

## **MLS POST-GAME QUOTES**

Portland Timbers vs. St. Louis City SC  
September 9, 2026 – Providence Park (Portland, Ore.)  
Final: Portland Timbers 2, St. Louis 2

### **Portland Timbers Head Coach Martí Cifuentes**

#### ***General thoughts on the match...***

"We didn't start well at all. Probably the most difficult start to the match that we could imagine because it's not only the goal we concede, but then as well, I think that we were really like a boxer when he gets a bit dizzy because of an unexpected situation. And then suddenly after 15 minutes we lose one of our most important players with David [Da Costa]'s situation. So we took some time until we got into the rhythm of the game. I think that when we did in the first half, we finish very strong, not only because of the equalizer that helped us mentally, but as well the way we play, the way we build up against [St. Louis], the way we went through their pressure again and again and again, against a team that actually is very aggressive and defends well. So credit to the guys that understood very well why it was needed, once again, to build against a team that tries to play very aggressive. It's true of St. Louis in the last minutes of the first half, and that's why they got a little bit more control. They change a little bit in the midfield. They create a diamond that creates some doubts on the press, and then we finish the last five minutes of the first half, seven minutes of the first half with a little bit of doubt because of that diamond instead of the usual box that they have. But that we corrected, and then it was a clear message in the second half that we have to stay connected to the game in these small details, small situations, because I was sure with the quality that we got and the belief and how strong we can be at home that we could have situations to win the game. And then we concede a goal that's exactly the opposite of what we were asking. There is lack of what I say, 'stay connected.' It's a free kick, very high on the pitch. Again, we should have organized much quicker. That we should have paid much more attention, but we do all the opposite things. And then they get into the box in a situation that we should never concede. From there, I really want to emphasize that the team kept believing, that those guys have this strength, mentality — call it how you want — but this resilience that allows us to keep competing despite perhaps when things are not going our way. I think through the minutes we were more and more dominant. We missed a little bit the last pass because we got a lot of actions into the last third. We could penetrate once again the pressure and go defending in a lower block, but this quality, this small movement, this small pass. I remember two or three actions with [Kristoffer Velde] playing through them, and then perhaps [Vincent Janssen] was very tired. But it was very difficult for me to sub someone who comes from a hat trick, in a game that you are losing at home. It's very difficult to take him out, but he was very tired. At the end, it's very good that Kris helped us with his individual quality through two quality actions that show his level. But as well, we felt a little bit like, with a little bit more control in certain situations, especially defensively, with some improvements in some areas that we're trying to improve — starts of the games, not concede goals, try to keep clean sheets — something that we need to work on to correct. Definitely, it is a game that, in my opinion, we could have won, but we play against a good team, that has good players, that are in very good form, and it was difficult at the end. I think the point is something that we need to give value according to how the game started."

#### ***On substituting in Diego Chará when David Da Costa goes down with a concussion...***

"The thinking process is that — I explained, I think last week — for me Joao [Ortiz] is a hybrid between a six and an eight. I felt that perhaps as well the way St. Louis started the game with [Rafael] Navarro, who is a very good holding player. The fact that we could add Diego, who is very good at regaining second balls, into picking with these tackles, into doing like what we call 'the sandwich' between the center half and the six, that he could help us to avoid when we try to press very aggressively. [St. Louis] try to go

over, and then I think that Diego did a fantastic job, especially through the minutes. I think that he finished the game at an incredible level, and that was the thinking behind that. Joao could give us something else a bit higher on the pitch, and then as well, when we decided to sub Joao and have Omir [Fernandez] there, it was because we were looking for the more attacking profile, because I think Omir is more a 10 than what Joao is. Joao, as I said, is more six/eight, while for me, Diego is a clear number six.”

***On the offensive firepower the Timbers have with Kristoffer Velde...***

“It’s not a secret that I love Kris since my time in Norway, and that I was always interested in him because I think he’s a fantastic player, and he will help us a lot. He’s already helping us. I think in the first games it was a bit difficult for him because he went to Norway because he had his baby, so he came a little bit out of rhythm, so to say, on my arrival. So we were trying to be very cautious with him in terms of not pushing for him too many minutes, especially at this time of the season when the pitches are very dry and it’s very hot. Now I think he’s picking that rhythm that he needs because he’s quite powerful, very technical, but as well his first meters are very strong. I think that he’s fantastic on 1v1. He’s very good on driving inside, but as well on combinations in small pockets. Then he’s got his pace, his quality to give us another dimension when we counter. And it’s not easy to find these two qualities in players that are technically good in smaller spaces, but as well he’s got this big power to attack bigger spaces, so I think that is definitely a pleasure as a coach to have him.”

