

MLS POST-GAME QUOTES

Atlanta United FC vs Portland Timbers FC
Feb 28, 2026 – Providence Park, Portland, OR
Final: Atlanta United FC 1, Portland Timbers FC 0

Portland Timbers FC Head Coach Martí Cifuentes

Opening thoughts on tonight's match...

"Yeah, sure. Yeah, very disappointing night. That we definitely could get more from the game, and it's one of those nights probably because we think we can see a clear progress on the identity of the team. I think that we started really well the first 15 minutes of the game, which we spoke with the players, how important it is after a season where a lot of weak stars of the game, I would say, and definitely think that we did a lot of good things today. But then we can see the goal, and the goal is a mistake on the build-up, is a mistake on the way with the fan against a very left-footed player that we know that he likes to cut inside. So it's a combination of mistakes, but once again, it's disappointing to not be able to keep the clean sheet, and then you are chasing a result. I think that after the goal, perhaps we lost a little bit the grip of the game. Atlanta obviously has quality players. We know that they had made big investment during the last window, bringing some good players, and yeah, it's true that I don't think that we considered more chances during the first half, but we got good control. Perhaps we couldn't press and regain as many balls as we did in the first minutes of the game because they started to drop more and more players behind the ball. So you always need to find a thin balance on how much you want to jam and be aggressive on them. But when they have a player like Embola, that today for me made a difference for them in the way they press, in the way sorry they build up, they could drop, they could use him dropping down, or he could run in behind. Then it was a bit tricky to control. In the second half, obviously we spoke about the things that we had to improve. I think that Antony had a good had a good game, the minutes he played, but obviously it's not it's not a clear striker when you're defending a low block. Through the minutes, Atlanta started to drop, and we needed more reference. It's a pity that Vinny got this hamstring issue in the last week, but the reality is that he only trained last couple of days, very light sessions, so it was too much, perhaps, for him to start the game. And yeah, through the minutes, I think they were more and more desperate, so to say. The transition started to get longer, but we got still enough chances to at least to get one point from the game, so it's on us. It's on us. We need to be better at not getting punished by those mistakes, and be better in the last term because we had plenty of situations in the in the box. We had more chances than them, and still we lost. So it's disappointing, but that's the reality of the game. It's not, I always say, it's not about deserving; it's about achieving, and we didn't achieve today."

On the team's response to the goal...

"Yeah, as I said, my impression. Obviously, I want to want to see the game, watch the game again. But my feeling it was that we started really well, creating some great atmosphere together with the fans. That's the kind of feeling that I want to build when we play, especially at home. I think that we put pressure, we created chances, we were able to regain very high on the pitch. We were very good on the counter pressing. I remember a lot of situations with Diego recovering quite high on the pitch. So I think it was a combination of a lot of good things that are very aligned on our identity. My feeling is that after the goal, perhaps we lost a little bit of that grid. But as I said, I think that Atlanta started to draw more and more players to just get more control, to slow down the tempo of the game, they are good. They have experienced players. They know how to slow down the tempo of the game, which they did for probably 94 minutes. And yeah, we just need to get better on managing those situations. Mistakes about the game is about how you respond. And obviously, I know that Finn was very disappointed, but it's not on Finn. It's on the whole team how we respond to those kind of mistakes, in a process where we know the way we build up in zone one is slightly different than when we build up high on the pitch. So perhaps we are caught a little bit in between. It's a bit of individual and collective understanding of what we are trying to do. But perhaps when I when I look at the 90 minutes for me, perhaps was today the most complete performance since I've been here in terms of stability and our behaviors, in terms of our patterns, on recognizing what the players need to do, and from there, I think it's a good foundation to to keep growing."

On what signs of improvement coach is seeing...

"Yeah, I think that through a season you will get moments where perhaps you will collect more points than what actually perhaps you can deserve in some games. But that's power of the game. And now we're in this bum during the year that that things are not going our way because we are doing good things. I'm especially disappointed that in the last games at home we lost against our team in a game that perhaps we should get something more from the from it. Not our best game, but still it hurt against St. Louis. I think that we play really well for many minutes. We did a lot of good things. We couldn't get the win, and today it hurt to to not even be able to score one goal because you think that the least we could get it was a draw, but again we need to convert those situations. I think that in the second half we got like two, three clear ones against Dallas. It was the same. I think it's very clear, but we are missing, and it's something that we knew that we should have addressed. But that's what we are."

