

DIGITAL WORLD PULSE

MLS CUP PLAYOFFS 2026

ROUND ONE

NOVEMBER 21 - DECEMBER 2, 2026

Eight best-of-3 series | Game 1 previews and series outlooks

Kickoff times, Wild Card paths and editorial forecasts



DIGITAL WORLD PULSE

CONTENTS

MLS CUP PLAYOFFS 2026 | ROUND ONE

PAGE	GUIDE	SECTION
03	Round One format and Wild Card	START HERE
04	Nashville vs. East Wild Card	EAST | GAME 1
05	Nashville: series outlook	EAST | OUTLOOK
06	Inter Miami CF vs. Columbus Crew	EAST | GAME 1
07	Miami vs. Columbus: outlook	EAST | OUTLOOK
08	New England Revolution vs. Philadelphia Union	EAST | GAME 1
09	Revolution vs. Union: outlook	EAST | OUTLOOK
10	Chicago Fire FC vs. Charlotte FC	EAST | GAME 1
11	Chicago vs. Charlotte: outlook	EAST | OUTLOOK
12	Vancouver vs. West Wild Card	WEST | GAME 1
13	Vancouver: series outlook	WEST | OUTLOOK
14	FC Dallas vs. Portland Timbers	WEST | GAME 1
15	Dallas vs. Portland: outlook	WEST | OUTLOOK
16	St. Louis CITY SC vs. LAFC	WEST | GAME 1
17	St. Louis vs. LAFC: outlook	WEST | OUTLOOK
18	San Jose Earthquakes vs. Houston Dynamo FC	WEST | GAME 1
19	San Jose vs. Houston: outlook	WEST | OUTLOOK
20	Sources and disclaimer	REFERENCES

ROUND ONE DATES

Game 1: Nov 21-24. Game 2: Nov 27-28. Game 3: Dec 2 if needed, kickoff TBD. Select any row to open that page.

FORMAT AND WILD CARD

ROUND ONE AT A GLANCE

November 21 - December 2, 2026 | Eight best-of-3 series

Scheduled fixtures start November 21; the general MLS calendar opened the window November 20.

8	16	16-24	2
SERIES	ROUND ONE CLUBS	POSSIBLE MATCHES	WINS TO ADVANCE

HOW EACH SERIES WORKS

The higher seed hosts Game 1 and any Game 3. The lower seed hosts Game 2. A tie after regulation goes straight to penalties. A 4-0 win followed by a 0-1 loss still leaves the series at 1-1: match wins decide who advances.

EAST WILD CARD | NO. 8 VS. NO. 9

Inter.co Stadium

Orlando City SC vs. FC Cincinnati | Apple TV | Winner faces Nashville SC

ET	PT	GMT	CET
19:30	16:30	00:30	01:30
Thu Nov 19	Thu Nov 19	Fri Nov 20	Fri Nov 20

WEST WILD CARD | NO. 8 VS. NO. 9

Lumen Field

Seattle Sounders FC vs. Real Salt Lake | Apple TV | Winner faces Vancouver Whitecaps FC

ET	PT	GMT	CET
22:00	19:00	03:00	04:00
Thu Nov 19	Thu Nov 19	Fri Nov 20	Fri Nov 20

ROUND ONE TIMELINE

Game 1 runs November 21-24 and Game 2 runs November 27-28. Any decider is scheduled for December 2, with kickoff TBD. The eight series winners advance to the single-match Conference Semifinals on December 5-6.

SOURCES **Official schedule** **Round One format** **Competition rules** **Wild Card** **Playoff calendar**

EAST CONFERENCE | GAME 1 PREVIEW

NASHVILLE VS. EAST WILD CARD

No. 1 Nashville SC vs. No. 8 Orlando City SC or No. 9 FC Cincinnati

Sun Nov 22, 2026 | GEODIS Park | Higher seed hosts

GAME 1 KICKOFF — **GEODIS Park**

Apple TV, FS1, FOX Deportes, TSN, RDS

ET	PT	GMT	CET
16:00	13:00	21:00	22:00
Sun Nov 22	Sun Nov 22	Sun Nov 22	Sun Nov 22

REGULAR-SEASON COMPARISON

SEED	CLUB	PTS	W-D-L	GF	GA	GD
No. 1	Nashville SC	77	23-8-3	71	25	+46
No. 8	Orlando City SC	46	13-7-14	63	78	-15
No. 9	FC Cincinnati	46	12-10-12	67	75	-8

W-D-L: wins, draws, losses. GF / GA: goals for / against. GD: goal difference.

