

# 2024 REAL SALT LAKE PREVIEW

UPDATED: 30 August 2024

- 2024 PERFORMANCES:** MLS 12W-6L-8D (44 points, 3<sup>rd</sup> West); 51 GF / 36 GA  
Open Cup 0W-1L (Rd of 32 Loss @ NMU, 2-4; goals from Barajas, Luna)  
Leagues Cup 1W-1L (Group loss @ HOU, 0-3)
- SPORTING DIRECTOR:** Kurt Schmid  
(4<sup>th</sup> season with RSL – 1<sup>st</sup> full season as Chief Soccer Officer)
- HEAD COACH:** Pablo Mastroeni (Aug. 2021 – present)  
[4<sup>th</sup> season with RSL – 3<sup>rd</sup> full season as RSL HC; 8<sup>th</sup> overall in MLS (COL 2014-17)]
- ASSISTANT COACHES:** Nate Miller (1<sup>st</sup> season – formerly USL San Diego Loyal);  
Anthony Pulis (1<sup>st</sup> season – formerly USL Miami FC);  
Jamison Olave (1<sup>st</sup> season – formerly MLSNP Real Monarchs);  
Mirza Hrambasic – GK (1<sup>st</sup> season – formerly MLSNP Real Monarchs);  
Joel Delass – Player Development Coach (2<sup>nd</sup> season – formerly Monarchs);  
Sean Buckley – performance (1<sup>st</sup> season – formerly Minnesota United)
- INCOMING 2024 TRANSFERS:** M/F Fidel Barajas (Charleston Battery – USA – signed Jan. 11, 2024);  
DF Alexandros Katranis (Piast Gliwice – Poland – signed Feb. 2, 2024);  
FW Matt Crooks (Middlesbrough – England – signed Feb. 9, 2024);  
FW Benji Michel (free agent – signed July 19, 2024);  
MF Lachlan Brook (Western Sydney – Australia – signed July 22, 2024)  
DF Javain Brown (Vancouver – Canada – signed July 31, 2024)  
FW Diogo Gonçalves (FC Copenhagen – Denmark – signed Aug. 9, 2024)  
FW Dominik Marczuk (Jagiellonia Bialystok – Poland – signed Aug. 14, 2024)
- KEY DEPARTURES:** (2023 or 2024 All Comp Stats)  
FW Jefferson Savarino (11 goals, 7 assists → Botafogo – Brazil);  
FW Danny Musovski (9g, 4a → Seattle – MLS);  
M/F Damir Kreilach (8g / 1a → Vancouver – MLS);  
MF Jasper Löffelsend (1g, 2a → Colorado – MLS)  
M/F Fidel Barajas (1g, 2a → Chivas de Guadalajara – Liga MX)  
FW Andrés Gómez (13g, 9a → Stade Rennais – Ligue 1, France)  
DF Bryan Oviedo (0g, 2a → MLS waivers)
- OUT ON LOAN:** FW Rubio Rubin (3g, 2a → loaned to Queretaro – Liga MX through 2024 season);  
DF Delentz Pierre (loaned to Colo. Springs – USL through 2024 season);  
D/M Kevon Lambert (loaned to San Antonio – USL through 2024 season);  
MF Jude Wellings (loaned to FC Pinzgau Saalfelden – Austria – through Winter 2024)  
FW Ilijah Paul (loaned to Ventura County – MLSNP – through 2024 season)
- AVAILABILITY REPORT (for 31 August v New England Revolution):**
- OUT:** DF Kevin Bonilla (knee injury suffered 2/14/24 v TOR)  
MF Pablo Ruiz (knee injury suffered 3/5/24 in training)
- QUESTIONABLE:** FW Chicho Arango (hamstring injury suffered 8/24 in game)  
MF Nelson Palacio (knee injury suffered 8/27 in training)  
DF Bryan Vera (neck strain suffered 8/27 in training)  
DF Bode Hidalgo (back spasms)  
MF Matt Crooks (back spasms)
- CAUTION WARNINGS:** FW Chicho Arango, DF Alex Katranis  
(suspended next caution)

## ***RSL RETURNS HOME FOLLOWING LEAGUES CUP STUMBLE ::***

Real Salt Lake (12-6-8, 44 points, 3<sup>rd</sup> West MLS) resumes its 2024 Major League Soccer slate Saturday night at home against New England Revolution (8-14-2, 26 points, 12<sup>th</sup> East), the second of back-to-back home matches at America First Field in Sandy, UT, to close out the month of August ...

RSL remains in the thick of the Western Conference top-seed race, with the Claret-and-Cobalt hosting three of its next four matches and five of the final eight overall on Utah soil, where Head Coach **Pablo Mastroeni's** side has excelled this season ...

Kickoff Saturday is at 7:30p MT at America First Field in Sandy, with the match available via Apple TV+ / MLS Season Pass, as **Mark Rogondino** and **Heath Pearce** (ENG) provide the call, as will **Moises Linares** and **Pablo Marino** (SPN) ...

RSL arrives Saturday looking to rebound from its flattest and most disappointing home performance of 2024, an 0-2 loss to last-place Western Conference side San Jose, conceding two early goals after poor giveaways ...

With the loss, RSL falls to 9-3-1 / 28 points across all competitions on Utah soil, despite the presence of 21,015 at America First Field, where RSL has produced seven consecutive standing-room-only sellout crowds, and nine in 13 games so far this year ... Saturday against New England is expected to add to those totals ...

In its previous home match, back on August 1, RSL kicked off its 2024 Leagues Cup experience with a 2-1 home victory over Atlas FC (Liga MX), coming back from an early deficit to win on goals from FW **Anderson Julio** (45+2') and MF **Nelson Palacio** (79')

Palacio's goal off the bench just one minute after coming on proved to be the game-winner, a nearly 40-yard blast that traveled at 80 miles per hour into the back of the net ... RSL FW **Andrés Gómez** earned the assist on the Julio equalizer in the dying moments of the first half, improving its all-time record against Mexican visitors across friendly, CONCACAF Champions League and Leagues Cup competitions in the Claret-and-Cobalt's 20-year history to 5-6-3 / 18 points ...

## ***ACTIVE SUMMER WINDOW SEES FIVE RSL ADDITIONS ::***

Since the Club's August 5 Leagues Cup ouster in Houston, RSL completed the most active summer transfer window in the team's 20-year history, with five new players arriving on the Wasatch Front: FW **Benji Michel**, DF **Javain Brown**, M/F **Lachlan Brook**, MF **Diogo Gonçalves** and FW **Dominik Marczuk** ...

While Michel was able to play 16 minutes in MLS action on July 20 at Colorado – becoming the 212<sup>th</sup> player in RSL's 20 MLS seasons and the eighth player to make his Club debut this season, while also making his home debut on August 1 against Atlas – last Saturday provided an opportunity for three of the remaining four – Portuguese Designated Player Gonçalves, former Vancouver centerback Brown and Australian youth international Brook – to make their RSL and/or MLS debuts ...

Due to P-1 visa acquisition process, Polish youth international Marczuk hopes to don the Claret-and-Cobalt for the first time this weekend at home against the New England Revolution ...

Outgoing RSL players during the recently-closed MLS window include MF Fidel Barajas (sold to Chivas Guadalajara in LIGA MX), FW Andrés Gómez (sold to Stade Rennais in French Ligue 1) and DF Bryan Oviedo (waived) ...

## ***BEST RSL CAMPAIGN IN A DECADE***

Despite last week's setback, RSL still boasts 44 points in 25 games, the Club's best start in over a decade, Mastroeni's team having a chance to surpass its all-time high of 57 points in a season, set back in 2012 ...

RSL also has a trio of 56-point campaigns since MLS went to a 34-game reg. season (2010, 2013, 2014) ...

RSL needs just two road wins in its final three away trips to match its second-highest visiting win total (2012, 2013; last year was RSL's best-ever road performance, with an 8-5-4 / 28-point mark) ...

With five more home games this season, RSL would need to win four of those to match the Club's best-ever home mark of 12-4-1 / 37 points, set in 2019 ... Two more home wins would give RSL its eighth season with double-digit wins, and its first since 2019 ...

Should RSL get another seven points this year, it would be the Club's eighth 50-point season in its 20-year history ...

## ***YET ANOTHER BOUNCEBACK RESPONSE REQUIRED DURING MASTROENI ERA ::***

RSL returns to MLS action Saturday looking to stop its 2-game MLS losing streak and a run of dropping three of its last four, as a home win or draw would once again provide the requisite “bounceback” response we have come to expect ...

The resilience, response and determination of RSL's collective DNA during the **Pablo Mastroeni** era – also known as the “xDAWG” mentality – was on full display in that August 1, 2-1 come-from-behind home win for RSL against Atlas, following a 12-day break after the disappointing Rocky Mountain Cup loss on July 20 in Colorado ...

During the now 129 games coached by Mastroeni since taking the Claret-and-Cobalt reins in late August, 2021, RSL has dropped back-to-back matches just 10 times overall – with four of the nine occurring last August, following the season-ending, non-contact knee injury suffered by metronomic playmaker Pablo Ruiz in mid-August at LAFC in the Leagues Cup Round of 32 match ...

In those 129 games coached by Pablo since late August, 2021, matches following a loss has seen RSL bounce-back successfully and respond with 21 wins and 13 draws against just 10 losses, avoiding long droughts and not letting losing streaks fester ...

Mastroeni's all-time RSL record across all competitions is now 53W-45L-31T mark in MLS reg. season, MLS Cup Playoff, Leagues Cup, Open Cup and int'l friendly matches, guiding the Club to the 2021 MLS Western Conference Final and the 2023 Lamar Hunt U.S. Open Cup Semifinal ...

RSL's mentality also abounds in bouncing back from losses during the Mastroeni era, with its collective resilience and the “never say die” attitude on full display in leg two of the Audi 2023 MLS Cup Playoff series at Houston, once again avoiding consecutive setbacks ...

The trend continued with the 1-1 draw Feb. 24 in St. Louis following the season-opening loss at Miami, as well as the March 23 2-1 win in Vancouver following the rare home loss to Colorado on March 9 ...

Only the 0-3 loss at Houston in Leagues Cup on August 5 and last Saturday's 0-2 setback against San Jose have occurred this year, despite RSL suffering five of its seven losses across all competitions in the last 60 days (since June 22) ...

## ***MLS GOLDEN BOOT LEADER CHICHO ARANGO RETURN STUNTED ::***

That August 1 Atlas FC home match represented the fourth and final match with MLS suspension imposed on RSL Captain, Colombian striker and MLS Golden Boot leader **Chicho Arango**, who also missed the 1-1 July 17 RSL draw at LAFC, the 2-3 loss at Colorado on July 20, the July 24 MLS All-Star Game against the Liga MX All-Stars ...

Chicho – still tied for the League's Golden Boot lead with D.C. United's Christian Benteke, one ahead of LAFC man Denis Bouanga despite the Colombian's scoring drought July 13-20 – did play the final 45 minutes of an 0-3 loss at Houston in RSL's second Leagues Cup group stage match ...

