

Soccer

DETROIT 1, RIVERHOUNDS 0

# Le Rouge creates a playoff stunner

Gasso's one-timer in 78th minute ends season for league's top seed

By Keith Barnes  
Tri-State Sports & News Service

Detroit City did not manage a shot on the Riverhounds SC net in two regular-season meetings and more than 70 minutes of their USL Championship postseason opener.

As it turned out, one was all Le Rouge needed.

Dominic Gasso laced a one-timer from the top of the box through a host of players and past Riverhounds goalkeeper Jahmali Waite at 77:35 for the only goal of the match as eighth-seeded Detroit City (12-8-15) pulled off a stunning upset of the No. 1 Riverhounds in a 1-0 victory at Highmark Stadium in front of a record crowd of 6,123.

"It happens in this sport more than we realize," Riverhounds coach Bob Lilley said. "There's one moment, one goal and it changes everything."

Gasso certainly did that.

After a throw-in from the right sideline, Riverhounds midfielder Danny Griffin headed the ball out of the box and seemingly out of danger. But Gasso was able to get to the loose ball first with a wide-open look at the frame.

Gasso fired high and to the right of Waite and the ball was in the net before he even reacted.

As fate would have it, it was also his first professional goal. And he couldn't have authored a better time to hit the back of the net.

"It was a perfect moment for me," Gasso said. "As soon as I saw it drop to me, as soon as I heard the ball (on the shot), I knew it was going to be a goal. I'm just so

happy. There's no better way to get my first goal than that goal."

Scoring goals has been a problem for Detroit City all year.

Detroit City finished last in the league with 30 goals scored in the regular season. The Riverhounds tied a league record with 13 home wins and had posted 15 shut-outs on the year, including 10 by Waite.

But the one thing Detroit City does well is play defense. In 34 regular-season matches, the team gave up only 39 goals, which was the main reason why the lowest scoring team in the league had a minus-9 goal differential and qualified for the postseason.

Against the Riverhounds, Le Rouge defenders glommed onto every player in a black and yellow striped jersey, challenged every possession and effectively got into the passing lane every time the Riverhounds tried to go over the top to send the ball deep into the attacking zone.

"Detroit mucked it up again. They played a lot of long balls, collisions. I do think we switched the ball a lot," Lilley said. "We had a lot of good possessions in the first half where we were in and every cross got cut out because we only hit the first ball into (Albert) Dikwa. To me, we needed other guys in the box and to mix up our service."

In fairness, the Riverhounds had a couple of solid opportunities in the first half, but probably none more fortuitous than a direct free kick from 28 yards out 4:40 into the match. Though



Riverhounds forward Albert Dikwa sits alone on the Highmark Stadium turf Saturday night after being eliminated by Detroit in the first round of the USL Championship playoffs. The Riverhounds entered as the No. 1 seed.

the team had been solid on set plays all year and had improved down the stretch, midfielder Junior Etou could not get around the Detroit City wall and his shot glanced off one of the outside defenders and away.

It was a portent of things to come.

Time after time the Riverhounds used a short passing attack to weave their way through the Detroit City

pressure, but the moment they went for the deep shot into the box or either one of the corners, Le Rouge stymied the attempt and turned it aside.

"I thought we were close to breaking then, but anyone that was sitting in the stands around the 60th minute was probably thinking that this was going to be one goal," Lilley said. "Then there was a ball flighted in the box, we

cleared the initial ball and the player hit a great strike, gets it on frame and it goes through a lot of bodies."

After the goal was scored, the Riverhounds heavily pressured Detroit City and generated several outstanding scoring attempts, but goalkeeper Nate Steinwascher came up big, including a huge stop on Golden Boot winner Dikwa from close range in stoppage time.

It was Steinwascher's 12th clean sheet of the season and second in as many weeks against the Riverhounds, who played Detroit City to a scoreless draw last week that allowed Le Rouge to pick up the one point they needed to qualify for the postseason.

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