NASHVILLE'S HOME EDGE

Nashville finished with 77 points and allowed 25 goals, the fewest in MLS. The club won 15 of 17 regular-season home matches and lost none. Sam Surridge's 21 goals give Hany Mukhtar and Cristian Espinoza a clear target when Nashville pin the visitors back.

IF ORLANDO QUALIFY

Antoine Griezmann produced 14 goals and eight assists in 18 league appearances. His movement away from the front line could open a lane for a runner, but Orlando conceded 78 goals. Their best chance is to keep the centre closed and send Griezmann support quickly after regains.

IF CINCINNATI QUALIFY

Nashville won 2-0 at Cincinnati on Decision Day. A return match turns on how often Evander can find Kévin Denkey before Nashville reset. If Cincinnati cannot get the first forward pass out, they may spend long spells defending near their own goal.

GAME 1 PROJECTION | REGULATION SCORE

Nashville 2-0 Orlando
If Orlando advance

Nashville 2-1 Cincinnati
If Cincinnati advance

SOURCES Official schedule · Season standings · Matchup guide · Nashville record · Home record

EAST CONFERENCE | SERIES OUTLOOK

NASHVILLE: SERIES OUTLOOK

No. 1 Nashville SC vs. No. 8 Orlando City SC or No. 9 FC Cincinnati

Game 2 at the lower seed | Game 3 at the higher seed only if needed

GAME 2 KICKOFF — **Inter.co Stadium if ORL; TQL Stadium if CIN**

Apple TV

ET	PT	GMT	CET
18:30	15:30	23:30	00:30
Sat Nov 28	Sat Nov 28	Sat Nov 28	Sun Nov 29

GAME 3 | ONLY AT 1-1 IN THE SERIES — **Wed Dec 2**

GEODIS Park — *Kickoff TBD | Apple TV*

THE TURNAROUND

Less than 72 hours separate the Wild Card kickoff and Game 1. If the qualifier starts with a deep block, Nashville can move the ball from flank to flank and attack once the far-side defender has to step out. Forcing the visitors to run early may matter more than forcing the first cross.

THE ROAD TEST

Game 2 puts the Wild Card winner at home. Orlando's route is to get Griezmann receiving with a runner beyond him. Cincinnati have a different route: move Evander wide enough to create a cleaner passing angle to Denkey. Nashville can protect the middle by keeping a midfielder behind each attack.

WHAT COULD FORCE GAME 3

A tied Game 2 goes straight to penalties. If the qualifier takes an early lead, Nashville have to decide how much cover to sacrifice while chasing an equalizer. One shootout loss would count the same as a defeat in regulation.

SERIES PROJECTION | MATCH WINS

Nashville 2-0	Nashville 2-1
If Orlando advance	*If Cincinnati advance*

SEMIFINAL PATH

Faces the winner of Chicago Fire FC vs. Charlotte FC.

SOURCES Official schedule | Competition rules | Matchup guide | Season standings | Nashville record | Home record



EAST CONFERENCE | GAME 1 PREVIEW

INTER MIAMI VS. COLUMBUS

No. 2 Inter Miami CF vs. No. 7 Columbus Crew

Sat Nov 21, 2026 | Nu Stadium | Higher seed hosts

GAME 1 KICKOFF — **Nu Stadium**

Apple TV

ET	PT	GMT	CET
18:00	15:00	23:00	00:00
Sat Nov 21	Sat Nov 21	Sat Nov 21	Sun Nov 22

REGULAR-SEASON COMPARISON

SEED	CLUB	PTS	W-D-L	GF	GA	GD
No. 2	Inter Miami CF	60	16-12-6	80	59	+21
No. 7	Columbus Crew	47	14-5-15	59	52	+7

W-D-L: wins, draws, losses. GF / GA: goals for / against. GD: goal difference.

MIAMI'S SCORING CEILING

The defending champions scored 80 league goals. Lionel Messi won the Golden Boot with 26 goals and added 17 assists. Watch whether Columbus can stop him turning between their midfield and back line, where he can either shoot or play the runner behind the defence.

