

MLS POST-GAME QUOTES

Portland Timbers vs. Vancouver Whitecaps FC
March 7, 2026 – Providence Park (Portland, Ore.)
Final: Vancouver Whitecaps 4, Portland Timbers 1

Portland Timbers Head Coach Phil Neville

On Eric Izoita's debut and performance...

"I thought he was the best player on the pitch for us. Our youngest player played like a man, and I didn't think the others played like men. I really didn't. We've loved him for the last six months, seven months. We've believed in him. No hesitation to put him in today. Composure on the ball, temperament to play at this level, courage to do the right things. In the makeup of that central area, I thought he was head and shoulders above everybody else on our team. Super proud. We're a club that really, really believes in young players, and he's another one that can come through. We're going to just keep giving him the opportunity. That's the way that we're going. That's the way that this team is going to be built. There's going to be ups and downs. Today was a down, but he was a shining light. And I thought we had one or two players that were a little bit like, this is going to be tough. And [Eric] — for me — just lit up the game for us every time he touched the ball."

On the changes to the team's starting lineup...

"We've got a lot of starters out, but that's not an excuse really. Playing Vancouver with your best 11 is tough. Obviously, we knew it was going to be tough, but I just said to the team that the first goal was on us. Second goal was on us. Fourth goal was on us. Third goal, on us. So we can make excuses that we made four or five changes. We didn't have Cole [Bassett], we didn't have Diego [Chará], we didn't have Juan Mosquera, we didn't have [Alex] Bonetig. It wasn't the reason we lost the game. We lost the game because we made basic errors. We didn't show the toughness to play against a Vancouver team. And what I said to them at the end is that I want them all to watch the game back and see Thomas Müller running back. 93rd minute running back. And I'm afraid there's some of ours that didn't do that. And to win a game of football against the best teams, you need every single player to be showing that kind of hunger. And you know, when you come to Providence Park, there's an incredible atmosphere, and you want to be the star, but the only star should be the team, not an individual. That was my reflection."

On the mentality of playing against Vancouver...

"No mental block at all. I mean, last year we were down to 10 men after what? Five minutes. Same referee? Yeah, same referees went tonight. Sent Kamal Miller off. I think the playoff game, you could say was damaging. Tonight there were no lasting effects from those games. We were just playing against a really good team. And when you play against men, you've got to play like men. Not play like little boys. And I thought some of our players played like little boys. I really did. And these are the experienced players, the players that have been with us. I thought they played with too much fear. I think that's because — maybe last week at Colorado, and then the week we've had — we've really pushed them. We're playing against a good team. I think against a good team you need to show even more courage. I think [Alexander] Aravena, [Eric] Izoita were the players on the pitch for me that showed the most courage. And so a good chance that those two will start next week."

On the team's transitional play...

"Well I think there's some context, obviously, to tonight. Cole [Bassett] dropped out on the morning of the game today, which was a big loss for us. You can't go into these games with too many of your best players and most experienced players out. Like I said about Thomas Müller and [Sebastian] Berhalter at the end. You've got to sprint forward and sprint back. You've got to defend transitions, and you've got to

transition well. We're probably one of the best teams from the data, to transition to goal. The quickest from winning the ball to transition to goal. Data-wise, I think we're one of the best, and we've got to be equally as efficient defending that. That means that you need 11 players to come back. You can't be left with four players up front. You can't be left with people just thinking, 'well, you know, I'm not going to run back today because I'm at Providence Park, and we're going to leave the boys at the back to defend.' You can't do that against the best teams, trust me. I've been there and I've done that, and it's every single player. You watch the best teams. I watched Arsenal this morning. I watched Manchester City versus Newcastle. The best teams, every single player runs back. Sprints forward, sprints back. And I think if we've got some players that really aspire to be at the real, real top, then that's the things that we need to keep preaching to them and teaching them and learning them and showing them and regroup this learning. And sometimes through failure, you don't fail, you learn, and you only learn and get better through improving from these examples that we've seen tonight and against Colorado a little bit. I trust my players incredibly well. I knew it was going to be a tough game tonight. I'm just disappointed that we've probably come away — and I've come away thinking — we've actually competed really well, but we've thrown two or three goals away through our own mistakes. That's the frustration."

Portland Timbers midfielder Eric Izoita

On coming up through the Timbers' academy to playing in the first team...

"It's been a really good experience. I'm thankful to all the staff for believing in me and giving me the opportunity. It's a lot different than the academy, for sure. A lot better, a lot faster. Everything's just a lot better."

On his mentality lining up for a Cascadia derby on his debut...

"It was just, for me, like a regular game. I mean, obviously it's a debut for the first team, but I was going out there like it was a regular game. I wasn't really looking at the opponents. It was more about us. It wasn't really good enough from us today. We weren't good on the ball, and that's the reason we lost I think."

On when he found out he'd be starting his first match...

"I found out I was gonna be on the roster yesterday, and then I found out I was gonna start today a couple hours before the game. Phil [Neville] was amazing. Really encouraging. All the staff was really encouraging. They said they believed in me, and they all showed it. They put me on the field for the first time. I'm just grateful that they believe in me."

On if he visualized scoring on his debut...

"No, honestly, I wasn't. Everybody was telling me like, there were other guys, my brother, they're all saying, like, 'go out there and score. Go out there and score.' I never scored. I didn't score a single goal last year with T2. I was like, I'm not the goal-scorer, but it came today, and I knew I had to shoot from there. So I took the shot and then it went in. Really happy about that."