On Antony starting at the striker position...

"Yeah, Antony has played before as a number nine in his in Portugal, especially. I'm not sure if he has played a lot of games other seasons, but because of his qualities and the way Atlanta defends, we felt that his pace could be very useful against the pair of center halves, which I think he did in a couple of situations. Obviously, when we had to attack through the minutes in second half, a deeper block. He's not a static number nine or a box number nine, so we felt that perhaps it was between him and one of the other wingers, and because in low block within the against low block, we think that Kris is very important. He's got the one v1. Today things didn't work his way, but still, he's very a player that can track a lot of pressure. We felt that it was a good moment for Beanie to jump, but I'm happy with Antony. I think he's an important player for us. I want to see again the best version of himself because I know I know the potential he's got in himself."

On the ball movement of the team against a low block...

"Yeah, attacking low blocks is one of the most difficult things in football because it requires a lot of coordination and synchronization. That's the right word, sync, in between the players, I do believe that the timing at times was not there, but the ideas were there. It's true as well. From minute 80, we felt that they were very deep, very low, and we changed to a three at the back. With Ian being one of those three, which Ian is a very attacking fullback, almost like a wing back in my eyes. And doing that, we had Ariel on the left side, so in his natural side, just to cross more often, and then we had Omir on the right to try to use Vinny and Gage's and more target the strikers, give a little more freedom in between for Kris. I think the last minute, from minute 80, so to say, then it was a different game. Perhaps it's true that during the development of the second half we miss a little bit more. It was not perhaps the best game for some of our attacking or attacking midfielder players as well. We need more from them. We need to create more. We need to make sure that the tempo of the of the rhythm of the of the ball gets higher, and as well sometimes to sustain the tags a bit longer because not because you attack faster you will attack better."

On the midfield of Da Costa and Bassett...

"I think they are good players, and it's my job to get the best of both of them. So definitely, it's a work that we are doing with both of them to try to understand which situations they feel they feel better. I think it's very clear to understand their profiles, but then we need, as I said, this this development as a team. This this growth as a team that we want to experience, and they need to be very important players, and we need to ask them for to get all their qualities for sure."

Portland Timber Midfielder Diego Chara***On how the team can get more goals in the net...***

"Yeah, I think talking about the attacking side today, I think we miss a little bit quality at the end, you know. What you say, we create a lot of opportunities more in second half, and I mean, I think that was the

difference, the quality. And talking and the defense, I mean, has been very difficult for us because we want to keep the clean sheet, and has been difficult for this team. We're still working really hard, you know, to get it. And I mean, hopefully, I think that the next game try to be better and get the three points."

On the delayed play from Atlanta...

"Yeah, I think before the Tana goal, I think we played really well, trying to control the game. And after their goal, it was a different game. You know, we were chasing. You know they try to manage the tempo of the game, and sometimes you can do anything. You know, it's just try to play the best possible. At the at the end, we didn't get the goal. You know, and I think we need to learn from these games."

On what he wants from the next eight games...

"So first of all, seeing the team is going to be crucial to wearing the to get clean sheets. You know that's going to be crucial for us in the in this final part of the season. And second, I think we need to start getting points away. I think that's going to become crucial too. And I mean, we have this way to prepare well and be ready for those eight games."

On how he picks up teammates as a captain...

"I mean, it happens, you know. I think after he tried to make the pass and missed it, we had the opportunity to stop the guy running, you know. I think it's not just in Finn; it's in everyone, and what I said before is going to be crucial for us to prepare in those situations."

On how to gain more clean sheets...

"I think we need to make and find a way to do it, you know. Is any player seen is because he has the quality, you know, to play in any games, you know. And now it's just to get the confidence. I think after we could get the first cliché, I think it's going to be so different for the entire team."