

Soccer Tuesday: Houston has a lot at stake with Philly

Written by Mark Haslett
Thursday, 28 June 2012 00:00



Did a spectral Joan of Arc affect the outcome of last Saturday's game in Montreal? Was Leonard Cohen spinning a Buddhist prayer wheel while meditating on the fate of his hometown soccer team? Did Houston's players overdo it at lunch with too much bread and brie, or worse still, poutine?

Whatever the cause, the Houston Dynamo's defense, normally solid, was porous as a couscoussier in Saturday's 4-2 loss to the Montreal Impact in Major League Soccer play.

The lowlight of the match for Houston was the Impact's final goal, a penalty shot by Patrice Bernier that was awarded after the Dynamo's Adam Moffat was shown a red card for a takedown of Montreal's Felipe Martins. The hosts cried foul play, the visitors cried dive and bad call. Later, Dynamo captain Brian Ching accused Impact technical director Nick De Santis of berating Moffat as the player left the field.

Houston must shake off the loss before Saturday's home game against Philadelphia. There are no must-wins in June, but with the playoff race taking shape, the Dynamo have plenty of reasons to pick up three points against the Union.

In the MLS Eastern Conference, conventional wisdom suggests that D.C. United, Sporting Kansas City and New York will take three of the conference's five playoff spots. That would leave the remaining two berths to be fought over by Chicago, Columbus, Houston, Montreal and New England – all of which are bunched together in the conference's second tier.

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Following the Philadelphia match, Houston will begin July with four games against teams that lead them in the standings. The Dynamo will face Chicago, then Kansas City, then D.C., then Kansas City again. A win over Philly would help bolster Houston in advance of that stretch. It would also help clear the team's palate of the foul flavor left by its trip to Quebec.

The Dynamo expect to have Jamaican defenseman Jermaine Taylor back in the lineup against the Union. Taylor, one of Houston's best backliners, suffered a hip flexor injury against Dallas and has missed the last two games.

Houston is unbeaten (3-0-2) in MLS play at BBVA Compass Stadium.

Outside of MLS action, the Philadelphia Union remains alive in the U.S. Open Cup tournament. Philly defeated the Harrisburg City Islanders 5-2 Tuesday and will face Sporting Kansas City in the semifinals July 11 in Chester, Pa.

Night Editor Mark Haslett blogs about pro soccer in Texas and Mexico on Tuesdays.