Head Coach Phil Neville

General thoughts on tonight's match...

"I thought it was a brilliant night. I thought it was a brilliant game of football with two teams that wanted to play football the right way. I think at 2-1, I said to Dave [van den Bergh] this could be 6-5, this could be 4-3. But I was actually really enjoying it. I told the team that I trusted them and I told them that I would keep quiet. I told them that I would just sit down and enjoy their football. There were two phases to the half — there was a 20-minute period in the first half that was sensational. And then there was a period in the second half where I'd say we were sloppy technically, we were sloppy in possession and we had to really defend. And we did and we got the win. Did we deserve to win? I think it could have gone either way. I'm just glad that it fell our way."

On starting some of the new Timbers players tonight...

"I lied on Wednesday because I knew my starting 11 on Wednesday. What I thought was really important tonight was to give the new players their debuts at Providence Park. I think it's important for them to sample what it's like to be a Portland Timbers player. I've looked at Cole [Bassett] all pre-season, and he's probably like, we're in Coachella. And he's probably looked around and thought like, 'really, what's this club all about?' And I think he's experienced tonight what this club is all about. And I think that was really important for [Alex] Bonetig, and for Brandon Bye as well. So that was my reasoning behind that. I just said to them at the end, I felt that the players that came on — Kamal [Miller], Ari [Lassiter], [Ian] Smith, Joao [Ortiz] and [Kevin] Kelsy — I actually felt they won us the game. I really did. I felt that they won us the game with their attitude, with their energy, with their commitment, with their spirit. And I think we're going to need those five. You know, those five will play. Maybe they're frustrated tonight that they didn't. But, you know, this season's long, and they're all going to get opportunities because we've got a small squad and I love the fact that we've got a small squad, because everybody's pulling in the right direction. And tonight's just the start, and we're really pleased."

On Cole Bassett's Timber's debut...

"I can't wait to see his running data, because I honestly felt after 30 minutes he's going to need something to get him off the field, he was running that much. The second half, he was equally as good. I really believe he's a top player. I think his performance tonight was outstanding. He was probably our best player, probably. And he's a multi-functional midfield player. He's a throwback. You know, people talk I think in modern day football, where people say 'oh he's a six' or 'an eight.' I see [Bassett] as a central midfield player. He can play six and play eight, he can play 10. He's just a multifunctional central midfield player. He's a throwback to 10 years ago when people just played central midfield, and people were just like, 'Oh, I'm just a holding midfield player.' No. He's a central midfield player that can do every job that's asked of him. Tonight was a really good start for him. He's got a big game next week going back to his old club, and there's still more to come from him. Goals. Assists. And giving the midfield some control."

On Felipe Mora's first goal of the season...

"I messed him around last season. In reflection, I messed him around. I probably didn't give him the minutes that he deserved. I probably pushed other players in front of him. He knows the value to this club. I think he probably had an off season where he probably doubted where his future lay. But I think from the end-of-season meeting, we automatically just took his option. There was never any thought in our mind that we were going to do anything other than wanting him in this football club. He played in a 10 role

today, and I thought he did outstandingly well. I think him and Gage [Guerra] are a partnership. Kelsy and [Kristoffer] Velda are a partnership. And that's what we learned in preseason. And Kevin didn't get left out tonight because of his performances in preseason. He just got left out because of the partnership that we feel is probably better at this moment in time with [Mora and] Gage. And so we're pleased for [Mora]. Great to get his goal. And you know, when [Mora] scores, he goes on a run of scoring goals. So we're looking forward to that."

Portland Timbers forward Felipe Mora

On the partnership he's developed with Gage Guerra...

"I'm very happy with the win. First, Gage [Guerra] has been great. You know, we've been training together, and we feel great. We feel like we have a lot of quality up top, so it makes things a lot easier."

On what he sees his role as and wants to achieve this season...

"I didn't have the continuity I would have wanted, but I will always try and be a support in and out of the field. It may make me a leader, but at the end of the day, I think the team is always first, above individuals."

How he felt about his role in tonight's match...

"It was a position that I played throughout the preseason, and it helps me be a little more participative with the team, a little lower down the field. But either way, I feel comfortable with the position I get. I'll do my best."

On his daughter being here tonight and how important it was for him to score in the first match of the season...

"It's actually her first time here at the stadium, so I'm happy she brought me luck. We hope to continue like this. Like I've always said, a forward lives on scoring goals. So let's hope to continue this."

On gaining the confidence and competing for his forward position...

"Yes, it's very important to score a goal today. I think the competition is healthy, though. Kevin [Kelsy] and Gage [Guerra] have a lot of talent, and there will always be competition regardless."

Portland Timbers midfielder Ari Lassiter

What was said in preparing to come off the bench in the second half?

"Well, for us, as far as the wingers go, we wanted to be high and wide. To be able to stretch their back line, their back five, on both sides, the left and the right. Ideally, it was for me to get high and wide and get runs in behind and threaten and try to go 1v1 as much as possible. Thankfully, the ball was just sitting up, laying right there for me to be able to tuck it away."

What were the main differences in last pre-season and this pre-season?

"I think I had a lot of good work in the offseason, so I think the mentality of the group is a bit different. I think we all want to work hard. I think we all have moments where we all are going to need to step up, and I think a lot of guys did that today. Gage [Guerra] had a good game today, Antony's doing his thing, and [Kristoffer] Velde is dangerous. All the guys coming off the bench did a really good job. And that's what it's going to take for us this year to be a full squad and have everybody ready mentally, physically and on top of what we have to do."

On the stability of the team this year compared to last year...

“I think that everybody knows their role, and everybody knows what they have to do. It's not going to be one person. We're going to need everyone. Everyone that starts, everyone that's on the bench, everyone that's not even rostered. So we know that it's going to take a full team effort. I think maybe last year was a little bit different. I think we were expecting some of us to be a little bit more individualistic and try to win games that way. I don't think moments like that will necessarily change, of course, but I think this year, we know that we are a team that's going to have to fight, and everybody's going to have to come out ready to go.”