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Columbus 1, Portland 0: Wild goal late in game sinks Timbers


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By Special to The Oregonian

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AP Photo/The Columbus Dispatch, Neal C. Lauron

The Crew's Julius James, right, heads the ball in front of teammate Chad Marshall (14) against the Portland Timbers in Columbus, Ohio.

COLUMBUS, Ohio -- The Portland Timbers will have to wait a little longer for road win No.2.

After winning for the first time on the road this season last Saturday in Chicago, **the Timbers fell to the Columbus Crew 1-0** after Columbus midfielder Eddie Gaven knocked in a rebound in the 79th minute last night at Columbus Crew Stadium.

With the score still square at 0-0, the Crew's Robbie Rogers sent a cross from the left side of the field into the box and into traffic. Crew forward Tommy Heinemann corralled the bouncing ball and sent a shot at the net. The ball deflected off the left post past a diving goalie Troy Perkins.

On the rebound, Gaven reached out his right foot while in midair and spiked the ball past several defenders -- and through some of his own players -- into the chest of Portland defender Fuffy Danso. The ball rolled off Danso and into the net.

Initially ruled an own goal, the call was later overturned and Gaven was awarded his third goal of the year.

Timbers coach John Spencer said he didn't care who was credited with the goal. What mattered was that his team was down with only 10 minutes to play.

"It hit the back

The Timbers

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of the net; it went over the line," Spencer said. "When you try and control the ball in the six-yard box and you take a bad touch, generally you're going to get punished and that's what happened to us."

Perkins, a Columbus area native, got a finger on the initial shot from Heinemann but was bowled over by one of his own defenders while trying to make a save on the rebound.

"I was running toward the goal and wasn't able to stop and get a clean shot off," Gaven said of his acrobatic maneuver. "I just kind of threw my leg out at it and made some contact."

The loss drops the Timbers to 6-10-3, 21 points, ahead of only Vancouver (2-10-9, 15 points) in the **Western Conference standings**. Portland has one win since **beating Columbus at home May 21**, a span of nine games, and has one win on the road this season.

The Timbers looked like they were getting a lucky break when **Crew starting goalkeeper William Hesmer was scratched before game time with a quadriceps injury**. Hesmer had played every minute of MLS action for the Crew over the team's first 20 games while posting shutouts in three of the team's last six games.

Replacing the Hesmer was Andy Gruenebaum, who hadn't started a league game since August 2009. Instead of folding under the pressure, the Gruenebaum helped the Crew to their eighth shutout of the season.

Portland failed to score for the sixth time this season.

The goals were there for the taking early in the game, but Portland failed to capitalize. The Timbers racked up 10 shots in the first half but could only put two on net while the Crew failed to get the ball anywhere close to Perkins' domain.

The story was different after intermission when players for Columbus (8-6-7, 31 points) were rejuvenated and began pressing the Portland defense. The Crew managed 13 shots after halftime and dominated ball possession.

Still, most of the play was in the middle of the field with neither team taking advantage of scoring opportunities until Columbus' late goal, Perkins said, stopping short of calling the game sloppy.

"It was not a fun game to watch for anyone that watched it on TV or in the stands," Perkins said.

The early missed opportunities weighed heavy on Spencer's mind following the game.

"You're never happy with a performance when you lose, but I think we played well enough we should have gotten something from this game," Spencer said. "They adjusted to our play and started to throw men forward ... They pinned us back in and we couldn't get out."

The Timbers nearly fell behind in the 60th minute when a header from Crew defender Chad Marshall was deflected out by Portland midfielder Darlington Nagbe.

The close range header went past the goalie for what looked like a sure goal before Nagbe reached out with his left foot to knock the ball straight up, off the crossbar and back into the field of play. Fans and many Crew players started to celebrate, believing the ball had crossed the line to put Columbus ahead by one.

The referee signaled no goal.

"I saw the ball coming my way and just reacted," said Nagbe, who blocked two shots on the night. "It didn't go in."

Perkins wasn't as confident.

"I have no idea," the goalie said. "It happened pretty fast. Great reactions from Darlington, though. Definitely the save of the week."

-- AJ Mazzolini, special to The Oregonian

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