Last week against San Jose, Captain Chicho felt tightness in his right hamstring and pulled himself out of the match in the 41<sup>st</sup> minute ... His status for the New England match is questionable, but the Club is optimistic he can return on Sept. 14 at Houston to kick off a three-game/eight-day run of MLS matches, which includes two home games against Dallas and Portland on Sept. 18/21 ...

## ***HOME-HEAVY MLS SCHEDULE STARTING AUGUST 24 v SAN JOSE ::***

With the sun now finally set on the 2024 Leagues Cup tournament, RSL plays five of its final eight MLS contests at home, where the Claret-and-Cobalt boast 8 wins and 1 draw against just 3 losses in league action this season, in addition to a ninth home win over Atlas FC ... Saturday's home match against the New England Revolution (8-14-2, 26 points, 12<sup>th</sup> East) is the second of two remaining RSL games to close out August ...

Following the Sept. 7 weekend international break, RSL's September run is bookended by a pair of Texas road trips to Austin (Sept. 14) and Houston (Sept. 28), on either side of home games against Dallas and Portland on Sept. 18/21 ... RSL welcomes Minnesota on Oct. 2 and Vancouver on the Oct. 19 Decision Day, with an Oct. 5 road trip to the Bay Area prior to another FIFA international window the weekend of Oct. 12 ...

During the Pablo Mastroeni era – qualifying for the MLS Cup Playoffs in each of the three previous seasons – RSL has endured a rollercoaster ride in the final 10 games of each season ... Time now to nip the 0-2-0 record from July 20 / August 24 MLS contests in the bud ...

## **RSL'S FINAL 10-GAME MLS RUN-IN DURING MASTROENI ERA ::**

Back in 2021, RSL split its 10 games under Pablo, winning five and dropping five, securing a dramatic Decision Day win at Kansas City to qualify for the postseason, eventually progressing to the West Final and suffering elimination at Portland ...

In 2022, RSL posted a 3-3-4 / 13-point finish, suffering unexpected home draws / losses but delivering yet another Decision Day win, this time a dominant 3-1 home victory over Portland ... That year's RSL side burst out to a 2-0 lead at Austin courtesy an early **Sergio Cordova** brace in a first-round MLS Cup Playoff match, but a 53<sup>rd</sup>-minute **Rubio Rubin** ejection ended up with RSL falling in PKs after 120 minutes ...

Last season, RSL went 4-5-1 / 13 points in its final 10 matches, as it learned how to play without injured metronome Pablo Ruiz following his non-contact Leagues Cup Round of 16 injury at LAFC ... RSL did win three of its final five last year, including its lone win at LAFC on a late **Chicho Arango** goal, and a 1-0 Decision Day victory at Colorado, one that saw **Diego Luna** emerge and announce his presence with authority, scoring four goals in his final five matches of 2023, including the three-game series with Houston, which again saw RSL eliminated by the narrowest of margins, as both games two and three of the first-round series were decided by PKs ...

## **PALACIO BLAST LATEST IN STRING OF LONG-RANGE RSL HEROICS ::**

RSL MF **Nelson Palacio**'s scintillating, game-winning ZAPATAZO on August 5 from deep – 38 yards out, 78.1 mph (according to Sportrac) – marks the latest in a string of long-range RSL heroics, with Captain **Chicho Arango** scoring from midfield back on June 1 in a 5-1 home win against Austin as part of his hat trick that day, while MF **Pablo Ruiz** saw his 68-yard offering at Audi Field in Washington D.C. last summer a finalist for the 2023 MLS Goal of the Year ...

RSL's Sandy, Utah-based venue might not be a desired place in the future for Mexican power Atlas FC, the *Rojinegros* also playing at the venue now known as America First Field back in October, 2022, as part of that year's "Leagues Cup Showcase" match ...

Despite RSL falling at home, 1-2, that midweek October night, the game will be remembered for former RSL Homegrown **Aaron Herrera**'s long-range goal – a 78-yard *bombazo* – that gave the home side the lead ...

## **ALL-STARS GLAD, LUNA BACK IN UTAH ::**

Real Salt Lake saw its two MLS All-Star representatives – DF **Justen Glad** and MF **Diego Luna** – return to the Club a week before the Atlas match after spending four days in Columbus, Ohio, as part of Major League Soccer's annual All-Star festivities ...

Glad was voted into Wilfried Nancy's Starting XI against the Liga MX All-Stars by a combination of fan, player and media voting, playing the entire first 45' and squaring off against such attacking luminaries as Andrés-Pierre Gignac (Tigres), Germán Berterame (Monterrey) and Pedro Rondon (Pachuca) ...

Luna – named a replacement on the roster for teammate **Chicho Arango**, who was voted in to the XI but later suspended by MLS – entered the match as a first-half substitute for Portland star Evander, the 20-year old RSL man playing the final 20 minutes of the first half ...

Luna, also the youngest 2024 MLS All-Star, appeared in several events Tuesday night as part of the MLS All-Star Skills Challenge as well, grinning ear-to-ear all week and introducing his 18-month old son to iconic CONCACAF players ...

## **MIDFIELD STALWART EMEKA ENELI EARNS NEW CONTRACT ::**

Real Salt Lake has extended the contract for second-year midfielder **Emeka Eneli**, the Club announced Thursday ... The Michigan-born, Ohio-raised and Cornell-educated Eneli was selected by RSL 25<sup>th</sup> overall in the 2023 MLS SuperDraft, displaying versatility, toughness, skill and savvy in his 58 games played across all competitions for RSL during the 2023/24 seasons ...

"I'm very grateful and I'm just trying to put my head down and work, focus on my football and know that the rest will take care of itself," said Eneli, whose new deal, effective Jan. 1, 2025, extends Emeka's presence on the Wasatch Front through the 2028 Major League Soccer season, with a club option for 2029. "The Club was very fair and very transparent with the negotiations, I'm grateful for that, and my agent was obviously very helpful.

"My first professional season came when I was 23, so I'm kind of a late bloomer because I came from a college pathway. And while I'm 24 now, you never know how a good run, a good year will affect your career ... Things happen so fast in this industry. Hopefully I can continue on this trajectory, and we'll see what happens.

We all know here that the better the team performance, the more individuals get highlighted. I'm focused and content with working every day to get better here. Everyone has their own pathway, their own way of doing things; for us, it's about mentality, intensity, training and playing the right way.

"We have the best fans in the League, and as a player when you know the whole base is behind you, it's inspiring to want to reward them, to collect points at home, and to push for trophies."

Entering Saturday's home contest against New England, Eneli has started 24 of 25 reg. season games this MLS campaign for RSL, just outside of first place in the tightly-contested Western Conference ...

Following a start at right back for Head Coach **Pablo Mastroeni's** side in the Feb. 21 season opener at Miami, Eneli has played in the Club's new-look double-pivot ever since, playing the full 90 in each of RSL's first 14 games ... One of five players this season to have exceeded 1,800 minutes played this season, Eneli's 2,035 is second only to fellow pivot **Brian Ojeda** ... Eneli scored his first MLS goal back on March 9 at home in a 1-2 loss to Colorado, to go along with three assists so far this year ...

Born October 18, 1999 in Lansing, Michigan and holding dual Nigerian / American citizenship, Eneli's family moved to Dublin, Ohio when he was eight years old ...

A product of the Columbus Crew Academy prior to his Cornell University career with the Big Red, Eneli played in more forward attacking roles prior to his arrival in Utah, scoring 20 goals at the NCAA level in 60 games over a Covid-affected period ...

The 2018 Ivy League Rookie of the Year also served as the Big Red captain for Cornell Men's Soccer during his junior and senior seasons ... During his final college season in 2022, Eneli helped lead Cornell to the NCAA Sweet 16 for the first time in nearly 30 years ...

The goal March 9 in the loss against Colorado marked Eneli's first of his professional career, making him the 102<sup>nd</sup> all-time scorer in Real Salt Lake's 618-game history in Major League Soccer (now Ojeda is the 105<sup>th</sup> in 640 MLS contests) ...

## ***HOMEGROWN BODE HIDALGO ALSO EXTENDED ::***

Announced Wednesday, RSL also extended the contract for Homegrown defender **Bode (Davis) Hidalgo** ... The 22-year-old Kaysville, Utah native sees his new deal go into effect on Jan. 1, 2025 and extend through the 2027 Major League Soccer season, with RSL options for the 2028 and 2029 seasons ...

"Over my years here, it's just been a lot of hard work that has brought me to this point," said Hidalgo, born on Feb. 22, 2002 in Davis County, and converted from an attacker to a defender during his RSL Academy (2017-20) and Real Monarchs (2020-23) campaigns. "I've always been happy to be here, but at times I've taken playing in front of family a little bit for granted. Now I fully grasp how special and unique this opportunity is, how rare it is for someone who grew up dreaming of playing for my hometown Club to be able to contribute for so long, and at this level. When I signed my first professional contract back in 2020, I said it was a dream come true; now, the dream continues."

Throughout his MLS career, Hidalgo has displayed versatility, toughness, skill and savvy in his 63 RSL games played across all competitions for RSL during the 2022, 2023 and now 2024 seasons ... Hidalgo's first and only MLS goal came in just his sixth appearance, coming off the bench in a home "Decision Day" match against the Portland Timbers in a decisive 3-1 playoff-clinching win ... In 47 MLS reg. season and playoff appearances during the last two seasons, Hidalgo has two assists, with the former attacker playing mostly at right back in either a back four or a back three, despite five starts at centerback in 2024 due necessity this season ...

During his RSL Academy and Real Monarchs career, Hidalgo scored 11 goals in 72 matches, often playing on the right wing ... Entering Saturday's home contest against New England, Hidalgo has started 15 of his 22 MLS reg. season appearances for RSL, providing defensive tenacity, attacking prowess and link-up play from several spots on the park ...

## ***DISTANT MEMORIES OF DISMAL THREE-GAME ROAD TRIP ::***

Real Salt Lake (12-6-8, 44 pts., 3<sup>rd</sup> West MLS) stumbled into the 2024 Leagues Cup snatching just one of a possible nine points in a week-long, three-game road trip in mid-July ...

RSL rebounded from its worst loss of the year – the 0-3 scoreline from July 13 at Portland matched with the 0-3 at Houston in Leagues Cup on August 5 – with a valiant 1-1 draw July 17 at LAFC, earning yet another “bounceback” result during the **Pablo Mastroeni** era ...

RSL then arrived at Colorado on July 20 just two points out of first place in the West on 44 points, looking up at the LA Galaxy with a game in hand ... The Claret-and-Cobalt road warriors saw its Club-record 10-game road unbeaten run snapped July 13 in Portland, as RSL had earned four wins and six draws since its 2024 MLS opening day loss at Miami back on Feb. 21 prior to the weekend debacle ...

Despite the recent turbulence, RSL has dropped just three of its last 21 MLS contests, with all three losses coming in its last six games (June 22 v LAG, July 13 @ POR, July 20 @ COL) ... The 0-1 home loss on June 22 to visiting LA Galaxy also snapped a 15-game unbeaten run (nine wins, six draws), marred by Chicho's early departure due to a head injury 16 minutes in ...

