

MLS POST-GAME QUOTES

Portland Timbers vs. Sporting Kansas City
October 10, 2026 – Sporting Park (Kansas City, Kans.)
Final: Portland Timbers 3, Sporting KC 3

Portland Timbers Head Coach Martí Cifuentes

General thoughts on the match...

“A game that feels like we lost two points at least, and it hurts. It hurts because I think we started really well. On the sequence of the first goal, but as well the way we started the game. We had a lot of emphasis during the last couple of weeks on how we should start the games, start on the front foot, and I think definitely we had a positive start. As I said, not only the goal, but the intensity on doing some of the basics like winning duels, like picking up the second balls, like shuffling, like being compact defensively. So we started well. Then through the minutes in the first half, I think that we dropped a little bit the level. With the aim to be very compact, we start to drop too much. So actually, we would love to see as well, the same compactness, but much higher on the pitch. We conceded a little more dominance to Kansas, and that proved that we were defending deeper, and then the sequences on the ball, we start to struggle to keep the ball for longer. In that craziness, perhaps of the last minutes, I think that we definitely are the losers on that because we took the lead. First time in the game that we took a two-goal lead, and it's a clear penalty. Well, lucky that the VAR could check this, but then we take the lead, 2-0. One minute — even less — perhaps seconds left to finish the first half, and then of course we are defending that ball that we need to clear. In some situations, we need to be much more aggressive, much more efficient on how we clear the ball in defensive situations because the clearance is a defensive action — despite we want to build up, despite we want to be an attacking team — there are definitely situations where we need to clear the ball. We give them then the energy to start the second half strong. We started perhaps again a little bit too low. We found the third goal, which again it was the second time of the game that we took a two-goals lead, and that should be the closing of the game. But then, another poor box defense that we need to clear the ball. We allow them to pick the ball inside the box in a very dangerous situation. They scored, 2-3, and from there the game was out of control. So actually, they scored a third one in a very poor race defense. But we allow them to have more chances, more counters until the end. Perhaps the last seven, eight minutes, or even 10, that we changed a little bit. We tried to play with three centers halves. We play with two clear strikers, with [Alexander Aravena] and Antony at the top, and we provoke again. We regained the control and we provoke some chances, but it was not enough to get the goal, and I'm disappointed because overall it is, in my opinion, a weak performance despite a good start.”

On what he liked seeing from the Timbers in the first half...

“We speak a lot about the basics, about things that as a team, some days you will play better, some days you will have better flow on the ball, but that you should have in a consistent way from game to game and through the minutes in each game. So we talk about this shuffling. We talk about this compactness when we are not in possession to be able to, in some way, to put ourselves in an easier position to win the duels, to pick the second balls, to have this defensive consistency, and that's what we need to see much more often. Unfortunately, we couldn't keep that for 90 minutes. But since I came here, we have some things that we need to improve. I think that is slowly. Hopefully, in some games we had started better. Dallas was another example. I think that some other games we have done it as well. But we need to be consistent on that. The next one is to make sure that we are much better on the road, and the last one is to make sure that we don't concede. Because if we put ourselves like today in a situation where we need to score three, four, give goals to win every game, it is not possible to be a top team with that average goals conceded.”

On the substitutions he made in the second half...

"We felt that already in the second half, both Diego [Chará] and Joao [Ortiz] were starting a little bit to pick the seconds, to keep the shuffling. We thought that José [Caicedo] has been training really well, while Joao, for instance, has not started again for a while. So we felt that it looked like he was perhaps cramping at the end before his substitution. But we felt that José has been training well, as I said over the last couple of weeks, that he could give us a lot more energy and capacity to pick these seconds. Unfortunately it didn't work as good as we wanted. I think that when Eric Izoita came in, he gave us that energy, this capacity on the ball. He's doing so well. Then we wanted with Antony — in a game scenario where we were starting to drop more and more — we wanted to use his pace to be able to attack. At the end, the last substitutions with [Alexander Aravena] and Ian [Smith], as I explained, it was more a change on the formation, if you want. Playing with two wingbacks to open up the pitch, we were not connected with the wingers, Ariel [Lassiter] and Kris [Velde]. The last minutes it was during the second half they were participating less and less, and we found that playing with two strikers could put some pressure to Kansas, which I think it did."

On if it would change his opinion on the match if the team had scored a late winner...

"No, it doesn't change at all. I think it was a poor second half. I understand the question, but for me, 'almost' never exists in football. It's the same that I explain about 'deserving.' I don't care. I think that we need to compete much better. I think that we need to be much more consistent. 'Almost' is always a different world than reality. Reality is that we allow [Kansas City] to create a lot of chances. We drop two-goal lead advantage two times, and we allow them to score in the last minute of extra time in the first half, which is a bit naive, so to say. So that's the things that I need to help the guys to improve. That's the reason why I'm here to make sure that the team improves in those situations and not thinking about the 'if' or 'almost' because then every game will have an explanation or an excuse, and I'm not that type of guy."

Portland Timbers midfielder Ariel Lassiter

On the halftime talk after conceding a goal just before halftime...

"I think as far as the group goes, it was pretty frustrating. We know that after the last couple of games, the first half hasn't always been the best. Feel like we started off really well. We started off strong, and to give up a goal at the end of the half like that, with so much momentum on our side, was very difficult. So we knew we were frustrated with that, but our team talk was to be positive and to continue being on the front foot for the second half."

On the need to repeatedly create goal-scoring opportunities...

"Well, to be fair, I think we create a lot of those scenarios. I think it's the other way around, where we want to get more players into the box, feeling you know near post, cut back, back post. So it's a matter of finishing the actions when we get down to the end line. So I think those are positives for us. Now we just gotta be better in keeping a clean sheet on the other end."

On the feeling within the team after the draw...

"We know we have the quality. We know, I would say on paper, we would assume that we were a better side. There was still hope for us. I think we were still confident. I think maybe a little bit more urgency to push forward and to try to get that fourth goal, but it's very difficult for us to score three goals and let in three and try to win the game like that. I think we can all look at ourselves and say that we could do more and that we could be better defensively as a group, as a unit. But you know I think they're still positives. But there's still a lot of things that we need to work on and we need to make sure that we work on those pretty quickly. We've got three games in a week. A lot of points on the table for us to get back up and into the playoffs."