COLUMBUS ARRIVE IN FORM

The Crew won eight of their final nine league matches. Brais Méndez and Santiago Rodríguez helped rebuild the attack after summer departures. When Miami step forward, Columbus can make the first pass into one of those two and then run past the recovering fullback.

A LEAD MAY NOT SETTLE IT

Miami conceded 59 goals, and a home lead can still leave a demanding last half hour. The team that keeps midfield support behind the ball will be better placed to handle a spell of pressure without turning every turnover into a footrace.

GAME 1 PROJECTION | REGULATION SCORE

Inter Miami 3-2 Columbus

Editorial forecast, not a result.

SOURCES Official schedule · Season standings · Matchup guide · Golden Boot



EAST CONFERENCE | SERIES OUTLOOK

MIAMI VS. COLUMBUS: OUTLOOK

No. 2 Inter Miami CF vs. No. 7 Columbus Crew

Game 2 at the lower seed | Game 3 at the higher seed only if needed

GAME 2 KICKOFF — **ScottsMiracle-Gro Field**

Apple TV, FS1, FOX Deportes, TSN, RDS

ET	PT	GMT	CET
20:00	17:00	01:00	02:00
Fri Nov 27	Fri Nov 27	Sat Nov 28	Sat Nov 28

GAME 3 | ONLY AT 1-1 IN THE SERIES — **Wed Dec 2**

Nu Stadium — *Kickoff TBD | Apple TV*

THE CHANGE IN COLUMBUS

With the second match in Ohio, the Crew have a chance to press higher and win possession before Miami can set up around Messi. If Miami play through that first wave, the space behind it can turn the home crowd's energy into a defensive problem.

HOW THE CREW MAKE IT THREE

Keep the gap between midfield and centre backs small, get Méndez and Rodríguez involved before Miami can recover, and avoid losing the ball with both fullbacks high. A draw after 90 minutes is enough to reach penalties, even after conceding several goals in Game 1.

WHY MIAMI GET THE LEAN

Miami's scoring gives them more ways to win a close match, and a decider would be back at Nu Stadium. Columbus's finish keeps this a three-game projection. The main reason to revise it is if the Crew consistently get the first pass out after Miami lose the ball.

SERIES PROJECTION | MATCH WINS

Inter Miami 2-1

Editorial forecast, not a result.

SEMIFINAL PATH

Faces the winner of New England Revolution vs. Philadelphia Union.

SOURCES Official schedule · Competition rules · Matchup guide · Season standings · Golden Boot



EAST CONFERENCE | GAME 1 PREVIEW

NEW ENGLAND VS. PHILADELPHIA

No. 3 New England Revolution vs. No. 6 Philadelphia Union

Sat Nov 21, 2026 | Gillette Stadium | Higher seed hosts

GAME 1 KICKOFF — **Gillette Stadium**

Apple TV

ET	PT	GMT	CET
14:00	11:00	19:00	20:00
Sat Nov 21	Sat Nov 21	Sat Nov 21	Sat Nov 21

REGULAR-SEASON COMPARISON

SEED	CLUB	PTS	W-D-L	GF	GA	GD
No. 3	New England Revolution	58	18-4-12	55	47	+8
No. 6	Philadelphia Union	50	14-8-12	66	52	+14

W-D-L: wins, draws, losses. GF / GA: goals for / against. GD: goal difference.

GIL SETS THE TEMPO

Carles Gil finished with 13 goals and 13 assists for a New England side that won 18 league games. His delivery gives the Revolution a route through a compact block, especially when a wide run pulls a Philadelphia defender away from the pass he wants to make.

THE UNION HAVE MORE GOALS

Philadelphia scored 66 league goals to New England's 55. Cavan Sullivan contributed nine goals and 14 assists. The Union can create an opening if he receives facing forward as the first defender steps up, rather than taking the ball with the entire block behind him.

THE FIRST SAVE CAN MATTER

A strong Matt Turner performance can buy New England time to bring Gil into the match. Watch the second ball after the first save or clearance: both attacks are more dangerous if the defending side cannot finish the play with a clean exit.

GAME 1 PROJECTION | REGULATION SCORE

New England 2-1 Philadelphia

Editorial forecast, not a result.

