



# NEWS RELEASE

## **MLS MEDIA RESOURCES: CONFERENCE FINALS NEWS & NOTES**

*News and notes and statistical trends from around Major League Soccer*

### **PARITY RULES: MLS LEADS IN CHAMPIONSHIP PARTICIPANTS**

With their appearance in this weekend's Eastern Conference Final, the Philadelphia Union and New York City FC have become the 18th and 19th different MLS clubs to advance to the conference finals in the past decade.

With more than 70 percent of Major League Soccer's clubs having reached the final four in the MLS Cup Playoffs, it marks the highest percentage of teams from one of the five major North American/U.S. sports leagues to get to that stage.

	FINALS	TEAMS	
MLS	19	27	70.4%
NFL	21	32	65.6%
NHL	20	32	62.5%
MLB	17	30	56.7%
NBA	17	30	56.7%

Regardless of who wins the Eastern Conference Final, they will be the 17th team to reach MLS Cup in league history. There have been seven different champions in the last 10 years (and 10 in the last 15). A win by either Eastern Conference finalist (Philadelphia or New York City FC), or Real Salt Lake in the West, would mark the eighth different champion over the last decade – the most of any top-flight soccer league in the world.

Below is the percentage of teams to win a championship in the last decade across the five major North American/U.S. sports leagues:

	CHAMPS	TEAMS	
MLB	8	30	26.7%
MLS	7	27	25.9%
NFL	8	32	25.0%
NBA	7	30	23.3%
NHL	6	32	18.8%

**-- #MLSCupPlayoffs --**

### **WHERE A CONFERENCE FINISH LEADS TO AN MLS CUP BERTH**

Since the MLS Cup Playoffs were expanded beginning with the 2011 season, finishing second in a conference of the regular season has been a main path to MLS Cup.

In the 20 teams which have played in the league's championship match over that span, 10 have finished in the No. 2 position in their conference. One conference finalist in 2021 – the Philadelphia Union – finished second over the course of the regular season.

No team ever finishing lower than fifth place in its respective conference has reached MLS Cup – a milestone Real Salt Lake is looking to change this year.

Seed	#	MLS Cup appearances since 2011
1	2	(2011 LA, 2017 TOR)
2	10	(2011 HOU, 2013 SKC, 2013 RSL, 2014 LA, 2014 NE, 2015 CLB, 2017 SEA, 2018 ATL, 2019 SEA, 2020 SEA)
3	3	(2015 POR, 2016 TOR, 2020 CLB)
4	3	(2012 LA, 2016 SEA, 2019 TOR)
5	2	(2012 HOU, 2018 POR)
6	0	

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### **GOALS ON THE RISE WITH SINGLE-ELIMINATION PLAYOFF FORMAT**

Since the inception of the single-elimination format for the MLS Cup Playoffs, postseason games have averaged **3.20 goals per game**, through the conference semifinal stage this year. That total well outpaces the per-game average of the MLS Cup Playoffs before the knockout bracket was instituted, which was at 2.63 goals per game from 1996-2018.

The total is also well above Major League Soccer's all-time average of 2.87 goals per game in regular-season league play. It is a higher per-game average than any of the top-flight leagues in the world over the last five seasons.

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### **SET-PIECE GOALS A FEATURE OF THE STRAIGHT KNOCKOUT POSTSEASON**

During the Audi 2021 MLS Cup Playoffs, goals from set pieces have become a hallmark of the competition and the path to success.

Of 23 goals (not including penalty kicks) scored this year, nine have come from set pieces. That figure of better than 39 percent is far ahead of the last two years, while the single-elimination bracket structure has been in place. During the 2021 regular season, 20 percent of all non-penalty kicks goals came from set pieces.