That 15-game unbeaten stretch saw the RSL defense (six goals allowed in first nine games of the streak, with five clean sheets) earn 11 points in its last five matches, despite shipping 11 total goals and relying on stoppage-time heroics against COL, at DAL and at SEA prior to the Austin demolition on June 1 and the offensive fireworks June 19 in KC ...

During that MLS run, Head Coach **Pablo Mastroeni's** team outscored opponents 35-17, scored first in eight of the 15 matches and scoring six game-winning goals in the final 15 minutes of matches, as well as two stoppage-time equalizers ...

## ***COMFORTABLE ON THE ROAD***

RSL's recent streak of a Club-record 10 consecutive road results was terminated July 13 at Portland, RSL last losing away from home back on Feb. 21 in the 2024 MLS opener at Miami, a 2-0 win for the home side ...

Following the early July 8-4 aggregate in wins over Houston (3-2, July 3) and Atlanta (5-2, July 6), RSL embarked on a three-game week from July 13-20 that sees the Utah side travel to Portland, LAFC and Colorado in a critical road stretch leading into the MLS All-Star Game and Leagues Cup ...

The scoreless draw June 15 in Quebec was RSL's second 0-0 result of the year, also with a heavily-rotated Columbus side at home on April 13 ... With that clean sheet, RSL has shut out opponents six times in 23 matches, while allowing just two goals in its last 270 minutes played prior to the Gabriel Pec game-winner in the 71<sup>st</sup> minute for LA Galaxy ... The shutout June 15 at Montreal was GK **Zac MacMath's** fourth of the six, with GK **Gavin Beavers** earning two (4/20 at Chicago, 5/15 v Seattle) ...

The recent trips to Montreal and Kansas City marked the seventh and eighth road matches for RSL from mid-April to mid-June, the Claret-and-Cobalt playing eight out of 12 away from home during that stretch ... RSL posted a 3-1-4 (W-L-T) mark in those eight matches, a run which did include the Open Cup loss in Albuquerque ... RSL went 4-0-0 at home during the span, outscoring visitors 13-4 with a pair of clean sheets, one each by MacMath / Beavers ...

RSL's home / road splits don't even out until after Leagues Cup, when RSL will host six of its remaining nine MLS reg. season contests from August 25 through to Decision Day at America First Field ...

## ***RSL RECHARGING AT HOME ::***

Despite last week's setback to San Jose, early July saw RSL improve to 8-2-1 / 25 points at home this season with back-to-back America First Field wins over Houston and Atlanta by an 8-4 aggregate scoreline, with Olympic snub **Diego Luna** scoring two goals – including an MLS Goal of the Matchday honoree – while adding five assists, including a three-assist performance July 6 against Atlanta that was his second of the year and just the fourth “hat trick of assists” in RSL's 20-year, 640-game MLS history ...

Luna was named alongside teammate **Alex Katranis** on the MLS Team of the Matchday on July 8, while also being voted the MLS Player of the Matchday for Matchday 25 following his scintillatingly dominant Saturday performance ... With 12 assists on the season, Luna now ranks third in MLS, behind Lucho Acosta (17, Cincinnati) and Lionel Messi (13, Miami), while now tied with Portland DP Evander ... RSL Captain **Chicho Arango** ranks fourth with 11 assists ...

With that home performance, Luna became the first-ever MLS player with multiple three-assist games prior to his 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday in the 29-season history of Major League Soccer ... Also, Luna has become the first player 20 years old or younger to produce at least 10 assists in a single MLS regular season since Talles Magno (10) did so for New York City FC in 2022 ...

July 6 also saw 19-year-old RSL goalkeeper **Gavin Beavers** earn his fourth win in six MLS starts this season, while midfield engine **Braian Ojeda** scored the July 3 game-winner as well as another goal against Atlanta three days later, finding the back of the net in back-to-back games after not scoring in his initial 66 games with RSL since arriving in late summer 2022 ...

MF **Matt Crooks** scored his second goal of the year and his first at home, putting RSL up 1-0 just 43 seconds into that July 6 Atlanta contest, the fourth-fastest goal all-time for RSL, and one of five to be scored in the first minute of a match ...

## ***TIME FOR A NEW STREAK***

The recent 15-game MLS unbeaten run established a new record for the **longest single-season streak** in team history – while also matching the Portland Timbers (2013, 2018) and Colorado Rapids (2016) for the second-longest in MLS regular-season history (FC Dallas' 19 games unbeaten in 2010) ...

In RSL's 20-season history, the Club also enjoyed a 16-game run from 2013 into 2014 (including a 12-game single-season run in 2014), and a Club-record 18-game unbeaten streak from July 2010 to April 2011 (2010 includes a 14-game single-season run, RSL's previous best) ...

For the first time in 20 years, RSL now owns back-to-back seasons with unbeaten runs of nine games or longer ...

## ***GÓMEZ, LUNA OJEDA STEP UP***

RSL winger **Andrés Gómez** scored once and assisted twice July 3 against Houston, contributing to all three goals of the critical 3-2 home win over Houston ...

That day, Gómez became the youngest player (20 years, 301 days) in RSL's 20-year, 637-game and 211-player history to record 20+ goal contributions (now 11g / 9a) in a single season ...

With his recent transfer, Gómez fell one assist shy of allowing RSL to become the first MLS team since 2018 to have three different players register double-digit assist totals in the same season, as he would have joined both Diego Luna (12 assists) and Chicho Arango (11 assists) ...

Both 2018 Houston (Martinez, Quioto, Elis) and 2017 Atlanta (Almiron, Asad Villalba) accomplished the feat ...

For the dynamic young Colombian – 13 goals and nine assists on the season following his July 20 brace at Colorado – the June 19 KC performance marked his third brace of the season, Gómez also scoring two goals in the 3-0 win over LAFC in the March 2 home-opening “snowmageddon,” as well as fueling the come-from-behind 5-3 home win over Colorado on May 18 ...

Interestingly, it was Luna's pair of first-half assists to Gómez and FW **Anderson Julio** back on June 19 that also made him the PREVIOUS youngest player in RSL history to record 20 career goal contributions in the Utah side's annals (20 years, 286 days old) ...

## ***CHICHO / GÓMEZ / LUNA ATTACKING TRIUMVIRATE***

Luna's impressive strike July 3 against Houston to put RSL up 2-1 just before halftime – eventually recognized as the MLS “Goal of the Matchday” marked his fourth goal of the season to go along with nine assists, while the immense and tireless engine-room master **Braian Ojeda** scored his first-ever RSL goal in 66 appearances, the game-winning goal coming with 20+ minutes remaining in a tense match that saw **Matt Crooks**, **Chicho Arango** and **Emeka Eneli** all miss exquisite scoring chances ...

### ***GOALS GALORE, NOW BY COMMITTEE***

While the RSL road warriors played just four games at home from June 1 – July 6, the Claret-and-Cobalt scored 13 home goals in those four matches, which includes a 5-1 win over Austin on June 1, the 0-1 loss to LA Galaxy on June 22, a 3-2 comeback win over Houston on July 3 and a 5-2 thrashing of Atlanta on July 6 ... While the **Chicho Arango** hat tricks and the **Diego Luna** playmaking have garnered international headlines, the high-octane performances have often been group efforts, with the July 6 five-goal explosion coming from five different scorers, the fourth time RSL have accomplished that particular feat ... The list:

- April 29, 2009 – 6-0 W v NE – 6 scorers (Olave, Mathis, Movsisyan, Escalada, Williams, Findley)
- July 4, 2017 – 6-2 W v Galaxy – 5 scorers (Rusnák, Beckerman, Movsisyan, Savarino, Plata)
- August 25, 2018 – 6-0 W @ Colorado – 5 scorers (Kreilach, Savarino x2, Plata, Baird, Rusnák)
- **July 6, 2024 – 5-2 W v Atlanta – 5 scorers (Crooks, Ojeda, Chicho, Katranis, Luna)**

All three of RSL's five-goal games this season have occurred at home, and all have come in the last nine overall matches played since May 18 ... RSL also has three other games with three or more goals in that span ... However, RSL has scored four goals in a road match on two occasions this year, both wins – 4-0 at Chicago on April 20 and 4-3 at Kansas City on June 19 ...

RSL has never had three players each hit 20 combined goals/assists in a single season, and following a red-hot first week of July, RSL playmaker **Diego Luna** is now just three g/a away from joining Captain **Chicho Arango** (17 goals / 11 assists) and former dynamic winger **Andrés Gómez** (13 goals / 9 assists) in the 20+ goal contribution club this season ...

Luna – now with five goals / 12 assists this season – on July 6 provided three assists in a single game for the second time this season, something that has occurred just four times in RSL's history ... In addition to Diego's triple-assist match back on March 2 at home against LAFC (3-0 win), **Pablo Ruiz** accomplished the feat in 2023, with **Fabian Espindola** back in 2012 the first RSL player to secure three assists in an MLS match ...

With both Chicho (17 goals) and Andrés Gómez (11 goals) securing double-digit goal totals this season, RSL has a pair of 10+ scorers in a single season for the first time since 2021 (Kreilach, 16 goals; Rusnák, 11 goals) ... Should Julio (six goals) or Luna (five goals) or another player reach double-digits, RSL would also have a 10+ goal-scoring trio for the first time ever ...

### ***MORE KANSAS CITY MILESTONES***

In the June 19 match at KC, RSL also saw 19-year-old GK **Gavin Beavers** pick up his third win in five MLS starts this year, while becoming the second-youngest 'keeper in the 29-year history of MLS to save a penalty kick ...

(Beavers earned his fourth win of the year last Saturday against Atlanta) ...

In that June 19 match at KC, RSL Captain **Chicho Arango** secured his fifth game-winning assist – in what were 10 RSL wins – with his 84<sup>th</sup>-minute cross that found **Matt Crooks** at the back post, Crooks scoring his first-ever MLS goal following two weeks away from the team to get married ...

At Children's Mercy Park, Chicho extended his MLS goal contribution lead to 27 with the assist, now amassing 16 goals and 10 assists this season, also becoming the third player in RSL history with a 10g/10a campaign (Jeff Cunningham, 2006; Albert Rusnák, 2021) ...



## ***CELEBRATING PABLO'S 50 WINS***

The 4-3 victory in Kansas City was RSL Head Coach **Pablo Mastroeni's** 50<sup>th</sup> win across all competitions in what is now 125 games for the Utah side, the 47-year-old now posting a 52-42-31 (W-L-T) record in MLS reg. season play, MLS Cup Playoffs, U.S. Open Cup, Leagues Cup and international exhibition play with Real Salt Lake ...

Mastroeni reached the half-century mark three games faster than Jason Kreis ...

When RSL scores first under Pablo in MLS reg. season action, it has amassed a record of 32 wins and 10 draws against just four losses since he took the helm in late August, 2021 ...

## ***DEFENSIVE ROLLERCOASTER AND LATE-GAME DRAMA KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL RUN ::***

RSL returns home this week with just one clean sheet in the last 13 games, following a period that saw four defensive shutouts in its prior six matches to establish the recent streak, but keeping the unbeaten run alive despite allowing 14 goals in its last eight matches, including the 0-1 home loss June 22 to LA Galaxy ...

