



After overtime, penalty kicks, Real Salt Lake wins MLS Cup

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Kyle Beckerman holds the The Philip F. Anschutz MLS Cup trophy as Real Salt Lake celebrates their win over the Los Angeles Galaxy in the MLS Cup final at Qwest Field on Sunday in Seattle.

By Beau Dure, USA TODAY

SEATTLE — Major League Soccer has its most improbable champion in its 14-year history.

Real Salt Lake, a small-market expansion team that dealt with a harsh political landscape to survive in Utah and scraped into the MLS playoffs, won the league championship on penalty kicks after a 1-1 draw Sunday with the Los Angeles Galaxy before a festive crowd of 46,011 fans.

GAME REPORT: Los Angeles Galaxy 1, Real Salt Lake 1 (5-4)

Robbie Russell, a part-time starting defender for Real, hit the winning penalty kick. Nick Rimando, who stopped three penalty kicks in the semifinal win against the Chicago Fire, turned away two more Sunday and was named the game's most outstanding player.

The Galaxy's stars had their moments. David Beckham, whose presence attracted a large contingent of international news media, helped set up Los Angeles' goal and converted the first penalty kick in the tiebreaker. League MVP Landon Donovan sent a perfect cross to Mike Magee for the Galaxy's goal, but he hit the camera support behind the goal with his penalty kick, possibly the final kick of his accomplished MLS career.

Though its regular-season record (11-12-7) was barely enough to clinch the final berth in the playoffs, Real Salt Lake outplayed the Galaxy through most of the final, dominating play in the second half and extra time.

It was the second MLS Cup final decided by penalty kicks. The first was in 2006, when the Houston Dynamo beat the New England Revolution.

"We believed in each other as much as everybody disbelieved in us," Real coach Jason Kreis said.

Salt Lake started brightly, seeking out speedster Robbie Findley on through balls, but was unable to keep the ball in play on the fast artificial turf or persuade the referee's assistant to keep the offside flag down.

But the game turned sour for the underdogs when playmaker Javier Morales came up limping with a left knee sprain after a challenge with Beckham in the 14th minute. Morales tried to stay in but eventually conceded he couldn't continue, burying his face in his hands before being taken out in favor of Clint Mathis.

Late in the half, Los Angeles began to assert itself with quick counterattacks. Donovan sprang Mike Magee down the left side, but his shot missed wide.

Magee didn't miss a second chance. Beckham played the ball to Donovan on the right, and Donovan played a sublime cross to the far post. Magee tapped the ball in to give the Galaxy a 1-0 lead in the 41st minute.

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MLS CUP PLAYER RATINGS

REAL SALT LAKE

GK Nick Rimando 7 - Not asked to do much, no chance on Galaxy goal. Saved Kirovski PK, in the opposite direction from the three he saved in the semifinal.

RB Robbie Russell 6 - Stopped a couple of Donovan runs with well-timed intervention and shoulder charges. Converted the winning penalty.

CB Nat Borchers 6 - Good job clogging passing lanes.

CB Jamison Olave 6 - Quiet but effective.

LB Chris Wingert 6 - Solid at back and got into attack a few times. Converted PK that would've eliminated Real had he missed.

DM Kyle Beckerman 8 - Masterful performance as midfield engine, starting attacks from deep position. Had at least one writer's MVP vote (turned in before his PK was saved).

RM Andy Williams 6 - Distracted Galaxy defense with good runs and passes. Missed PK that would've won it.

LM Will Johnson 4 - Sick earlier in the week, got yellow card for hip check on Donovan. Labored and was subbed at halftime.

AM Javier Morales 5 - Struggled with touch before being subbed out early. Free kick sailed over everything.

F Robbie Findley 8 - Darting runs, quick and accurate shots. A menace to the slower Galaxy defense throughout. Converted Real's second PK.

F Yura Movsisyan 7 - Busy up front; shot set up rebound for Findley's goal.

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AM Clint Mathis 6 - Found and effectively used space while playing more minutes than he has played for much of the season. Free kicks were a little bit off, but drilled penalty kick.

MF Ned Grabavoy 6 - Effective in a variety of midfield roles. Converted PK.

F Fabian Espindola 5 - Didn't add much to attack.

LOS ANGELES GALAXY

GK Donovan Ricketts 6 - Not at fault on the goal; did well to challenge Findley on play that led to his injury.

RB Sean Franklin 6 - Good hustle; made overlapping runs early but stopped and eventually settled into central defense after Gonzalez's departure.

CB Gregg Berhalter 7 - Timely tackles, using veteran savvy to counter Findley's speed. Squeaked second PK past Rimando.

CB Omar Gonzalez 6 - Scrambled effectively to disrupt Real in box; left game late in regulation.

LB Todd Dunivant 6 - Had a couple of overlapping runs early, then settled into a quiet game with one good block on a cross in extra time.

RM David Beckham 7 - Aggressive in two-way role in right and central midfield, making tough tackles (ask Morales) and sparking attacks. Faded toward end but still won a couple of midfield battles. Converted first penalty kick for Galaxy.

CM Chris Birchall 4 - Early giveaway, yellow card for nasty hack on Mathis, subbed out in second half.

CM Jovan Kirovski 6 - Pressed into midfield service due to Dema Kovalenko and Stefani Miglioranza's absence and acquitted himself well. PK (Galaxy's third) was saved.

LM Landon Donovan 7 - Spectacular cross to Magee for first goal, but quiet thereafter. Sent penalty kick well high.

F Mike Magee 7 - Well-placed for tap-in on Donovan cross; also passed effectively. Converted PK.

F Edson Buddle 5 - Curiously played as more of a creator than a target forward. Committed a couple of needless fouls. Put PK in the same spot where Rimando has been saving a lot of them.

Subs:

GK Josh Saunders 6 - Collected a couple of crosses with no trouble; showed no nerves after coming on for Ricketts.

MF Chris Klein 6 - Nearly got on the end of the Galaxy's only good chance in extra time. Converted PK.

RB A.J. DeLaGarza 6 - Late sub for the injured Gonzalez; important block in extra time.

The Galaxy came out flat in the second half, and Real capitalized by applying constant pressure.

Yura Movsisyan drilled a shot that was blocked by defender Omar Gonzalez and fell to Findley, who slotted the ball into the net with goalkeeper Donovan Ricketts stranded, tying the score at 1 in the 64th minute.

Real kept the momentum into extra time and relied on Rimando to secure the win on penalties.

"We knew if it came down to it ... the guys were going to bury it (penalty kicks)," Rimando said. "The underdog has a championship now."

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