SOURCES Official schedule · Season standings · Matchup guide · East team guide



EAST CONFERENCE | SERIES OUTLOOK

REVOLUTION VS. UNION: OUTLOOK

No. 3 New England Revolution vs. No. 6 Philadelphia Union

Game 2 at the lower seed | Game 3 at the higher seed only if needed

GAME 2 KICKOFF — **Subaru Park**

Apple TV

ET	PT	GMT	CET
16:30	13:30	21:30	22:30
Sat Nov 28	Sat Nov 28	Sat Nov 28	Sat Nov 28

GAME 3 | ONLY AT 1-1 IN THE SERIES — **Wed Dec 2**

Gillette Stadium — *Kickoff TBD | Apple TV*

SUBARU PARK CHANGES THE TEST

At home, Philadelphia can apply pressure higher up the pitch without needing to force the first pass. The Union's best chance to stretch the series is to keep the ball near New England's box long enough to win a second or third attack from the same spell.

IF THE REVOLUTION LEAD

New England can give ground in wide areas if it keeps the middle closed and preserves a route out through Gil. Sitting too deep would take away that outlet and increase the number of decisions Turner has to make under pressure.

THE DECIDER EDGE

Philadelphia's higher goal total keeps the margin thin. New England won more games over the season, allowed five fewer goals and would host Game 3. That combination earns the narrow lean, provided the Revolution manage the middle of the pitch after turnovers.

SERIES PROJECTION | MATCH WINS

New England 2-1

Editorial forecast, not a result.

SEMIFINAL PATH

Faces the winner of Inter Miami CF vs. Columbus Crew.

SOURCES Official schedule · Competition rules · Matchup guide · Season standings · East team guide



EAST CONFERENCE | GAME 1 PREVIEW

CHICAGO VS. CHARLOTTE

No. 4 Chicago Fire FC vs. No. 5 Charlotte FC

Sun Nov 22, 2026 | SeatGeek Stadium | Higher seed hosts

GAME 1 KICKOFF — **SeatGeek Stadium**

Apple TV, FS1, FOX Deportes, TSN, RDS

ET	PT	GMT	CET
18:30	15:30	23:30	00:30
Sun Nov 22	Sun Nov 22	Sun Nov 22	Mon Nov 23

REGULAR-SEASON COMPARISON

SEED	CLUB	PTS	W-D-L	GF	GA	GD
No. 4	Chicago Fire FC	55	16-7-11	64	54	+10
No. 5	Charlotte FC	54	15-9-10	66	51	+15

W-D-L: wins, draws, losses. GF / GA: goals for / against. GD: goal difference.

A ONE-POINT SEEDING GAP

Chicago finished on 55 points and Charlotte on 54. Charlotte scored two more goals and conceded three fewer. Chicago still earned the right to open at home, where a strong start can turn an otherwise even matchup into a chase for the visitors.

CHICAGO'S TARGET IN THE BOX

Robert Lewandowski registered nine goals and five assists in 19 league appearances. Watch how Chicago get the ball to him: a low pass after pulling the back line toward the near post can be more useful than a high cross into a set defence.

CHARLOTTE'S COUNTER

Pep Biel finished with 13 goals and 18 assists. If Charlotte win the ball and find him before Chicago's midfield gets back, he can release Idan Toklomati or Allan Saint-Maximin. The quality of that first outlet pass is the visitors' main tell.

GAME 1 PROJECTION | REGULATION SCORE

Chicago 2-1 Charlotte

Editorial forecast, not a result.

SOURCES **Official schedule** **Season standings** **Matchup guide** **East team guide**



EAST CONFERENCE | SERIES OUTLOOK

CHICAGO VS. CHARLOTTE: OUTLOOK

No. 4 Chicago Fire FC vs. No. 5 Charlotte FC

Game 2 at the lower seed | Game 3 at the higher seed only if needed

GAME 2 KICKOFF — **Bank of America Stadium**

Apple TV

ET	PT	GMT	CET
12:30	09:30	17:30	18:30
Sat Nov 28	Sat Nov 28	Sat Nov 28	Sat Nov 28

GAME 3 | ONLY AT 1-1 IN THE SERIES — **Wed Dec 2**

SeatGeek Stadium — *Kickoff TBD | Apple TV*

THE EARLY GAME IN CHARLOTTE

Game 2 has a 12:30 p.m. ET kickoff. Charlotte can use their home match to make Chicago defend the full width of the field, then look for Biel between the lines when a defender steps toward the winger.

