MLS POST-GAME QUOTES

Portland Timbers vs. Houston Dynamo
November 1, 2026 – Providence Park (Portland, Ore.)
Final: Portland Timbers 3, Houston Dynamo 1

Portland Timbers Head Coach Martí Cifuentes

General thoughts on the match…

"Very good. A great, great night. We knew that we were playing against a team that so far has had a very strong season. That [Houston] are comfortable in different game scenarios, but especially they are calm if they need to defend deep. We knew that the challenge would be to start the game well, to try to get the lead and then try to put some tempo into the game. I think that we started well with a big chance for [Vincent Janssen], but unfortunately we couldn't score. And then I think that slowly we understood a little bit that we had to move the ball quicker. We had to attack much faster through certain ways that we like to attack, and actually, until we didn't score the first goal, I think that we misunderstood this a little bit. After the goal, I think that we started to play with more rhythm. I think that Houston is very good at managing the tempo of the game, trying to regain some momentum. I think the last minutes of the first half, the team made a good effort to try to defend a bit deeper in a couple of minutes where we had to make sure that we went into halftime with the lead. Then in the second half I think that that we were very good. We created chances. We could have scored more than three goals, definitely. Their goal is more our mistake and actually, it's my responsibility because I ask the players to build up from the back, so I'm accountable for that, and we can keep improving on that. But definitely, the team showed character, scoring the third goal, improving as well on set plays. And then, as I said, I think that in the last minutes, I think Omir [Fernandez], Joao [Ortiz], we had several situations to score the fourth goal. But overall, a great night, and I appreciate the fans especially. The atmosphere was amazing, and I think the players responded at a high level with a lot of individual quality performances and a fantastic bench impact."

On the pace of the Timbers' attack to score two of the three goals…

"Definitely we did a lot of good things. My thoughts were that we knew that Houston was a game similar or closer to what it was against Charlotte. Well, you need to move very quick the ball because you play against very zonal teams that are comfortable defending deep. So then you need to do certain things at a really high level. And definitely the first goal was a great combination attacking an established defense. The second one was a fantastic counter. The third is a fantastic delivery on the set play. So it's a great combination. Then as well, Diego [Chara] got the yellow card, so it's overall a great performance, right? So now I think that the team is growing. It's kind of easy for me to come here now off three wins in a row, four games undefeated, and come here and say that the team is doing great. But I think that when we were seven games in a row without a win, I was saying that the team was improving game by game. It's true that some games, for instance, San Jose first half was not good, but overall the team was taking steps. And I see a team that now understands more the concepts, the way we want to play. We still need to improve on a lot of things. I would like to press higher. I would like to defend even better and even higher. I would like to be more clinical in the way we build that, so there are a lot of things that the guys know, and that's why at this moment of the season you cannot stop. Now today is the moment to be happy, but we need to keep growing."

On the Timbers' improved defense…

"Definitely. We know that [Houston] are missing a very important player on defense. But we knew that one of the strengths for me that Houston has out of the defensive part of the game is that they can build in different structures. So we had to be very accurate on the way we approached these situations. So we didn't want to give them space to attack, space to run. That's why today, again, as we did against St.

Louis, we dropped the number eight a little bit lower to play in a double six when we were not in possession. When I'm saying that we need to defend better, I totally agree that we didn't concede a lot of chances, which is the first step. Now for me, defending is not just about not conceding goals, but as well regaining the ball as high as possible, as quick as possible. And this is the power, I think, that when we have an established high press, I think we do well. But this moment from this kind of mid-block to go higher, I think that there is still work to be done."

On if his goals have changed for the team this year following three-straight wins…
"When I came here, I said two things for this year. I think the target — as it should be for Portland — is to get into the playoffs. This will never change. So even when we look difficult after certain games, we said that we should keep believing, we should keep pushing, we should keep improving. And now we've put ourselves in a position over the last couple of weeks that in some way it's up to us now. I'm not changing the fact that the first target is to get into the playoffs, and the best way to do it is growing week by week, understanding that every game is different, that you cannot feel happy because what you achieved yesterday is gone. So now we're going to go to Austin. What expectations will be? 'Ah, that's an easy win.' It's far from easy. It's going to be a super difficult game because Austin is playing with no pressure. We are playing on the road, which we have not been great during the season. We are playing in a long trip, which we have not been great during the season. So I'm pretty aware that this is far from done. Now we need to keep growing. We need to prepare to win. Well, today enjoy and today be happy because we need to be happy, and from there be very humble and keep pushing. But for me, the assessment has not changed. This team must do every year the playoffs, and the target is there. And second, I came here to win. I said that. I do believe in Merritt [Paulson]. I do believe in Ned [Grabavoy]. I do believe in the people at this club can help us to win, to build something that can be very strong in the future."