	SET-PIECE GOALS	NON-PENALTY GOALS	
2021	9	23	39.1%
2020	13	47	27.7%
2019	13	52	25.0%

**-- #MLSCupPlayoffs –**

# AUDI 2021 MLS CUP PLAYOFFS – CONFERENCE FINALS

## LOOK AHEAD

### WESTERN CONFERENCE FINAL

#### **W#4 PORTLAND TIMBERS v W#7 REAL SALT LAKE**

Saturday, Dec. 4, 2021, Providence Park, Portland, Ore.  
3:30 p.m. PT (FS1 / FOX Deportes; TSN 1 / TVA Sports 2)

REFEREE: Alan Kelly. AR1 (bench): Cameron Blanchard; AR2 (opposite): Jeremy Hanson; 4th: Joseph Dickerson; VAR: Geoff Gamble; AVAR: Jeremy Kieso

MLS Career: 154 games; FC/gm: 24.2; Y/gm: 3.4; R: 19; pens: 56

MLS Cup Playoffs: 10 games; FC/gm: 23.5; Y/gm: 2.7; R: 4; pens: 3

LEAGUE HEAD-TO-HEAD: Timbers 12 wins, 49 goals ... Real 8 wins, 40 goals ... Ties 8

AT PORTLAND: Timbers 6 wins, 27 goals ... Real 2 wins, 19 goals ... Ties 6

2021 (MLS):

8/7: POR 3, RSL 2 (Asprilla 10; Y. Chara 29; Mora 62 -- Rusnak 40; Kreilach 80)

9/25: POR 6, RSL 1 (Mora 27; Asprilla 36; Y. Chara 48; D. Chara 68; Niezgodá 85; Paredes 88 -- Kreilach 41)

11/3: RSL 3, POR 1 (Rusnak 88 -- Blanco 17, 45; own goal 38)

MLS CUP PLAYOFFS: Timbers 0 wins, 3 goals ... Real 3 wins, 7 goals ... Ties 0

- The Timbers have reached the conference final stage for the fourth time in the club's history, after defeating the top seed Colorado Rapids by the game's only goal on Thanksgiving Day (Nov. 25) at Dick's Sporting Goods Park. The only goal of the contest was netted by defender **Larrys Mabilia** in the 90th minute – his second consecutive game with a goal, after not scoring a goal over 26 appearances during the regular season.
- Real Salt Lake are in a conference final for the fifth time in the club's history, following another road triumph, defeating Sporting Kansas City 2-1 at Children's Mercy Park on Nov. 28. RSL came back from a goal down as **Anderson Julio** netted the equalizer in the 72nd minute, then **Bobby Wood** potted the game-winner in stoppage time.
- The teams met three times during the regular season, and the Timbers won all three in goalfests. The first two meetings came in Portland: On Aug. 7, **Dairon Asprilla**, **Yimmi Chará** and **Felipe Mora** all scored goals in a 3-2 result, then on Sept. 25, six different players scored goals for the Timbers, the first by **Felipe Mora**, and one from both **Yimmi** and **Diego Chará** (the second time brothers scored a goal in the same game), in a 6-1 win at Providence Park. In the last meeting, Nov. 3 at Rio Tinto Stadium, Sebastián Blanco scored a goal and added an assist in a 3-1 Portland victory.
- The Timbers have come away with points in eight of the last nine league meetings between the teams, over the last four seasons, winning seven with one draw. The lone RSL win in the span was a 2-1 victory Oct. 14, 2020 in Sandy.
- The teams have met twice in the MLS Cup Playoffs – and Real have advanced on both occasions. In the last meeting, in Round One of the 2019 MLS Cup Playoffs, **Jefferson Savarino** scored the game-winner three minutes from the end, giving RSL the 2-1 win on Oct. 19 at Rio Tinto Stadium. The teams also met in the Western Conference Championship in 2013, with RSL gaining a place in MLS Cup after winning the series 5-2 on aggregate, victorious in both legs, 4-2 at home and 1-0 in Portland.

**TIMBERS:** **Steve Clark** was credited with three saves in recording his second career shutout in the MLS Cup Playoffs in 11 outings, his first coming Nov. 22, 2015 with the Columbus Crew, 2-0 vs. New York Red Bulls.

**REAL:** **Justin Meram** collected his third career assist in the MLS Cup Playoffs, making his 18th career playoff appearance (coming off the substitutes' bench for the last two after starting the first 16). ... **Andrew Brody** recorded his first career postseason assist, in his second appearance.