11 different players appeared either in goal or along the back four during the 15-game unbeaten run, as newcomer **Philip Quinton** and homegrown **Tommy Silva** have been forced into action due to an injury epidemic in mid/late April that also saw **Bryan Oviedo** play centerback in a 4-0 win at Chicago, as well as the 0-1 loss to Galaxy ...

Also deputized periodically at centerback has been RSL Academy graduate **Bode Hidalgo**, a 22-year-old converted winger who has seen time mostly at right back in his now 48-game / 25-start MLS career – in the middle of the back in place of injured Justen Glad (ankle) ...

Second-year GK **Gavin Beavers'** clean sheet at Soldier Field on April 20 was also the youngest shutout performance by an MLS player in 2024, the Las Vegas native just turning 19 years old ... Beavers followed that up with a solid home performance in a 2-0 win over Seattle on May 15, also recording a 1-0 win for the USA U-19 team in Argentina during the recent FIFA international break ...

Veteran GK **Zac MacMath** had posted clean sheets on April 13 against Columbus and May 4 against Kansas City, while allowing just the one goal at Philadelphia in

a recent 363-minute span played prior to the May 11 second half in Carson (allowing two), the May 18 first half against Colorado (also allowing two) and May 25 in Dallas (two howlers amongst three allowed in a 20-minute span) ...

The May 6 MLS roundup in The Athletic ranked MacMath third so far this year amongst MLS shot-stoppers, the advanced numbers putting the veteran in rarefied air ...

## ***FEAST OR FAMINE ::***

RSL played at home just twice in June, a tale of two cities ... While scoreless and toothless after Chicho's head injury in the 0-1 loss to LA Galaxy on June 22, RSL's early-June win over Austin saw the Claret-and-Cobalt ride a four-goal first half against Austin to mark just the third 45-minute stanza in Club history – 20 seasons, now 636 MLS games – that it had scored four times in a half ...

FW **Chicho Arango's** 63-yard ZAPATAZO that day started off the goal explosion after a quarter-hour, followed by a pair of **Anderson Julio** goals – his first brace since his RSL debut back in April 2021 at Minnesota – before another Chicho strike just before the halftime whistle moved the scoreline to 4-0 before a standing-room only crowd of 21,000+ ...

RSL had previously scored four goals in a half twice at home – on July 24, 2009 against Dallas, reversing an 0-2 halftime deficit into a 4-2 Pioneer Day victory – and in September 2014, scoring four against Colorado early on in a 5-1 win against Rapids GK Joe Nasco ...

RSL had never scored five goals under Head Coach **Pablo Mastroeni** from August, 2021 until May 18 of this year, in the dramatic 5-3 win over Colorado ... Then, RSL grabs the quintet again June 1 against Austin and July 6 against Atlanta for the third time in what is now 124 games with Pablo at the helm to score five ...

## ***LIVE BY THE SWORD, DIE BY IT TOO ::***

The drama of RSL's 10 days prior to the 5-1 Austin win – coming back from 0-2 down to Colorado at home for a 5-3 win before earning a point at Dallas following an 0-3 deficit, followed by the May 29 90+9 equalizer in Seattle – indicate the combination of resilience and belief exhibited by **Pablo Mastroeni's** side, always playing to the final whistle ...

The May 11 concession at the death by RSL at LA Galaxy saw the team drop points after scoring first for the fourth time in 20 games this season ... While RSL has now seen five late game-winners of its own so far this year, it has scored first and dropped points 2/24 @ STL (1-1 T), 3/9 v COL (1-2 L), 4/6 @ MIN (1-1 T) and 5/11 @ LAG (2-2 T) ...

On June 19, RSL's game-winning goal in the 4-3 dub at Kansas City came in the final 15 minutes of the match, RSL's sixth such marker – in addition to two stoppage-time dramatics – during its 15-game unbeaten run, which had seen Head Coach **Pablo Mastroeni's** side accrue nine wins and six draws to ascend to first place in the West ... RSL held the solo position atop the table this late in the season for the first time since August, 2016 ...

## ***ROCKY MOUNTAIN CUP SPECTACULAR ::***

RSL's scintillating comeback May 15 against Colorado to even up the 2024 Rocky Mountain Cup series saw the Claret-and-Cobalt bolster what is now an 8-2-1 mark at home w/ 25 points at America First Field in MLS action this year, previously defeating LAFC (3-0, March 2), St. Louis (3-1, March 30), Kansas City (1-0, May 4) and Seattle (2-0, May 15), while drawing with Columbus Crew (0-0, April 13) and losing at home on March 9 to Colorado (2-1, after taking a 1-0 lead) ...

For just the fourth time in the Club's now 637-game history, RSL rebounded from an 0-2 deficit to earn the full three points, riding 2-goal / 1-assist performances from both Arango and **Andrés Gómez** to defeat the Rapids 5-3 before a standing-room only crowd of 20,728 ...

Goals from **Chicho Arango**, **Andres Gómez** and **Anderson Julio** – the Colombian pair each netting a brace plus an assist, with the Ecuadorean proving late insurance fireworks – completed a historic comeback win for RSL in a game that saw the home side down 0-2 after 20 minutes – the four-minute period down multiple goals for just the second of three occasions all season, and the first since Feb. 21 at Miami for the final

seven minutes plus stoppage – again conceding in the early second half before scoring three goals in the final six minutes plus injury time to record the home triumph over bitter rivals ...

## ***SUPERSUB ANDO DOES IT AGAIN***

“Supersub” **Anderson Julio** was then named to Major League Soccer's “Team of the Matchday” for Matchday 16 of the 2024 season, following the Ecuadorean international's goal and assist off the bench to spark the May 25 scintillating comeback at Dallas, as RSL rebounded from an 0-3 deficit in the final half-hour to score at the death and secure the road point ...

Julio's audacious banger in the 72<sup>nd</sup> minute – named the Matchday 16 Goal of the Week – brought RSL to just a goal down with roughly 20 minutes remaining ... Taking two touches 25 yards out following a pass from fellow substitute **Maikel Chang**, Julio ripped a right-footed laser that went upper 90 to Dallas GK Maarten Paes' right ...

The goal was Julio's third of what is now six on the season for RSL, for whom he has now scored 22 career MLS goals, including 14 off the bench ... Fifteen of Julio's 22 career goals have come in the second half, including nine in the 80<sup>th</sup> minute or later ...

At Dallas on May 25, Julio also earned the assist on the 90+8 equalizer from MF **Nelson Palacio**, squaring a ball across the top of the box and finding Palacio open ...

The Colombian U22 midfielder's goal was his first-ever in MLS, while the game-tying goal matched Justen Glad's home header last year against Minnesota for the latest equalizer in RSL history (a record that lasted precisely four days, thanks to the 90+9 equalizer from **Andrés Gómez** on May 29 in Seattle) ... The point secured at Toyota Stadium after falling down 0-3 marks the first time in RSL's then-629 and now-632-game history that the team was able to come back from an 0-3 deficit to rescue a point ...

Julio made his 100<sup>th</sup> career reg. season appearance for RSL on July 13 at Portland, a milestone for which he will be honored Saturday prior to the SJ match ...

## FINDING THE SCORESHEET

In support of Chicho, **Andrés Gómez** was the Club's second-leading scorer this season, now with 11 goals and 9 assists in 2024, while playmaker **Diego Luna** adds 5 goals and 12 assists ...

FW **Anderson Julio** scored his sixth goal of the season in the first half June 19 at Kansas City, while DF **Alex Katranis** boasts 3 goals and 4 assists this season, with British 10 **Matt Crooks** notching four assists so far in 2024, in addition to his first-ever goal coming as the eventual game-winner at KC, and last week's score just 43 seconds into the eventual 5-2 win over Atlanta ...

Centerback **Bryan Vera** and now-transferred teenage attacker **Fidel Barajas** round out the group that has the RSL scoresheet multiple times this season with two assists each, while **Nelson Palacio**, **Emeka Eneli** each have a goal ...

And now **Braian Ojeda** boasts two goals in the last two home games, after not scoring in his first 66 matches with Claret-and-Cobalt dating back to Sept. 2022 arrival ...

## CHICHO CHASING MLS HISTORY

With his 63-yard wondergoal on June 1 against Austin, RSL striker **Chicho Arango** became just the eighth player in MLS history to reach 50 career MLS regular-season goals in 79 games or fewer:

### All-time MLS Players w/ 50 career MLS regular-season goals in 79 or fewer games:

<u>Player</u>	<u>Goal #</u>	<u>Game #</u>	<u>Date</u>
Zlatan Ibrahimovic	50	54	9/25/2019
Josef Martinez	50	54	10/28/2018
Carlos Vela	50	61	3/ 8/2020
Raul Diaz Arce	51	67	7/ 4/1998
Carlos Ruiz	50	69	8/21/2004
Roy Lassiter	52	75	7/18/1998
Taylor Twellman	50	77	4/27/2005
<b>Chicho Arango</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>6/ 1/2024</b>

With his June 1 hat trick, Chicho also became the **second-fastest active player** to reach the milestone behind only Josef Martinez (54 games), becoming just the fourth active player to reach the mark in fewer than 100 games:

### Active players to reach the career 50-goal milestone in fewer than 100 career games:

<u>Player</u>	<u>Goal #</u>	<u>Game #</u>	<u>Date</u>
Josef Martinez	50	54	10/28/2018
Raul Ruidiaz	50	79	11/ 1/2021
Hany Mukhtar	51	93	5/20/2023
<b>Chicho Arango</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>6/ 1/2024</b>

In MLS reg. season action, Chicho has scored 30 of his 49 career MLS reg. season goals during the 2021 and 2022 seasons in 51 games with LAFC (0.59 goals per game, and a rate of 0.72 goals per 90), and has now scored 23 in 34 games (0.70/game, 0.87 per 90) across the last 11 months with RSL, spanning the 2023 and 2024 seasons ...

Chicho needs 8 more Claret-and-Cobalt goals in what will be the remaining 9 games of the current MLS campaign starting August 24 against San Jose to surpass his LAFC output on a volume basis, with his per-game and per 90 numbers significantly more prolific at RSL ...

## **CHICHO ARANGO HOLDING OFF MIAMI SUPERSTARS ::**

When **Chicho Arango** finds the scoresheet, as he has in 15 of 24 MLS matches this year, RSL owns 11 wins and three draws against one loss, the Claret-and-Cobalt failing to score on three occasions (@ MIA Feb. 24, v CLB on April 13 and @ MTL on June 15), with Chicho's assist on an **Emeka Eneli** goal back on March 9 the only one coming in a loss to Colorado ...

Prior to Chicho's game-winner July 6 against Atlanta, he had scored just once in a seven-game span, albeit with a hat trick on June 1 against Austin ...

The May 25 / 29 mini-slump at Dallas / Seattle marked the only back-to-back games Chicho failed to find the scoresheet, along with two of the three times RSL scored when Chicho did not, his only two previous goal/assist-less games this year coming in RSL shutouts at MIA and v CLB ... Back on April 20, Chicho led RSL's dominant 4-0 win at Chicago with the Club's first-ever 2-goal/2-assist performance, rebounding from the rare goose egg the week prior against the Crew ...

