

RailHawks rout Miami 9-0, clinch playoff berth

CARY, N.C. — The RailHawks wanted an early goal Wednesday against Miami, but if it didn't materialize, they wanted to focus on playing the final 15 minutes of the first half with a flourish.

It didn't. They did.

The RailHawks scored five goals in 14 minutes to close the first half en route to a 9-0 demolition of Miami at WakeMed Soccer Park. Six players scored for Carolina, including a hat trick for Joseph Kabwe and a double for Sallieu Bundu.

"If you look at it, a lot of the games we've played here, we've had loads of chances, and I always said if we keep creating chances, eventually we'll score them. And we did that," said Carolina coach Martin Rennie. "I think Miami, once we started scoring, they kind of mentally fell out of it. We just kept going and the guys who came on are hungry to make an impression. Overall, it was a great night, and I think it gives a more realistic showing of how many goals we should have scored this season."

Not only was it the most lopsided victory in RailHawks' history, not only did it extend the RailHawks' club record unbeaten streak to eight games (5-0-3), not only did it give the RailHawks sole possession of second place, it also allowed Carolina (14-5-6) to clinch a playoff spot in the USL First Division postseason.

"That was one of our first goals, to get in the playoffs," Rennie said. "I'm really happy we managed to do it. That was one of our main goals and now we want to go and finish as high as we can in the table and have a good run in the playoffs."

After scoring once in their previous three games, the RailHawks ran roughshod over the Blues during the final 15 minutes of the first half.

It started with Daniel Paladini's free kick in the 30th minute. From 30 yards out, Paladini took the shot as Miami goalkeeper Pat Hannigan was still trying to set the wall. He curled it in at the far post for his sixth goal of the season.

"I asked the ref for 10 yards, and then he backed them up, and he blew the whistle," Paladini said. "Kupono [Low] was like, 'Take it, take it, take it!' So it just clicked in my head real quick, and the goalie was setting up the wall, and I just put it in the corner."

As Paladini took off on his celebration, Miami players were irate, and a handful of them charged toward referee Tony Crush. Within seconds, Crush flashed a red card toward the group of players, and it went to midfielder Edwin Miranda.

Six minutes later, the RailHawks capitalized on the man advantage. John Cunliffe took a ball at the top of box from Devon McKenney and uncorked a masterful, swerving shot that left Hannigan helpless.

Four minutes later, Andriy Budnyy got in on the action. Following a short corner kick, Kabwe served a ball to the back post and Budnyy headed it in — his fourth goal of the season.

Three minutes after that, Gregory Richardson pounced on an errant back pass and tucked it in the goal for a 4-0 lead.

One minute later, Kabwe followed up a rebound after a Budnyy shot and redirected it in.

“After the first goal, it just opened up the floodgates,” Paladini said. “I mean, from there on out, I mean, everything we’ve practiced, everything we do — everything went in.”

Not only did Carolina score five goals in 15 minutes, but they scored three in four.

“[Rennie] was very excited, honestly,” Kabwe said of the mood in the changing room at half time. “He just said, ‘I mean, there’s nothing I can tell you guys.’ Just go out there and pretend it’s 0-0. Keep on scoring goals, as many as you can. And we just tried to do like that.”

With the game already in hand, the RailHawks slowed down for much of the second half. But the floodgates open up back up during the final 15 minutes of the match. From the 76th through the 87th minutes, the RailHawks scored four more goals.

Kabwe headed in a Richardson cross in the 76th minute, then completed his hat trick in the 80th minute. Budnyy played Kabwe into space, and Kabwe beat the offside trap and easily finished the chance.

“I will give it to the team, honestly,” Kabwe said. “Because if you look at it, it’s all about making runs into the box without the ball. Whenever somebody has the ball, people tend to congest it. They did well building it up and positioning the ball, attracting guys to one side and then coming out of the other side.”

Bundu finished the rout with goals in the 85th and 87th minutes, pushing his season total to seven.

Lost in the shuffle of the RailHawks offensive onslaught was the fact that Carolina held Miami to just six shots and none of them were on frame. Eric Reed didn't need to make a save in order to earn his seventh shutout of the season and the RailHawks' league-leading 16th. They've not shut out their opponents in back-to-back matches and seven of their last eight.

While the RailHawks reveled in their romp, they also recognized that with five games remaining, two in Montreal on the horizon, they cannot get comfortable after Wednesday's performance.

"You don't get too carried away," Rennie said. "It's one game. If we won 1-0, it would be the same three points. We've got to keep going. We've got a lot of hard games coming up. We've got Montreal and Puerto Rico, and it's up to us to see how we do."

LINEUPS

MIA: GK Pat Hannigan, D Zack Kirby, D Cristiano Dias (Pedro Faife, 39th), D Junior Baiano, D Walter Ramirez, M Tim Merritt, M John Pulido, M Edwin Miranda, M Leo Inacio, F Alen Marcina (Reinier Alcantara, 45th), F Tristan Bowen (Nelson Pizzaro, 45th)

CAR: GK Eric Reed, D Kupono Low, D Jeremy Tolleson (Sallieu Bundu, 64th), D Mark Schulte, D Devon McKenney, M Brad Rusin, M Joseph Kabwe, M Daniel Paladini (Matt Watson, 45th), M John Cunliffe (Luke Creamalmeyer, 59th), F Gregory Richardson, F Andriy Budnyy (Gavin Glinton, 74th)

SCORING SUMMARY

CAR: Daniel Paladini, 30th

CAR: John Cunliffe (Devon McKenney), 36th

CAR: Andriy Budnyy (Joseph Kabwe), 40th

CAR: Gregory Richardson, 43rd

CAR: Joseph Kabwe, 44th

CAR: Joseph Kabwe (Gregory Richardson), 76th

CAR: Joseph Kabwe (Sallieu Bundu), 80th

CAR: Sallieu Bundu, 85th

CAR: Sallieu Bundu (Matt Watson), 87th

CAUTIONS

MIA: Walter Ramirez, 21st; John Pulido, 23rd

CAR: John Cunliffe, 53rd

EJECTIONS

MIA: Edwin Miranda, 30th