CHICAGO'S ANSWER

Keep the far-side fullback a step deeper when attacking and force Charlotte's first outlet toward the sideline. That gives the Fire time to recover while keeping Lewandowski high enough to occupy the centre backs.

THE UPSET CASE

Chicago get the Game 1 lean at home. Charlotte's slightly better attack and defence over 34 matches make the series close enough to go the other way. The projection needs Charlotte to win at home and earn a second result at SeatGeek Stadium.

SERIES PROJECTION | MATCH WINS

Charlotte 2-1

Editorial forecast, not a result.

SEMIFINAL PATH

Faces the winner of Nashville SC vs. East Wild Card winner.

SOURCES Official schedule · Competition rules · Matchup guide · Season standings · East team guide

WEST CONFERENCE | GAME 1 PREVIEW

VANCOUVER VS. WEST WILD CARD

No. 1 Vancouver Whitecaps FC vs. No. 8 Seattle Sounders FC or No. 9 Real Salt Lake

Sun Nov 22, 2026 | BC Place | Higher seed hosts

GAME 1 KICKOFF — **BC Place**

Apple TV, TSN, RDS

ET	PT	GMT	CET
20:30 Sun Nov 22	17:30 Sun Nov 22	01:30 Mon Nov 23	02:30 Mon Nov 23

REGULAR-SEASON COMPARISON

SEED	CLUB	PTS	W-D-L	GF	GA	GD
No. 1	Vancouver Whitecaps FC	64	19-7-8	74	34	+40
No. 8	Seattle Sounders FC	46	12-10-12	44	46	-2
No. 9	Real Salt Lake	45	13-6-15	53	52	+1

W-D-L: wins, draws, losses. GF / GA: goals for / against. GD: goal difference.

THE WEST'S STRONGEST RECORD

Vancouver led the West with 64 points, scoring 74 and conceding 34. Brian White reached 20 goals. When a creator such as Thomas Müller or Ryan Gauld can receive in front of the centre backs, White's movement gives Vancouver a second threat behind them.

IF SEATTLE QUALIFY

The Sounders got in with a 2-1 Decision Day win over LAFC. Cristian Roldan's distribution can help them escape Vancouver's first press. The challenge is to support the first forward pass so the Whitecaps cannot immediately win the ball back.

IF REAL SALT LAKE QUALIFY

RSL beat the LA Galaxy 2-1 on Decision Day. Sergi Solans scored 15 league goals as a rookie and gives them a target in transition. Vancouver will want to cut off service early and avoid leaving their centre backs isolated after a turnover.

GAME 1 PROJECTION | REGULATION SCORE

Vancouver 2-0 Seattle
If Seattle advance

Vancouver 2-1 RSL
If Salt Lake advance

SOURCES Official schedule · Season standings · Matchup guide · West team guide

WEST CONFERENCE | SERIES OUTLOOK

VANCOUVER: SERIES OUTLOOK

No. 1 Vancouver Whitecaps FC vs. No. 8 Seattle Sounders FC or No. 9 Real Salt Lake

Game 2 at the lower seed | Game 3 at the higher seed only if needed

GAME 2 KICKOFF — **Lumen Field if SEA; America First Field if RSL**

Apple TV, FS1, FOX Deportes

ET	PT	GMT	CET
22:00	19:00	03:00	04:00
Fri Nov 27	Fri Nov 27	Sat Nov 28	Sat Nov 28

GAME 3 | ONLY AT 1-1 IN THE SERIES — **Wed Dec 2**

BC Place — *Kickoff TBD | Apple TV*

SEATTLE PATH: LUMEN FIELD

Seattle's best path to a third game is to control the middle at home and get Roldan on the ball before Vancouver close his options. That gives the Sounders a way to create a winning sequence without needing to outshoot the Whitecaps for 90 minutes.

SALT LAKE PATH: AMERICA FIRST FIELD

RSL can keep Game 2 close if their first pass after a regain reaches Solans with support nearby. If he is stranded, Vancouver can recycle possession and keep the hosts running. Look for the second RSL runner when Solans holds up the ball.

WHY THE PICK STAYS WITH VANCOUVER

The Whitecaps have the strongest goal difference in the West and would get any decider at BC Place. Seattle's home route is enough to project a third game in that branch. Vancouver's ability to create from more than one position earns a two-game lean against RSL.