That zero against the Crew on April 13 meant that Arango saw his three-game, six-goal / two-assist streak snapped in the scoreless home draw despite a dangerous first half against Columbus ...

Chicho – the MLS Player of the Matchday for Weeks 7 and 10 and now Week 16 – scored two braces in the week against LA and COL to move up the “goal contribution” table, with 17 goals and 11 assists (28 goal contributions thus far on RSL's 48 goals this season) in 22 games played, barely outdistancing Lionel Messi's Miami numbers (12g/13a) ... Chicho is still three ahead of Christian Benteke (DCU) and Denis Bouanga (LAFC) in the MLS Golden Boot race with his 17 goals, while Chicho's 10<sup>th</sup> assist of the season on June 19 enabled him to become RSL's third-ever 10g/10a player in 20 years, joining Albert Rusnák (11g/11a in 2021) and Jeff Cunningham (16g / 11a in 2006) ...

Chicho is also now just one goal shy of breaking Alvaro Saborio's 2012 single-season scoring record for RSL, the Costa Rican also striking for 17 that year ...

Chicho provided a three-goal explosion in a 21-minute span in the Utah side's come-from-behind 3-1 home win over St. Louis on March 30, the Club's first hat trick since September 17, 2018 (Damir Kreilach) ...

Chicho's pair of three-goal performances this year are just the seventh and eighth in RSL's now 636-game

MLS history, the Colombian joining **Alvaro Saborio** (three hats – two in 2012, one in 2013), along with **Robbie Findley** (2009), **Javier Morales** (2014) and Kreilach ... Former Captain, head coach and current Club Director **Jason Kreis** also had a hat trick, albeit in the 2005 U.S. Open Cup ...

Arango now has three hat tricks in his MLS career – his first was for LAFC in late 2021 against Dallas – and boasts 116 goals as a professional, including 60 goals in 95 games across all competitions since arriving in MLS for LAFC and RSL ... Since appearing on the Wasatch Front last July, Chicho boasts 23 goals and 13 assists in 34 MLS reg. season appearances for the Claret-and-Cobalt, with those numbers increasing to 25 goals and 15 assists in 42 RSL games across all competitions (incl. Leagues Cup, Open Cup, Playoffs) ...

## **ANOTHER GÓMEZ GAME-CHANGER ::**

**Andrés Gómez** became just the third player under the age of 22 in MLS' 29-years to provide a goal contribution in six consecutive games, his assist on Anderson Julio's goal against Austin on June 1 coming just 72 hours after providing the latest equalizer in RSL history at Seattle on May 29 ...

This year's Gómez game-winners (5/18 v COL, 5/15 v SEA, 3/2 v LAFC, 4/20 v CHI) now lead RSL with four GWGs this season, two ahead of both **Chicho Arango** and **Alex Katranis** ... Arango's late game-winner back at home on May 4 against Kansas City was his second of the season, with his first coming via PK back on March 30 as part of his hat trick at home against St. Louis ...

Both **Katranis** game-winners (3/23 @ VAN, 4/27 @ PHI) arrived in the final 15 minutes of games, as did Chicho's ...

The Gómez heroics on May 18 in Rocky Mountain Cup action marked his first game-winner of the quartet to come in the final 15 min, the young Colombian usually striking early ...

The 90+9 equalizer at Seattle came on Gómez' second bite of the cherry, with a **Brayan Vera** long ball starting a sequence that saw both **Matt Crooks** and **Chicho Arango** keep the ball alive in the box, with Gómez' initial offering deflected, and his second shot through Stefan Frei's five-hole for the RSL “Cardiac Kids” to strike again and snatch a point at the death ...

## ***DIEGO LUNA EXTENDED LONG-TERM ::***

RSL starlet **Diego Luna** – with five goals and 12 assists on the season – joined **Pablo Ruiz** in signing a long-term contract extension with the Club in early March, keeping the affectionately known “Moon Boy” – or “Moon Man” as Brian Dunseth likes to say – with the Utah side through the 2026 season, with Club options for 2027/28 ...

Luna – who received his first-ever USMNT cap in January’s friendly with Slovenia in San Antonio but has somehow been left out of the Olympic setup – is now considered a U22 roster designation for RSL, joining **Braian Ojeda** and **Nelson Palacio**, as winger **Andrés Gómez** is moved into the “Young DP” slot, alongside **Chicho Arango** and newcomer **Matt Crooks** (TAM-able in MLS’ secondary window this summer) ...

## ***RISING STAR LUNA SHINES BRIGHT ::***

RSL playmaker **Diego Luna** emerged last season as a late-season talisman for the Claret-and-Cobalt, scoring critical goals in each of the final five matches – two MLS reg. season contests, providing the equalizers in both leg one and leg three of the Playoffs at Houston, and scoring the game-clinching PK in the leg two elimination match at home ... Luna recently earned his first U.S. Men’s National Team appearance in the January friendly in San Antonio against Slovenia, starting and playing 77 minutes in the very same free role drifting off left wing that he has made his own at RSL ...

2024 should be a big year for Luna, whose role within the team is certain to expand after he has now started 35 of 43 games following his return from USYNT qualifying last summer ... The Paris Olympics schedule dovetails nicely with the Leagues Cup slate, minimizing Luna’s potential absences from MLS reg. season contests ...

Last year, Luna’s goal scored in the first leg at Houston saw him find the back of the net for a third consecutive match, his late equalizer back on Oct. 14 at LA Galaxy starting the run which continued on Decision Day in Colorado with his game-winner ... That 54<sup>th</sup>-minute goal in Houston made Luna the youngest playoff goal-scorer in RSL history, usurping Yura Movsisyan by about 16 months ... Luna’s accomplishment also made him the 12<sup>th</sup>-youngest player in MLS history to find the back of the net in the postseason ... Luna then asked for the opportunity in the leg two home game to be the decisive fifth shooter against Houston, envisioning and ultimately delivering the series-extending score ...

Luna ended up with seven goals across all competitions in his first full season with RSL, the USA U-20 playmaker starting 21 of the Club’s last 25 games of the 2023 season since returning from the FIFA Youth World Cup in Argentina ... The USA U-20 playmaker acquired in May, 2022, from USL Championship side El Paso Locomotive was named the MLS Player of the Matchday for Matchday 26, courtesy of his brace in the 3-1 home RSL win over New York Red Bulls on July 15 ... Luna’s 2<sup>nd</sup>-minute goal in that game off a Savarino assist marked RSL’s quickest goal since March 2022 (Bobby Wood), while his eventual game-winner off an intricate give-and-go with Musovski made him the youngest player (19 years, 311 days) in RSL history to register a multi-goal goal (Olmes Garcia, June 2013 v LA Galaxy, 20 years, 282 days) ...

Last June 21 in St. Louis, Luna became the 98<sup>th</sup> player in RSL’s 19-year history to find the back of the net in MLS reg. season action for the Claret-and-Cobalt, scoring in the 15<sup>th</sup> minute and assisting on goals in the 48<sup>th</sup> and 66<sup>th</sup> minutes ... While he is only the 6<sup>th</sup>-youngest player to score for RSL, Luna did become the absolute youngest in Club annals to score and assist in the same game, No. 599 all-time for the Club ...

## ***SEVERAL DEBUTANTS FIND THE FIELD ::***

July 20 at Colorado saw recent signing **Benji Michel** become the eighth RSL player to make his League / Club debut this year, the dual Haitian/American citizen and former Univ of Portland product coming off the bench and playing the final 16 minutes, impressing on the attack ...

Michel is now the 212<sup>th</sup> RSL player all-time to appear in League action ...

Last week saw a trio of new players make their debuts, as three of the other four recent signings – Portuguese Designated Player Gonçalves, former Vancouver centerback Brown and Australian youth international Brook – each made their RSL and/or MLS debuts Saturday, bringing the total number of debutants this year to 11, and the all-time number of RSL players in the Club’s 20-year MLS history to 215 ...

Due to P-1 visa acquisition process, Polish youth international Marczuk hopes to don the Claret-and-Cobalt for the first time this Saturday, August 31, at home against the New England Revolution, becoming the 12<sup>th</sup> player to debut this year and the 216<sup>th</sup> all-time ...

This weekend’s emergency / short-term callup from the Monarchs, Utah native and former Univ. of Maryland standout **Griffin Dillon**, could potentially add to that total as well ...

## **RSL RIDES RAUCOUS ROAD WARRIOR MENTALITY ::**

RSL's draw July 17 at LAFC improved the Utah side to 4-2-8 / 19 points away from home this year ... RSL has previously won on the road in Vancouver on March 23 and at Chicago on April 20, prior to the April 27 win in Philadelphia ... Mastroeni's road warriors have scored first in six of its 14 road matches this season, settling for draws at St. Louis on Feb. 24 and at Minnesota on April 6, riding early goals en route to winning at Chicago and Philadelphia, losing after scoring first on July 20 at Colorado ...

A year ago, Head Coach **Pablo Mastroeni's** team amassed 12 road wins and five away draws across all competitions, against just eight losses, by far the most successful road campaign in Club history ...

## **KATRANIS FIRE PROVIDES LATE GAME- WINNER IN PHILADELPHIA ::**

RSL newcomer **Alex Katranis** scored his second game-winning goal on the road this year back on April 27 with an 89<sup>th</sup>-minute blast from nearly 30 yards out, settling a half-cleared **Maikel Chang** set-piece offering and lacing a shot far post past Andre Blake and securing the full three points for RSL's first road win at Philadelphia since 2016 ...

The 89<sup>th</sup>-minute ZAPATAZO – named the MLS Goal of the Matchday that week – was the sixth-latest game-winner during the 120-game **Pablo Mastroeni** era, with the 95+ “Damiracle” at Kansas City on Decision Day 2021 the most memorable ...

Here's the full list of late game-winners since Pablo's resilience mentality took hold at RSL:

### **AWAY:**

- 95' – Damir Kreilach (2021 @ KC)
- 93' – Tate Schmitt (2022 @ NE)
- 91' – Bobby Wood (2021 playoffs @ KC)
- 91' – Anderson Julio (2023 @ Toronto)
- 90' – Albert Rusnak (2021 @ Dallas)
- 89' – Alex Katranis (2024 @ PHI)**

### **HOME:**

- 95' – Anderson Julio (2021 v Galaxy)
- 88' – Andrés Gómez (2024 v Colorado)**
- 88' – Andrew Brody (2022 v Austin)

## **DEPTH TO BE ON DISPLAY AS ROTATION INCREASES ::**

As RSL continues its five games in 17 days this month prior to the All-Star Game and Leagues Cup – the expectation is that Mastroeni will implement additional squad rotation ...

With last year's mid-year success inspired by the Open Cup fresh in mind – RSL went from mid-April to mid-August losing just three of 24 matches prior to the Pablo Ruiz injury – the upcoming glut could provide ample opportunities for **Gavin Beavers, Bryan Oviedo, Philip Quinton, Nelson Palacio, Anderson Julio** and young Academy products **Zavier Gozo** or **Tommy Silva** ...

Prior to Silva's insertion May 11 in LA, it was back on April 20 at Soldier Field, capping off an insane 30-hour period, that newly-acquired DF **Philip Quinton** joined four others to have made their RSL debuts in 2024 ...