On the momentum within the team heading into the final regular-season game…
"The momentum was definitely in the changing room now, so they were very happy. I mean, look, it's always important because I said before, right? Wins give you confidence. What I value the most is that during these games that we were not able to win, the team kept working at a really high level every day in the training facility, and kept believing on what we are trying to build. And as I said before, now it's very easy to feel that we are great, that we are so strong. We need to keep working really hard because the challenge against Austin will be completely different than today. And because then we'll see what's going to happen. But we need to be ready for whatever it's going to happen after Austin, right? I just want to make sure that we enjoy today. As a coach, you always think, 'it's five minutes since the end of the game.' I'm already thinking about Austin. I want to enjoy a little bit, and then from tomorrow we have the game."

<u>Portland Timbers forward Vincent Janssen</u>
On the fans and the atmosphere inside Providence Park tonight…
"It was great. It's been great actually. So it's been actually the last couple of games already we feel that they want to push us to for the last couple of games. It's such a big difference. Sometimes you come to an away stadium, and it's just not the same as what we have at home here, so I think that's the big difference, and we enjoy it. It gives us an extra push, and they are the extra man on the pitch for us."

On how he felt scoring his goal tonight…
"Obviously you want to score as a striker. I think it's one of your jobs, but once you get older, you start to be able to leave [the disappointment of a miss] behind you at some point during the game. So mostly I was not happy, but it just happens, and you just keep going, keep going, and wait for the next moment. I

think I was able to help the team with different moments in the game too. So try to forget that moment, keep going, wait for the next one."

On being active defensively and setting up Kristoffer Velde's goal…
"It's just what I want to be, actually. So I think our team has so much quality going forward, and I think we're trying to get this way of playing that also defensively, especially in that first three, four, five seconds to win that ball back again. And I think that's something that I really enjoy on the pitch. So I'm trying to help in that way, and trying to be the guy that gives that first push to give the pressure. I think a lot of the teammates picked up on that, especially with the coach. That's just how we want to play. I'm trying to help as much as I can in that way. I will always do that. So not just specifically for this game. It's just part of my game to help the team. So I always try to do that work."

On the belief within the team after three-straight wins…
"Yes, I think with the style or how MLS is obviously with the competition, the last push of the competition is super important. Where you get into a form with your team, you get into a mood. Let's say you win the last couple of games. You get into confidence. Everyone gets confidence. It's like a boost for everyone. And I feel like that first win here against Charlotte helped us a lot, and that pushes us also over the line in St. Louis. You have a little bit more confidence on the ball. Like defensively, you have a little bit more confidence. And then you see a game like today. I got into this game, and even though Houston is higher on the table, I feel like we had so much confidence going into this game that we're also going to win this one. So it absolutely has something to do with confidence. I think how we play has not changed at all. The ball is just falling away right now, and I think we have to keep going with that energy, keep going with the confidence that we are playing with right now, and then we'll see what's going to happen. But everyone has a pretty good feeling right now, and I think our objective was to get into the playoffs. I think we're in a pretty good spot right now, but again, I think we're doing the exact same thing. We're putting the exact same effort in it, and sometimes it just falls your way. That's the hard work that we do every single day, and it was always gonna get us there I think at some point. So I think we have one more push to go, and we're gonna keep doing the same thing, and hopefully we'll get there."

<u>Portland Timbers midfielder David Da Costa</u>
On the energy within the team after winning three-straight games…
"It's very good to see my teammates play like that. An important win, but the job is not done yet. But good spirit, and we see on the pitch when we play like that, when we help each other, it's perfect for the team."

On if he's experienced his current scoring run of form before in his career…
"Not something like that. It's the first time, and I'm happy to help the team, and like I said, it's an important win. Okay, there are personal stats, but for the team. Now we need to think about the next game. It's going to be very important."

On the upcoming game against Austin to secure a playoff spot…
"It's not going to be easy because [the last time] we played against them, we lost the game, and now we're gonna play away. They have good players. Okay, they don't have [anything to play for] but we need to respect the opposition and we need to go for it and win the game."