SERIES PROJECTION | MATCH WINS

Vancouver 2-1	Vancouver 2-0
If Seattle advance	*If Salt Lake advance*

SEMIFINAL PATH

Faces the winner of San Jose Earthquakes vs. Houston Dynamo FC.

SOURCES Official schedule | Competition rules | Matchup guide | Season standings | West team guide



WEST CONFERENCE | GAME 1 PREVIEW

DALLAS VS. PORTLAND

No. 2 FC Dallas vs. No. 7 Portland Timbers

Sat Nov 21, 2026 | Toyota Stadium | Higher seed hosts

GAME 1 KICKOFF — **Toyota Stadium**

Apple TV

ET	PT	GMT	CET
16:00	13:00	21:00	22:00
Sat Nov 21	Sat Nov 21	Sat Nov 21	Sat Nov 21

REGULAR-SEASON COMPARISON

SEED	CLUB	PTS	W-D-L	GF	GA	GD
No. 2	FC Dallas	58	16-10-8	62	51	+11
No. 7	Portland Timbers	46	13-7-14	62	61	+1

W-D-L: wins, draws, losses. GF / GA: goals for / against. GD: goal difference.

SAME ATTACK TOTAL, DIFFERENT DEFENCE

Both clubs scored 62 regular-season goals. Dallas conceded 51 to Portland's 61 and finished 12 points ahead. That makes Dallas the stronger baseline pick, although Portland's late run is a reason to watch the early tempo carefully.

MUSA VS. THE FIRST CROSS

Petar Musa scored 22 league goals. Portland need to stop the service before he can set himself in the area, especially when Dallas switch the ball quickly. Pressing the crosser buys more than leaving Musa one defender to beat on the delivery.

PORTLAND'S FOUR-WIN FINISH

The Timbers won their last four league games, with Kristoffer Velde finishing the season on 12 goals and 10 assists. If he receives wide with room to turn, Portland can attack the inside channel or use a late runner after Dallas slide toward him.

GAME 1 PROJECTION | REGULATION SCORE

Dallas 2-1 Portland

Editorial forecast, not a result.

SOURCES Official schedule · Season standings · Matchup guide · Golden Boot · West team guide



WEST CONFERENCE | SERIES OUTLOOK

DALLAS VS. PORTLAND: OUTLOOK

No. 2 FC Dallas vs. No. 7 Portland Timbers

Game 2 at the lower seed | Game 3 at the higher seed only if needed

GAME 2 KICKOFF — **Providence Park**

Apple TV, FS1, FOX Deportes, TSN, RDS

ET	PT	GMT	CET
22:30	19:30	03:30	04:30
Sat Nov 28	Sat Nov 28	Sun Nov 29	Sun Nov 29

GAME 3 | ONLY AT 1-1 IN THE SERIES — **Wed Dec 2**

Toyota Stadium — *Kickoff TBD | Apple TV*

PROVIDENCE PARK IS THE SWING GAME

Portland have the attacking form to level the series at home. Velde can draw a second defender wide, leaving space for David Da Costa or Vincent Janssen to receive inside. Dallas should protect the cutback lane even when the first cross looks harmless.

DALLAS CAN WIN THE SECOND BALL

Musa does not need to win every aerial contest if a teammate collects the clearance and returns the ball before Portland reset. Dallas can threaten from those second attacks while still keeping enough cover to stop a Portland counter.

WHY DALLAS IN THREE

Portland's finishing run makes a sweep a less convincing forecast. Dallas had the better season at preventing goals and would be back at Toyota Stadium for a decider. The pick depends on Dallas turning a share of their wide possession into quality chances for Musa.

SERIES PROJECTION | MATCH WINS

FC Dallas 2-1

Editorial forecast, not a result.

SEMIFINAL PATH

Faces the winner of St. Louis CITY SC vs. LAFC.

SOURCES **Official schedule** **Competition rules** **Matchup guide** **Season standings** **Golden Boot** **West team guide**



WEST CONFERENCE | GAME 1 PREVIEW

ST. LOUIS VS. LAFC

No. 3 St. Louis CITY SC vs. No. 6 LAFC

Mon Nov 23, 2026 | Energizer Park | Higher seed hosts

GAME 1 KICKOFF — **Energizer Park**

Apple TV, FS1, FOX Deportes, TSN, RDS

ET	PT	GMT	CET
20:00 Mon Nov 23	17:00 Mon Nov 23	01:00 Tue Nov 24	02:00 Tue Nov 24

REGULAR-SEASON COMPARISON

SEED	CLUB	PTS	W-D-L	GF	GA	GD
No. 3	St. Louis CITY SC	54	15-9-10	59	48	+11
No. 6	LAFC	47	12-11-11	52	40	+12

W-D-L: wins, draws, losses. GF / GA: goals for / against. GD: goal difference.