**EASTERN CONFERENCE FINAL**  
**E#2 PHILADELPHIA UNION vs. E#4 NEW YORK CITY FC**

Sunday, Dec. 5, 2021, Subaru Park, Chester, Pa.  
3 p.m. ET (ABC / ESPN Deportes; TSN 5 / TVA Sports 2)

REFEREE: Ted Unkel. AR1 (bench): Corey Parker; AR2 (opposite): Cory Richardson; 4th: Rubiel Vazquez; VAR: Jon Freemon; AVAR: Adam Wienckowski  
MLS Career: 127 games; FC/gm: 23.4; Y/gm: 4.0; R: 39; pens: 60  
MLS Cup Playoffs: 6 games; FC/gm: 22.7; Y/gm: 2.5; R: 1; pens: 0

LEAGUE HEAD-TO-HEAD: Union 5 wins, 18 goals ... NYCFC 8 wins, 23 goals ... Ties 2  
AT UNION: Union 4 wins, 9 goals ... NYCFC 4 wins, 9 goals ... Ties 0

2021 (MLS):

5/1: PHI 0, NYC 2 (Medina 5; Castellanos 65)

8/18: PHI 1, NYC 0 (Bedoya 67)

11/7: NYC 1, PHI 1 (Castellanos 53 -- Przybylko 26)

MLS CUP PLAYOFFS: Union 0 wins, 1 goal ... NYCFC 1 win, 3 goals ... Ties 0

- The Union have reached the conference finals for the first time in the club's history, defeating Nashville SC in a penalty shootout following a 1-1 draw in their Eastern Conference Semifinal at Subaru Park on Nov. 28.
- **Andre Blake** saved two penalty attempts as Nashville SC were unsuccessful in all four of their tries from the spot, the second time in MLS history a team did not convert a chance during a shootout. The Union were taking part in a penalty shootout in the MLS Cup Playoffs for the first time in club history (with seven coming previously in the U.S. Open Cup).
- NYCFC have reached the conference finals for the first time in their club history, defeating Supporters' Shield winners New England Revolution in a penalty shootout following a 2-2 draw in their Eastern Conference Semifinal at Gillette Stadium on Nov. 30.
- MLS Golden Boot winner **Valentín Castellanos** scored his second goal of the postseason in two games, his second career goal in the MLS Cup Playoffs (six games played). Castellanos later received a second yellow card during extra time, meaning he will miss out on the Eastern Conference Final.
- Maximiliano Moralez collected his second assist of the 2021 postseason, in his second match, now with five assists for his career in the MLS Cup Playoffs in nine appearances.
- The teams met three times during the regular season, evenly splitting the series. They each won once at Subaru Park over the first two encounters: On May 1, **Jesús Medina** and **Valentín Castellanos** scored as NYCFC took a 2-0 win, then on Aug. 18, **Alejandro Bedoya** scored the game's only goal in the Union victory. The teams then reached a 1-1 draw on Decision Day (Nov. 7) at Yankee Stadium, as **Kacper Przybylko** gave the Union the lead in the first half, but Castellanos scored his 19th goal of the season after the break to seal the MLS Golden Boot.
- NYCFC have won nine of the last 14 meetings between the teams, with one draw, but the Union have won twice over the last two seasons, last year winning in group play at the MLS is Back Tournament in Orlando. The Union have won two of the last three meetings in Chester, since 2018.
- The teams also met in the Knockout Round of the 2018 MLS Cup Playoffs, NYCFC taking a 3-1 victory at Yankee Stadium. **Maxi Moralez** was involved in all three goals for NYCFC, assisting on tallies by **Ismael Tajouri-Shradi** and **David Villa** before netting the third.

**UNION:** **Dániel Gazdág** scored the Union goal, the first playoff goal of his MLS career, making his second appearance.

**NYCFC:** **Santiago Rodríguez** netted his first career goal in the MLS Cup Playoffs, in his second game played. ... **Jesús Medina** collected his first assist of the postseason, the second of his MLS career in the playoffs. ... **Tayvon Gray** and **Gudmundur Thorarinnsson** each collected their first career assists in the MLS Cup Playoffs. ... NYCFC won a penalty shootout for the first time in the club's history in five tries.

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