This season, teenage playmaker **Fidel Barajas**, MF **Matt Crooks**, DF **Alex Katranis** and MF **Noel Caliskan** have each made their MLS debuts for the Club ...

Quinton was acquired on Friday morning, April 19 in a trade from Columbus, meeting the team in Chicago that night, participating in group and individual video sessions on gameday, and appearing in the final 16 minutes of the eventual 4-0 victory ...

The 22-year-old centerback out of Notre Dame was drafted by the Crew with the 25<sup>th</sup> overall MLS SuperDraft pick – a pick originally owned by RSL and sold to Columbus for \$50,000 GAM – and won an MLS NEXT Pro title in 2022 prior to being a part of the Crew's MLS Cup 2023 championship side ...

Quinton had started the weekend prior at America First Field, a pivotal figure in RSL's 0-0 home crew with the Crew on April 13 ...

Surely the current injury epidemic could see young RSL players such as **Zavier Gozo, Bertin Jacquesson, Daron Iskanderian, Aiden Hezarkhani** and others potentially make their 2024 / RSL debuts as well ...

## ***PABLO PROMISES TACTICAL EVOLUTION ::***

RSL has moved to 4-2-3-1 in 2024, after playing mostly a flat 4-4-2 last season ... Head Coach **Pablo Mastroeni**, now in his fourth season with RSL (third full year as manager) and his crew – an entirely new staff of four on-field assistants [former USL head coaches **Nate Miller** (San Diego), **Anthony Pulis** (Miami FC) and **Jamison Olave** (Real Monarchs), along with GK Coach **Mirza Hrambasic**] and a new performance/fitness coach (**Sean Buckley**, formerly of Minnesota United / Cruz Azul) for 2024 – looks to increase possession, create more central penetration (i.e., not as wing dependent as 2022/23) and utilize overlapping outside backs in the attack to involve both pivots and two 10s when RSL has the ball ...

In theory, this leaves iconic striker **Chicho Arango** up top, **Diego Luna** in a free role starting on the outside and coming in, **Andrés Gómez** with the sizzling pace to stretch and get behind allows new attacking mid **Matt Crooks** and some combination of **Braian Ojeda** / **Nelson Palacio** / **Emeka Eneli** to involve themselves in the attack, all while protecting what is basically a back three of **Brayan Vera** / **Justen Glad** and one other as either **Alex Katranis** / **Bryan Oviedo** move up the left side, or **Andrew Brody** bombing forward on the right ...

## ***CORE CONTINUITY REMAINS ::***

For 2024, RSL returned 10 of the 11 starters (Savarino) from last year's shootout-laden playoff series with Houston, a series that saw RSL without the services of star striker **Chicho Arango** (relegated to spot duty off bench in Legs 2 and 3 following late-season hamstring injury) and metronomic midfielder **Pablo Ruiz** (August 8 meniscus tear in Leagues Cup Round of 16 match at LAFC) ... Overall, nearly 26,000 combined minutes return for RSL from 2023 to 2024, despite the losses of nearly 45 combined goal contributions from the departed Savarino, Kreilach, Musovski & Rubin ...

Several critical contributors from last year – GK **Gavin Beavers**, DF **Brayan Vera**, DF **Emeka Eneli**, MF **Nelson Palacio**, FW **Andrés Gómez** and FW **Chicho Arango** – are first-year RSL players no longer, while several others – DF **Bode Hidalgo**, DF **Brayan Oviedo**, MF **Braian Ojeda**, MF **Diego Luna** – vault into 2024 for their second full seasons in Utah ...

## ***IT'S CHICHO TIME ON THE WASATCH ::***

As Real Salt Lake embarked on the early days of its 20<sup>th</sup> season in Club history, famed Colombian striker **Chicho Arango** was named the sixth Captain for the Claret-and-Cobalt, assuming the armband and related duties vacated by the recent departure of beloved leader Damir Kreilach, now in Vancouver ...

### **ALL-TIME RSL CAPTAINS:**

**Chicho Arango – 2024 -**

Damir Kreilach – 2022-23

Albert Rusnák – 2021

Kyle Beckerman – 2008-20

Carey Talley – 2007

Jason Kreis – 2005-07

Arango arrived on the Wasatch Front last July as the Claret-and-Cobalt's most acclaimed acquisition ever ... the former LAFC / Pachuca striker becoming the fifth-ever RSL player to score in his debut – a 4-0 home win over Orlando – and the only RSL man to find the back of the net in his first 4 appearances with the Club (three MLS, one Leagues Cup) ...

Joining a locker room that has also seen veteran leaders **Marcelo Silva** and **Zac MacMath** serve as Captain – as well as **Justen Glad**, the first-ever and only Homegrown to wear the armband in recent years – Chicho would have to remain at an elite level with RSL through the 2037 season to eclipse the longevity of the man who changed RSL's competitive culture, Cup-winning former Captain and all-time Club legend Kyle Beckerman ...

## ***A CENTENARY FOR CHICHO ::***

As he welcomed his former MLS side LAFC to Utah on March 2 for the first time since his arrival on the Wasatch, RSL Captain **Chicho Arango** was honored pre-game for scoring his 100<sup>th</sup> professional goal Feb. 24 at St. Louis ... Chicho faced LAFC twice last year, once in Leagues Cup (0-4 loss) and once in MLS (1-0 win), both at BMO Stadium in Los Angeles ...

That fateful March 2 match saw Chicho provide the third of a stellar opening 45 for RSL, giving him 101 for his career and two goals in the first three games this year, outpacing his personal preseason prediction of 17 goals in 34 MLS games for RSL in 2024, precisely one goal every two matches ...

## ***THE CHICHO EFFECT ::***

As the Summer 2023 window opened, Colombian star and former LAFC and Pachuca FW **Chicho Arango** got off to an historic start with RSL, as the new Designated Player announced his presence in Utah and his return to MLS with authority July 8 against Orlando, finding the back of the net just 23 minutes into his Claret-and-Cobalt debut, providing the game-winning goal in a dominant 4-0 win over Orlando ... Arango became just the fifth of 200 players in RSL's 19-year history to score in his debut (Dunseth, Tarley, Findley, Julio) ...

Arango followed up his debut goal with an assist on July 12 in Kansas City just seconds after coming on, setting up former LAFC teammate Danny Musovski for a critical goal early in the second half ... Arango joined Rubio Rubin (2021) as the only two RSL players to score or assist in their first two matches with the Club; when Chicho earned his way onto the scoresheet with an assist on **Diego Luna's** July 15 opener against New York Red Bulls, he became RSL's first-ever player with goal contributions in his first three games upon debut, a mark extended to four with his isolation slammer in the League Cup opener against Seattle to make it 2-0 for RSL in the 51<sup>st</sup> minute of an eventual 3-0 win ...

Arango's first two weeks on the field last summer for RSL saw him become the first-ever player in the then 19-year, 200-player, 604-game MLS history for the Utah MLS side to score or assist in his first three League games ... Arango's arrival benefitted several RSL players – including Musovski, along with FW Jefferson Savarino, MF Diego Luna, Captain Damir Kreilach, FW **Andrés Gómez**, FW Rubio Rubin and others – who each saw their attacking space, time, quality and opportunity increase ...

Arango, the former LAFC striker – named the 2021 MLS Newcomer of the Year and part of the 2022 MLS Cup and Supporters Shield championship runs in LA with the Black-and-Gold – returned to MLS last summer after six months at Pachuca in Liga MX ... Arango – with two caps for the Colombian national team – boasted 32 goals in 58 all-time appearances with LAFC, and had been training with RSL since his June 10 arrival in Utah ...

Chicho pulled his hamstring on Oct. 7 at home 25 minutes into a 2-3 loss to Kansas City, forcing the striker to miss three full games, and only partially participate in legs two and three of last year's postseason series with Houston ...

## ***WINTER WONDERLAND ON MARCH 2 ::***

In its season-opening home contest nearly four months ago, RSL rode a pair of first-half goals and an assist from FW **Andrés Gómez** to dominate a weather-delayed and weather-affected 3-0 result against visiting LAFC back on March 2 ... FW **Chicho Arango** also scored to add to his legendary career (106), MLS (51) and RSL (16) goal-totals, the Colombian now with 16 goals in 17 MLS matches this year ... Arango and **Diego Luna** each tallied assists as well, while GK **Zac MacMath** registered his first clean sheet of the season ...

## ***THE ANDRÉS SNÓ-MEZ GAME ::***

RSL winger **Andrés Gómez** – the 21-year-old Colombian who arrived to Utah a year ago from Millonarios (Colombia) having never even SEEN snow, much less having played a competitive game in it – doubled his 2023 goal total in the first half, scoring not once but twice against LAFC ... To top it all off, five minutes into first-half stoppage, Gómez found countryman **Chicho Arango** for the third RSL goal of the first 45' to notch his first assist of the season ...

A year ago, Gómez arrived on the Wasatch Front amongst great fanfare, the most expensive acquisition in Club history – just under \$3 million – prior to the \$6 million Chicho purchase five months later ... Across all competitions in 2023, Gómez scored once and added six assists, with five of those setups earning “game-winning” status ...

The former U22 signing has now been moved to “Young DP” status following the departures of Jefferson Savarino and Damir Kreilach, as well as **Diego Luna's** new contract extension, which adds the up-and-coming USMNT / USYNT Olympic standout to a U22 trio that also boasts Paraguayan international **Braian Ojeda** and Colombian destroyer **Nelson Palacio** ...

Both Gómez and Palacio were late reporting to RSL's preseason festivities due to their participation in December with the full Colombian National Team and January's U23 Olympic qualifying side for *Los Cafeteros* ...



## ***EXORCISING LAFC DEMONS ::***

RSL is now unbeaten in three consecutive games against LAFC, the 3-0 home win following up on last October's 1-0 road victory ... Previously, RSL could only boast an early-season 2020 home win over LAFC as well as the 2018 postseason shocker prior to the two recent wins, which improve RSL's all-time record against LAFC to 4 wins against 12 losses across all competitions ...

LAFC had always been comfortable in Sandy, winning at the typically road-resistant RSL venue in each of its six seasons ... RSL was just 1W-6L-0T against the Black-and-Gold at America First Field prior to Saturday, the teams splitting both LAFC visits during the Covid-affected 2020 season ... In now eight MLS reg. season matches on Utah soil, LAFC has still outscored RSL 18-9, by far the worst home goal differential in Claret-and-Cobalt annals ...

Despite dropping its home opener a year ago, 1-2, against visiting Austin FC for just its second home-opening loss ever, RSL has enjoyed great success in season kickoffs on Utah soil over the years, posting an all-time 8-2-6 (W-L-T) record in Sandy at the venue now known as America First Field, outscoring opponents 30-19 on aggregate ... Prior to last season's stumble, the lone previous home-opening setback was a brutal 1-5 performance in 2018 against expansion LAFC ... During the entirety of the Club's 20-year history, RSL is now 9-2-9 overall (35-23 on aggregate), including the early Rice-Eccles years ...