THE CUP WINNERS GET HOME FIELD

St. Louis won the 2026 U.S. Open Cup and earned the West's third seed with 54 points. Rafael Navarro and Carlo Holse give the hosts options to turn a recovered ball into a quick attack before LAFC get their shape back.

LAFC'S FORM HIDES A THREAT

LAFC won just once in their last nine entering the playoffs. They still conceded fewer league goals than St. Louis, and Son Heung-min and Denis Bouanga combined for 25 goals and 24 assists. A few clean chances can change the complexion of a tight opener.

WHERE THE PRESS CAN BACKFIRE

If St. Louis push to win the ball high, the players behind the press must be close enough to cover Son or Bouanga on the first pass out. The risk is greatest when the nearest defender chases the receiver and opens a gap for a runner.

GAME 1 PROJECTION | REGULATION SCORE

St. Louis 1-0 LAFC

Editorial forecast, not a result.

SOURCES Official schedule · Season standings · Matchup guide · West team guide



WEST CONFERENCE | SERIES OUTLOOK

ST. LOUIS VS. LAFC: OUTLOOK

No. 3 St. Louis CITY SC vs. No. 6 LAFC

Game 2 at the lower seed | Game 3 at the higher seed only if needed

GAME 2 KICKOFF — **BMO Stadium**

Apple TV

ET	PT	GMT	CET
20:30	17:30	01:30	02:30
Sat Nov 28	Sat Nov 28	Sun Nov 29	Sun Nov 29

GAME 3 | ONLY AT 1-1 IN THE SERIES — **Wed Dec 2**

Energizer Park — *Kickoff TBD | Apple TV*

BMO STADIUM GIVES LAFC A RESET

LAFC can make Game 2 less frantic by drawing the press toward one side and then switching to the other. With Son or Bouanga receiving against a defence still moving laterally, a single diagonal pass can create the clean look they need.

ST. LOUIS CAN MANAGE THE CENTRE

Rather than press every first pass, St. Louis can wait for a backward touch or a receiver facing his own goal. That gives them a chance to win the ball high without giving both LAFC forwards free runs at the back line.

A NARROW HOME-FIELD LEAN

LAFC's better goals-against total and forward talent make a Game 2 response plausible. St. Louis get the series lean because of the stronger regular-season record and hosting rights in a decider. A clean LAFC exit against the press in Game 1 would lower confidence in that pick.

SERIES PROJECTION | MATCH WINS

St. Louis 2-1

Editorial forecast, not a result.

SEMIFINAL PATH

Faces the winner of FC Dallas vs. Portland Timbers.

SOURCES Official schedule · Competition rules · Matchup guide · Season standings · West team guide



WEST CONFERENCE | GAME 1 PREVIEW

SAN JOSE VS. HOUSTON

No. 4 San Jose Earthquakes vs. No. 5 Houston Dynamo FC

Tue Nov 24, 2026 | PayPal Park | Higher seed hosts

GAME 1 KICKOFF — **PayPal Park**

Apple TV, FS1, FOX Deportes, TSN, RDS

ET	PT	GMT	CET
22:00	19:00	03:00	04:00
Tue Nov 24	Tue Nov 24	Wed Nov 25	Wed Nov 25

REGULAR-SEASON COMPARISON

SEED	CLUB	PTS	W-D-L	GF	GA	GD
No. 4	San Jose Earthquakes	52	14-10-10	57	51	+6
No. 5	Houston Dynamo FC	51	14-9-11	43	43	0

W-D-L: wins, draws, losses. GF / GA: goals for / against. GD: goal difference.

ATTACK MEETS DEFENSIVE CONTROL

San Jose finished one point above Houston, scoring 57 goals to the Dynamo's 43. Houston conceded eight fewer. The contrast gives San Jose a reason to attack early at home and Houston a reason to keep the match within a single goal.