***On preparing to play against a physical team like St. Louis...***

“Definitely. It’s a team that is very aggressive, especially when you try to build up. They go man-to-man, and actually, the first goal is a situation when they try to jump in a very aggressive way. And we need to understand what it takes here. I think that the goals against Minnesota and today, for many, many actions, many minutes, when we were able to play through them, around them, we were able to really beat their high press. And then it’s true that the way I like to play requires a certain level of rhythm if you want, more than physicality. Because at the end physicality is a bit of an abstract concept. I think that you need to be able to sustain a high rhythm out of possession, and then in possession you need those moments where you need to be more calm, knowing that against certain teams it is not easy because they go man-to-man, they come to press you, and then there is no free man. There are not any free men in the pitch, so you need to find quick combinations to play through them, and then — as it happened in the second half — when they’re in a low block, that is when you can decide if you really want to sustain longer possessions, as well to have shorter transitions. I think that the team did well. I think that Finn [Surman] had a fantastic game against a difficult player, a very good player like Navarro is. Then they bring the other guy with new energy and still Finn competed very well. I’m happy with the guys. How they are adapting to perhaps a way that it was a bit more like mid-block to low block, try to get more in the counters. Now we need to expand that a little bit, but it will take time. You can see that, for instance, in the first half, the last seven minutes against Minnesota for some minutes, we tend to drop a little bit. So we need to keep correcting and working on that.”

**Portland Timbers forward Kristoffer Velde**

***On the free kick routine that led to his second goal...***

“It was so much back and forth, and [Vincent] Janssen came as well. He asked me if he wanted a left foot guy with me there for the free kick for the setup, and then suddenly Cole [Bassett] got involved, and Cole said, ‘We need to move the wall.’ And I wanted him in one place, and he wanted to stay in another place. And in the last second, he said, ‘I will just flick it behind me, and you shoot.’ And it ended well. So need to give some credit to Cole for that one. Was 75% his goal.”

***On playing under head coach Martí Cifuentes...***

"I never worked with Martí. I knew he has been interested in me in the past, and I heard a lot of great things about him as a coach from my time back in Norway, and played against him a few times, and always scored against him. And now our paths crossed. I'm happy to work under him, and I think he has a lot of good ideas that he wants to implement into this team. Obviously it takes a bit of time. I think the more time he gets, the better it will be. And because we concede, it's not his fault. It's us as a team, where we switch off or personal mistakes. So I think if we get rid of those, we will be a very good team."

***On preparing to play against a physical team like St. Louis...***

"After the last game, I had some really bad pain in my groin right after and had some hard few last days where I struggled a bit with pain. But yeah, you just need to get ready and be ready for every moment in every game. So we knew it was going to be a tough game. It's just finish the game and get back on the horse and compete again. And I think we did great. I think we should win this game. That's my honest answer. We can't cry about this game anymore. We have a new game in Dallas in a few hours, so we just need to get back on the horse."

***Reflecting on arriving in Portland and finding his goal-scoring touch...***

"I think I was pretty unlucky in the first — how many was it — like 13 games before I scored against San Diego. Many, many opportunities, many chances missed, hit the post a few times, and I think as an offensive player, as soon as you get one or two, it starts to get this catch-up effect, and the goals are running through, and assists are running through. So I think I said it in the press conference last year as well, I wish we had many more games to play because I was really finding the back of the net. I enjoy playing for Portland. I enjoy attacking. I enjoy creating chances. When the ball goes in the back of the net, I'm very happy. So, just need to keep going, help the team in the best way I can, and create. That's my job."

***On playing with a lot of intense emotion and finding that edge...***

"How many games I've been going on without a yellow card is crazy. I think 10 games without a yellow card. I feel like I need to be on the edge to play well. I think in the Austin game I wasn't on the edge, and it was a really bad game. So I think just be as friendly with the referee as possible, and keep him happy sometimes. But today, like this, blonde guy that came on the central defender. It should have been a red card, that's for sure. So I told him after the game, like this is really bad. I draw so many fouls, and I think the referees are so aware of it. But I haven't got a defender a red card this season, which is crazy to me. So I think they should protect me more. I'm being fouled so many times, and it's frustrating. But nothing I can do about it."