## ***RUIZ OUT FOR YEAR ::***

The elation from the dramatic March 2 rollercoaster in the wind, lightning and snow came to a screeching halt in the following Tuesday's training session, as MF **Pablo Ruiz** suffered a contact injury to his left knee, with an MRI later that day revealing an isolated ACL tear ... Ruiz underwent surgery early the following week, with the procedure performed by RSL Team Orthopedic Surgeon **Dr. Dain Allred** of Intermountain Hospital in Provo ...

A 25-year-old Argentine who has often been on Chile's preliminary rosters in the last several FIFA windows started each of RSL first two games this season – a road loss at Miami and the away draw in St. Louis – before coming off the bench for the final 20 minutes of the March 2 3-0 win over visiting LAFC ... In the days before the injury, Ruiz had just signed a new long-term contract with RSL that will keep him on the Wasatch Front through the 2026 season, with Club options for 2027/28 ...

## ***LA QUINCEAÑERA DENIED ::***

On Feb. 21 in Miami, RSL dropped an MLS season opener for the first time since 2009, registering a 14-game unbeaten run on MLS Opening Weekends from 2010-present with 7 wins and 7 draws in that time ...

With only two of those matches played at home (2014 – 3-0 W over Toronto and 2017 – 0-0 with Toronto), RSL was 6W-0L-6T away in openers since 2010, including two previous visits to Florida – both draws at Orlando (2016 – 2-2 and 2020 – 0-0) ... That 2016 tilt at what was then Camping World Stadium in Orlando saw RSL take a 2-0 lead on a pair of Joao Plata goals (26' / 66'), before conceding a pair in 94+/95+, forcing the Claret-and-Cobalt to settle for a disappointing draw ... Incidentally, RSL won MLS Cup 2009, so hope is alive despite the Feb. 21 loss ...

## ***2023 IN REVIEW ::***

The 2023 RSL side amassed the Club's seventh 50-point season all-time (out of 19 years in MLS), just the second year with 50 or more since the 2014 campaign ... Finishing 11<sup>th</sup> overall out of 29 teams, RSL crashed out of the postseason by the thinnest of margins for a second consecutive year (Austin 2022, Houston 2023), dropping a road shootout tiebreaker in Texas ...

RSL smashed its previous incoming transfer record on two occasions a year ago, spending nearly \$3 million on U22 initiative signing **Andrés Gómez** from Millonarios in Colombia in January, later doubling that acquisition cost to bring heralded striker **Chicho Arango** back to MLS following a six-month stint at Pachuca (Liga MX) ...

RSL also spent significant funds to sign two other young Colombians – DF **Brayan Vera** (América de Cali) and MF **Nelson Palacio** (Atlético Nacional), while also making the one-year loan of Paraguayan international **Braian Ojeda** a permanent transfer from Nottingham Forest permanent in mid-summer ... All-told, RSL ownership dropped nearly \$16 million in player acquisition costs in 2023, with an expectation for those seeds to bear fruit in 2024 and beyond ...

Thirty-two (32) different players saw action for RSL in 2023, including then-15-year-old FW **Axel Kei** and 16-year-old **Zavier Gozo** making their Homegrown MLS debuts late in the season, along with fellow Academy products GK **Gavin Beavers** and DF **Delentz Pierre** also making their first-ever first-team appearances; a trio of collegiate picks – D/M **Emeka Eneli**, FW **Bertin Jacquesson** and FW **Ilijah Paul** – also made their professional debuts, while the international quartet of FW **Andrés Gómez**, MF **Nelson Palacio**, DF **Kevon Lambert** and DF **Brayan Vera** notched their first-ever MLS appearances last season ...

## ***SUMMER SURGE IN 2023 ::***

During a nearly four-month span from mid-April to early August, RSL dropped just three of 24 games across all competitions, including MLS reg. season action, its Open Cup run to the Semifinals and its initial Leagues Cup foray ... In the ninth minute of the Aug. 8 Leagues Cup Round of 16 match at LAFC, a non-contact knee injury to metronomic MF **Pablo Ruiz** snapped the run of good form and changed the trajectory of RSL's campaign, the Club eliminated that day from Leagues Cup and falling in 120 minutes the next time out at Houston in the Lamar Hunt U.S. Open Cup Semifinal at Houston two weeks later ...

Following the Ruiz injury, RSL lost six of its next seven games, essentially learning how to play anew; RSL then went 3-1-1 down the stretch – including the Club's first-ever reg. season win at LAFC, with an 81<sup>st</sup>-minute dagger by former Black-and-Gold icon **Chicho Arango** – to stabilize the ship entering the Audi 2023 MLS Cup Playoffs as the fifth seed, just three points out of second place ... A hamstring injury suffered by Chicho in a bitter 2-3 home loss to Kansas City in the year's penultimate contest brought massive repercussions in the three-game series with Houston, which saw RSL drop leg one, 1-2, at the Dynamo, win at home via shootout in leg two, and ultimately drop another shootout in leg three away to end a once-promising campaign ...

## ***MASTROENI THE MAGICIAN ::***

RSL boss **Pablo Mastroeni** leads the Utah side into 2024 for his third consecutive FULL season at the helm, the former USMNT star named interim manager in late 2021 ... During his time on the Wasatch Front, Mastroeni has led the Claret-and-Cobalt to three consecutive postseasons, **the ONLY Western Conference side with that distinction** ... Last year, RSL advanced to the MLS Cup Playoffs for the fifth time in the last six years (2020 Covid campaign the lone exception) and for the 13<sup>th</sup> occasion in the last 16 seasons since the Club' initial playoff foray in 2008, its fourth season in existence ...

Mastroeni, now 47 years old – an icon as an MLS player from 1998-2013, most of those years with RSL's Rocky Mountain Cup rival Colorado Rapids – arrived on the right side of the Rockies as an assistant coach prior to the 2021 season, before being elevated to the interim head coaching role that August ...

During Mastroeni's 128 games at the RSL helm across all competitions, the Claret-and-Cobalt now own a 53W-44L-31T mark, RSL and opponents on a 192-195 count in MLS, playoffs, Open Cup, Leagues Cup and exhibition play over the last 34 months ... Only former

HC Jeff Cassar (2014-16) reached 100 career reg. season points in the same number of League games (70) in RSL history as Mastroeni, after inheriting the **Jason Kreis** powerhouse a decade ago ...

The RSL job is Mastroeni's second head coaching stint, as the Arizona native amassing a 40W-55L-37T record with Colorado from 2014-17 ... This period includes the Rapids' all-time best reg. season in 2016, which saw the Mastroeni-led side go 15W- 6L-13T and allow just 32 goals in 34 games, finishing 2nd in the West behind Dallas before falling in the West Final to eventual champion Seattle ...

In 2020, Mastroeni spent one season as Tab Ramos' assistant in Houston, then matriculating to Utah a year later, where he quickly changed the mindset and culture of the locker room, growing a tight-knit culture built by pride, belief and dedication to the group ...

Mastroeni's RSL side has dropped back-to-back games just nine times overall in 128 games coached, displaying resilience and tenacity admired across North America for its collective "xDAWG" persona ...

As a player, Mastroeni served as a mentor to RSL icon **Kyle Beckerman**, when both shared the Miami Fusion FC locker room in the late 1990s, and shortly thereafter in Colorado ... Mastroeni became a breakout star of the United States' 2002 World Cup Korea/Japan Men's National Team, barely appearing during qualifying to start at centerback against Portugal, Mexico and Germany in the USA's thrilling run to the quarterfinal stage, its deepest progression ever on the world's largest sporting stage ...

Four years later, Mastroeni started each of the first two games for the 2006 USA World Cup side in Germany, against Czech Republic and Italy ... All told, the Phoenix, Ariz. native appeared in 65 games for the Stars-and-Stripes between 2001-09, playing for Bruce Arena and Bob Bradley ...

## ***PERENNIAL PLAYOFF PARTICIPATION ::***

Last year, RSL advanced to the postseason for a third consecutive season under the guidance of Head Coach **Pablo Mastroeni** ... As a Club, RSL was playoff-bound for the fifth time in six seasons – missing only the Covid-affected 2020 campaign – and for the sixth time in the last nine seasons (2015 / 2017) ... Mastroeni and staff used 32 players across 46 games in all competitions during 2023, as RSL advanced to the final four of the annual Open Cup tourney and to the Round of 16 in the inaugural Leagues Cup, prior to its Round One / Best of Three ouster at Houston last November ...

## ***MASTROENI MENTALITY EQUALS ROAD SUCCESS ::***

Overall, RSL has qualified for the postseason in 13 of its 16 seasons played since first advancing to the postseason in 2008, RSL's fourth season in existence ... RSL won MLS Cup in 2009, defeating the star-studded LA Galaxy via penalty-kick shootout in Seattle ... Four years later, RSL fell via the same tiebreaker in MLS Cup 2013 at Kansas City ... Overall, RSL has advanced in 11 of its 23 postseason series, with last year's playoff meeting with Houston marking RSL's 12<sup>th</sup> different opponent in 16 campaign qualifications ...

Real Salt Lake is one of three Western Conference teams and just five overall to have qualified for the Audi MLS Cup Playoffs in at least five of the last six seasons (2018-23), overcoming both internal and external volatility in the last six years through three different ownership situations and three different head coaches, as well as four different MLS Cup Playoff formats during this period ...

Two perennial postseason obstacles for RSL – LAFC and Seattle – join the Claret-and-Cobalt with the 5-out-of-6 qualification distinction, while two East teams – Philadelphia and New York Red Bulls – have qualified for the Audi MLS Cup Playoffs in six consecutive years from 2018-23 ...

The perennial nature of RSL's 13 postseason appearances in 16 years is remarkable when considering the League's growth and change dating back to 2008 ... Since RSL's first postseason appearance in 2008, the Utah side has advanced to 10 Conference Semifinal rounds and 5 Conference Finals – only SEA has reached more (12 Semis, 6 Finals) ... LA Galaxy also with 5 Conference Final appearances to match RSL ...

### ***ROAD WARRIOR RESOLVE ::***

In 2023, RSL enjoyed historic success on the road, developing a new standard and seeing its steely mentality manifesting in numerous “bounceback” moments under **Pablo Mastroeni** ... The Club's 2023 performance saw RSL accumulate an all-time RSL-best road record with 12 results in 17 away MLS matches, posting an 8W-5L-4T mark – with 28 of its 50 reg. season points amassed on the road ... RSL's previous road bests were recorded in 2012 and 2013, with identical 6W-7L-4T marks ... Additionally, RSL's 2023 U.S. Open Cup run saw the team win three matches away at Las Vegas, Portland and Colorado, prior to its road loss at Houston in the tourney semifinal ...

Since **Pablo Mastroeni** arrived at RSL for the 2021 season, first as an assistant coach and later as interim and then permanent head coach, the historically bad road performances that dogged the Club during its first 16 years have seemed to dissipate ... While there have been the periodic flameouts – an 0-5 loss at Portland in 2021, the 0-6 Easter massacre at Yankee Stadium in 2022, and the 0-4 at Columbus earlier in 2023 – RSL has simply never been more competitive or expected road points more frequently than it has in the last 36 months under Pablo's culture-building and leadership, evident with last year's Open Cup road run, featuring its first three away USOC wins in Club history, as well as its first two victories against MLS opponents in the competition ...