JUDD NEEDS SERVICE

Preston Judd scored 17 league goals, and Niko Tsakiris supplied 13 assists. If Houston close the central passing lanes, San Jose can use quick switches to move the defending block before playing the final ball toward Judd.

GUILHERME IS HOUSTON'S OUTLET

Guilherme led Houston with 16 goals and 10 assists. His early touches are an indicator: if he can receive on the move rather than with his back to goal, Houston can carry the ball out and force San Jose to defend deeper.

GAME 1 PROJECTION | REGULATION SCORE

San Jose 1-0 Houston

Editorial forecast, not a result.

SOURCES Official schedule · Season standings · Matchup guide · West team guide



WEST CONFERENCE | SERIES OUTLOOK

SAN JOSE VS. HOUSTON: OUTLOOK

No. 4 San Jose Earthquakes vs. No. 5 Houston Dynamo FC

Game 2 at the lower seed | Game 3 at the higher seed only if needed

GAME 2 KICKOFF — **Shell Energy Stadium**

Apple TV

ET	PT	GMT	CET
14:30	11:30	19:30	20:30
Sat Nov 28	Sat Nov 28	Sat Nov 28	Sat Nov 28

GAME 3 | ONLY AT 1-1 IN THE SERIES — **Wed Dec 2**

PayPal Park — *Kickoff TBD | Apple TV*

HOUSTON'S CHANCE TO DRAW LEVEL

At Shell Energy Stadium, Houston can make San Jose defend wider spaces by moving Guilherme away from the first marker before he receives. Keeping an outlet high also makes it harder for San Jose to hold the ball near the Houston box for repeated attacks.

WHY A TIE IS DANGEROUS

Houston's stronger goals-against figure suggests a route to a low-event match. If San Jose let a tight game drift toward penalties, their superior scoring total matters less. Watch whether the Earthquakes create close-range chances or settle for blocked shots and hopeful deliveries.

THE DECIDER WOULD BE IN SAN JOSE

A one-point gap makes this one of the tightest series. San Jose's extra scoring and the possible second home match tip the forecast. Houston's defensive numbers make the Game 2 upset credible and keep the prediction at three games.

SERIES PROJECTION | MATCH WINS

San Jose 2-1

Editorial forecast, not a result.

SEMIFINAL PATH

Faces the winner of Vancouver Whitecaps FC vs. West Wild Card winner.

SOURCES Official schedule | Competition rules | Matchup guide | Season standings | West team guide

REFERENCES

SOURCES & DISCLAIMER

Schedule and standings checked November 12, 2026

Click a source title to open its official page or standings table.

MLS | Round One schedule
Game 1 and Game 2 dates, kickoffs and venues; conditional Game 3 slots

MLS | Round One format
Eight series, two wins to advance, November 21 start

MLS | Competition guidelines
Hosting order, shootouts and semifinal pairings

MLS | Playoff calendar
Original November 20 window and later playoff rounds

MLS | Confirmed playoff field
Official seeds after Decision Day

MLS | Wild Card guide
November 19 fixtures and paths into Round One

MLS | Matchup guide
Postseason form and player production across the field

MLS | Eastern Conference guide
Eastern club records and playoff context

MLS | Western Conference guide
Western club records and playoff context

CBS Sports | 2026 standings
Final 34-match regular-season records and goal totals

MLS | Nashville's record season
77 points, Supporters' Shield and 25 goals conceded

MLS | Nashville's home finale
Unbeaten 15-win regular-season home record

MLS | 2026 Golden Boot
Messi's 26 goals, Musa's 22 and Surridge's 21

MLS | 2026 regular-season review
League records, top teams and defining regular-season results

ABOUT THE DATES AND NUMBERS

The fixture release takes precedence over the earlier November 20 calendar window. ET and PT use standard time for these dates. GMT is UK time and CET is Central European Time; dates may advance overnight. Regular-season totals cover 34 MLS matches per team.

ABOUT THE PROJECTIONS

Game 1 score projections cover regulation and stoppage time. Series projections count match wins, including matches decided on penalties. The conditional branches are scenarios, not Wild Card results. Check the official schedule and lineups near kickoff.

DISCLAIMER

Digital World Pulse is independent and is not affiliated with MLS or its clubs. This guide is for information and entertainment and is not betting advice. Schedules, broadcast listings and player availability can change. The artwork is illustrative and does not show actual players or venues.