

MLS POST-GAME QUOTES

Portland Timbers vs. Chicago Fire FC
August 16, 2026 – Soldier Field (Chicago, Ill.)
Final: Chicago Fire 2, Portland Timbers 1

Portland Timbers Head Coach Martí Cifuentes

General thoughts on the match...

"Definitely disappointed, of course, because we came here to try to get the three points and we couldn't. Fair play to Chicago. I think overall they were better than us. It's a game, obviously very influenced by the fact that we conceded two goals in the first 20 minutes. I think it's two situations that we should have defended better, despite some individual mistakes. But my job is to create a structure that sustains those individual mistakes. But yeah, the first was a bad situation because already it's an offside situation that we should know — the ref doesn't whistle — and then the second ball is for them a ball in behind, and then the cover, the backline behind was not strong enough, and then the second ball obviously is a ball that we should have cleared better. I think that from there it was difficult mentally. Some moments of the first half, we missed a little bit to create a little bit of momentum on the ball, so we knew that [Chicago] are quite strong on the counter because they have quick and fast players when there are turnovers. Then in the second half I would say that for moments we improved. I think that we were slightly better for some moments, but still we couldn't find this momentum overall. I value the fact that despite Chicago far being better than us overall, I value the fact that we finished strong, that the guys were honest, we scored a goal and we tried to put pressure at the end. So I wouldn't say that we deserve to get something, but I think it's important that the team never gives up and shows that mentality. Saying that, I repeat now, Chicago deserved to win, so I don't want to look bitter on that one. But I think that it's important to highlight, especially because the way the MLS is developing, the pitch was not at the level that this league deserves. It's unfortunate perhaps — I don't know exactly the reasons why yesterday was an NFL game here or a friendly game here, American football. But the fact is that the pitch was amateur level; it was not good enough to play a good game. And here I'm talking not about only Portland fans, but Chicago fans and fans overall that are watching this league grow every year, every season, every game. And I think that we should be better on this now, and I want to highlight this because it's important for the development of American football, American soccer."

On the defensive issues that allowed Chicago to go 2-0 up early in the match...

"I don't want to blame anyone individually. In any case it should be me, because it's a misunderstanding and a bad decision making. I'm a big believer that at the end in football, the most important is the decision making — in-possession, out of possession. And on that one, definitely we open the pitch too much to defend in a situation that we don't have that clear impact around the ball holder, so it's easy for him to just play behind, and everything gets too wide, too open. The reality is a strange one. I think it was what we call a plus two, so it was a recovery practice before Tijuana, and then the minus one, which is a training that there is not much where you can train actually. It must be a short one because you need to keep the freshness of the players for the game. After Tijuana, it was just a recovery practice again. Most of the players were inside the gym, recovering from the knocks. That's the usual at this level. And then we traveled to Chicago, so the training was here in Chicago. And obviously, it's difficult to work on game plans when you are training in the training facility of the opposition, so there is not much that you can work on. So basically, everything that we have done has been on videos, on talking to the players, on small units and team meetings. So we need to get all those things into the pitch properly to train them, to practice them, and I'm sure that it's going to get better. But the reality is that today we look more disjointed than I would like."

On what he thinks the Timbers need to do better to break down defenses...

"I think that we're going to face this situation, and I experienced that before in different countries, in different leagues. So the way we want to play, it's going to be a lot of situations against perhaps deeper blocks, and then here the relations must grow, and it will grow because it's about small movements, it's about small combinations, about small details that at the end can make the difference. On that part, there is definitely some work to be done. Today as well, I think that Chicago usually is a team that pushes a lot with the fullbacks very high. We had a big focus on that as well, using those gaps on a counter, but because we conceded two goals in the first 18 minutes or 20 minutes, then it was a game changer. So those counter opportunities were just the opposite. We had to push more, we had to risk a bit more in order to get more bodies, in order to get those more situations that at the end in the last third can make the difference to create the chance. I remember the one of Omir [Fernandez] as well at the very end of the game. So we need that to get better for sure, and we need the talent of [Kristoffer Velde], the talent of David [Da Costa], the talent of certain players, of course, to be there to make a difference as well."

On how the Timbers defended and attacked the wide spaces...

"There are a lot of things that today I could say that we want to improve, and I think that's a fair feeling when you have lost a game the way we did. There are plenty of things that we can improve. What I want to highlight is that, despite being very far from the level I think we can get, the potential we have, still, the team was there in the game, and we finished the last minutes pushing to try to get a draw. So that's something that I want to value. The mentality has been good against Tijuana. The same. We conceded an early goal. It was disappointing, but the team showed this resilience, this character, and these are the areas that I want to focus on at the moment. Then hopefully we're gonna get — not this week either, but we're gonna get — hopefully a full week to train with the team on the pitch, and then those things I'm sure are gonna get better."

On the impact of the congested game schedule...

"I felt the rhythm was very low actually today, so definitely it must be [a factor]. It was hot. The humidity here in Chicago is really, really high, so it's not easy for the players. But I definitely felt that the rhythm, the intensity, can go higher. But that must be one of the reasons when you have that succession of games. It's not easy. We are not the [deepest] roster in the league, so we need to manage very well the minutes of, I would say, all the players. Today you could see that most of the players who play 60, 50 minutes last game, we tried to push them to play 90. That some of the players that played 90 couldn't start. We decided that they shouldn't start because it's not just about today, but it's about what we do on Wednesday, what we do during the next week. Hopefully we can we can handle well, and I think that in this period as well, a big priority for us is to not get injuries because I'm sure that we're going to see a lot of games, that it's going to be some muscular injuries, and hopefully we can we can manage these in the best way."

Portland Timbers defender Finn Surman

On scoring his first Timbers goal...

"A little bit of a relief. It's been a long time coming, and that moment was pretty cool. So I'm really happy with that. The result puts a bit of a cloud over it, so that's disappointing. We'll just move on to the next one. Try and score again next game on Wednesday."

On Chicago taking a 2-0 lead early in the match...

"That 20-minute period at the start was pretty poor from us. You can't start like that on the road because you just get punished. I think it comes down to a couple moments. I got to put my hand up and take accountability. There were a couple moments there that I needed to do a lot better. Anyone on the team in that moment needs to do better, and so I need to do better. So that was disappointing. I think that it's

little — I don't want to say lapses in concentration — but kind of just little decision-making things, little things like should that person jump there, should that person go there, and then [Chicago] kind of exploited it pretty well, and they were pretty ruthless in that first 20 minutes. So we need to be better in those moments, be a lot better on the road. You know, we can't start slow. I think we have had a little bit of an issue the last — I don't know — probably since the World Cup break, to be honest, of starting slow and it's not by design. We're not purposely doing it, but it's something as a team that we're addressing, and we need to get better at. We know we need to get better.”

On new head coach Martí Cifuentes' influence in his first week...

“He's coming at a weird time. It's a really busy period for us. He's kind of coming off the back of a period where we were getting some good results, and so he's come in, and I think that he's done a good job of introducing his ideas, but not overloading us. Because I think it would be easy if you come into a new role and new club, and you want to immediately put your stamp on it. But he's been really good at kind of — I don't want to say drip feeding — but slowly giving us more and more information about how he wants us to be, and we know we're not the finished product of that yet, and he knows that as well. So we'll continue to work. It's difficult when you have such a short amount of time between games. So he's just tweaking little things one by one, and I think that's the way forward for us.”