Since Pablo's arrival, RSL is now 20W-27L-23T (83 points) in MLS reg. season road matches following recent road draws at Galaxy / Dallas / Seattle, along with a 1W-1L-4T (7 points) in MLS Cup Playoff matches on the road ...

In 2023, RSL was 3W-1L-0L away in U.S. Open Cup (9 points), giving RSL a total of 90 road points (1.31 points per game) earned in the 2021-2024 campaigns ... You'd have to go back to the 2012-14 seasons (62 total road points) to find a period with similar road results (1.22 points per game) ... With a strong 2024 on the road, RSL has the potential to put the 2012-14 success far away in the rear-view mirror ...

### ***WHERE WILL THE 2024 GOALS COME FROM? ::***

For yet another season, the big question for RSL remains – who will find the back of the net? ... So far this season, RSL has scored 40 goals, with Chicho contributing 26 (16g/9a) ... **Andrés Gómez** boasts 10g/6a so far this year following his success against Seattle and Austin, while **Anderson Julio**, **Alex Katranis** and **Diego Luna** are the only other players to have found the back of the net multiple times ... **Emeka Eneli** and **Matt Crooks** have also scored ... Expectations are also high this year to see **Fidel Barajas** contribute to the attack, while centerbacks **Justen Glad** and **Brayan Vera** combined for eight goals a year ago ...

This group lost three of the top seven scorers from a year ago across all competitions (Savarino, 11 goals; Musovski, 9 goals, Kreilach 8 goals), putting the pressure for 2024 onto **Chicho Arango** (8 goals / 1 assist in 2023), **Diego Luna** (7 goals / 1 assist), **Anderson Julio** and **Justen Glad** (5 goals each), Pablo Ruiz (4g / 4a), **Brayan Vera** (3g / 2a) and

**Andrés Gómez** (1g / 6a) to step up this season, along with recent acquisition **Matt Crooks** (23 goals in 115 games with Middlesbrough since Summer 2021) ...

Last year – as in 2022 as well – RSL truly employed a “goals by committee” approach, as the team saw 44 goals scored by 10 players during the final 22 games, with **Chicho Arango**, **Justen Glad**, **Jefferson Savarino**, **Diego Luna**, **Anderson Julio**, **Rubio Rubin** and then **Brayan Vera** each finding the back of the net...

The 4-0 over Orlando in Chicho’s debut on July 8 provided RSL’s largest margin of victory in three seasons, dating back to a July, 2021 win over Vancouver ... That particular 4-0 win boasts the unique circumstance of RSL playing as the visitors at what is now America First Field, due to the Whitecaps tenancy during the Covid-19 pandemic ...

The 4-0 win at Chicago on April 20 was the Club’s largest margin of victory away from home since August, 2018, in a 6-0 win at Colorado ... Meanwhile, Chicho’s 2g/2a performance marks the second time in RSL’s 633-game MLS history for a four-contribution game, as Javier Morales had 3g/1a in May 2014 at Houston ...

### ***WHO ELSE NEEDS TO STEP UP IN 2024? ::***

In addition to the larger roles that **Diego Luna** and full-season availability for **Chicho Arango** should bring, U22 winger **Andres Gómez** – who a year ago had never been outside of Colombia and had never even seen snow – is also expected to take a massive leap forward, assimilating off the field and seizing his role in the new 4-2-3-1 setup ... Last season, across all competitions, Gomez had one goal and six assists, with five of the helpers registering as game-winning assists ...

Three key RSL players in recent years – homegrown defenders **Justen Glad** and **Andrew Brody**, along with fleet-footed super-sub **Anderson Julio** – need to bounce back from subpar 2023 year and return to their 2022 standards ... Despite establishing a new career-high with five goals scored last year, Glad struggled in the back half of the season, while Brody was hurt in preseason and while solid, seemed a touch less dynamic than RSL had seen in 2022 ... Julio provided moments of brilliance at both the 9 and out wide, but did miss long stretches of the year due to injury ...

Two of the midseason 2022 additions – holding mid **Braian Ojeda** (Paraguay / Nottingham Forest) and left back **Bryan Oviedo** (Costa Rica / Copenhagen) – also are expected to even out their 2024 campaigns after a

choppy 2023 ... Ojeda felt more stable and could focus on football after Forest agreed on the sale to RSL in late July, his security evident on the field down the stretch with his immense two-way presence; Oviedo overcame a rollercoaster year to start the final 11 games of the reg. season and playoffs, now battling with Greek outside back **Alex Katranis** for the presumed starting nod on the left side for 2024 ...

### ***OFFSEASON ADDITIONS ::***

With the primary MLS incoming transfer window closing in late April, RSL bolstered its outside back group with the addition of 25-year-old former Greece youth international **Alexandros Katranis**, while adding high-level experience and industry with attacking midfielder **Matt Crooks**, formerly of EFL Championship side Middlesbrough ...

Prior to those early February moves, RSL also made yet another domestic transfer, bringing 17-year-old Mexican-American playmaker **Fidel Barajas** to Utah from the Charleston Battery (USL Championship) ... Barajas – a native of Sacramento, Calif., and a catalyst for the Mexican U17 National Team – follows in the footsteps of new teammate **Diego Luna**, and will be eager to earn minutes for RSL as early as the season opener in Miami ... The youngster enjoyed a standout preseason in Portugal, and looks to create selection headaches for Mastroeni with potential impacts on the wings or centrally in midfield or up top ...

At the opposite end of the spectrum, the veteran Crooks brings a depth and breadth of experience to RSL, the former Middlesbrough attacker now joining RSL veterans **Marcelo Silva** (35 years, 61 days at kickoff this weekend), **Maikel Chang** (33-029), **Zac MacMath** (32-287) and **Tomas Gomez** (31-006) as one of five ‘over-30’ players on the roster ... The 2024 RSL group also boasts several teenagers, including: **[Luca Moisa** (15-080), **Luis Rivera** (16-183), **Axel Kei** (16-153), **Zavier Gozo** (17-060), **Fidel Barajas** (18-036), **Jude Wellings** (18-034) and **Gavin Beavers** (19-013), in addition to 20-year-old Olympic hopeful **Diego Luna** (20-226)] ...

## ***YOUTH MOVEMENT ABOUNDS ::***

While RSL's trio of U22 players **Diego Luna**, **Braian Ojeda** and **Nelson Palacio** have been considered for the last year as the future starlets alongside both emerging GK **Gavin Beavers** and the ascendant **Bode Hidalgo**, it was swiss-army knife **Emeka Eneli** – a college draft pick out of Cornell – that perhaps surprised the most a year ago, playing 2,265 minutes (1,494 MLS reg. szn/playoff, 501 U.S. Open Cup and 270 Leagues Cup) ... Eneli played the second-most rookie minutes in MLS (Duncan McGuire, Orlando) and stabilizing numerous lineups as a versatile right back and/or holding midfielder ... Another pair of Eneli's fellow 2023 first-round picks – FW **Ilijah Paul** and winger **Bertin Jacquesson**, both signed to Generation adidas contracts – also provided both quality depth and flashes of brilliance in 2023, setting the stage for increased workloads this season ...

Looking to make their mark as college-experienced standouts for RSL are 2024 first-round draft pick **Matthew Bell**, a 21-year-old Jamaican international out of Marshall; now-injured right back **Kevin Bonilla**, a dual U.S./Honduras international out of the Univ. of Portland, along with former RSL Academy and UCLA homegrown signing **Tommy Silva** ... Another draft pick – FW **Damien Barker John** from St. Johns – could see action in Open Cup due to his outstanding Real Monarchs performances ... Teenagers **Fidel Barajas** and former Academy / Monarchs winger **Zavier Gozo** are also poised to further develop their games with a mix of MLS and MLS NEXT Pro action for Real Monarchs this year ...

MLSNP excellence should also blaze the MLS trail ahead for both Bonilla and T. Silva, as well as the much-heralded Academy standouts **Axel Kei**, and HG signings **Luis Rivera**, **Jude Wellings**, **Luca Moisa** and GK **Fernando Delgado**, amongst others ...

## ***HARD WORK PAYS OFF:***

During a whirlwind 5-day span in late January, 2024, 16-year-old FW **Aiden Hezarkhani** exemplified precisely the developmental player pathway that the RSL Academy has long imagined ... On a Wednesday, minutes prior to the Academy's monthly "tournament day," the Irvine, Calif., native was honored as one of 14 players to have logged a perfect 4.0 grade-point average last semester, receiving a commemorative jersey presentation from RSL Head Coach **Pablo Mastroeni** and RSL Asst. GM **Tony Beltran** ...

During that afternoon's tournament – a series of 5v5 and 6v6 games – Aiden not only starred individually, but proved throughout the competition that he raised the level of his teammates, regardless of age, status or skill level ... Upon the day's conclusion, Aiden was named "Player of the Tournament" and invited to participate the next day in first-team preseason training in Herriman, alongside several RSL and Monarchs players ...

In that Thursday training, second-year Generation adidas winger **Bertin Jacquesson** separated his shoulder, opening the door further for young Aiden to seize this opportunity ... He continued to flourish, and was invited back to Friday's first-team session ...

At the end of the day Friday, RSL's coaching staff and front office had seen enough – Aiden would travel for the two-week Atlantic Cup trip to Portugal, where he not only held his own, but raised eyebrows with his skill, industry, learning capacity and daily improvement ... Hezarkhani – who also traveled to Santa Barbara with the team and logged the final 25 minutes in a 1-1 draw with Toronto FC – could see time with RSL daily in 2024, training with the globally-known veterans and pursuing his pathway to professional status through Monarchs games and potentially much, much more ...

Hezarkhani was slated to join Zavier Gozo in a recent U.S. U-17 Youth National Team camp, but an ankle injury suffered in February's MLS NEXT Academy match limited the Irvine, Calif., native for the rest of March ...

## ***HOMEGROWN JUSTEN GLAD EXTENDED LAST YEAR ::***

RSL announced late last September that now 27-year old Homegrown DF **Justen Glad** signed a contract extension to keep the 10-year veteran in Claret-and-Cobalt through the 2027 season ... The longest-tenured player on the current Real Salt Lake squad, Glad first signed with the Utah side on April 7, 2014, at the age of 17, as the Club's sixth all-time Homegrown Player, out of the 40 signed all-time ... Throughout his career, Glad has gone on to set countless Club records, including being the first Homegrown to don the Captain's armband, as well as the first to reach both the 100-game centenary and 200 games played milestones ...

In 2022, Glad became the first Homegrown to be named Real Salt Lake's Most Valuable Player, as voted by his locker-room peers ... Currently, Glad is the third-most capped active Homegrown Player still with their original club, having appeared in a total of 232 MLS reg. season matches for Real Salt Lake, trailing only Jonathan Osorio (276, Toronto FC) and Russell Teibert (254, Vancouver Whitecaps FC) ...

In the 60<sup>th</sup> minute of RSL's 0-0 home draw with Columbus on April 13, Glad surpassed legend Javier Morales to move into fifth place in MLS minutes played for RSL, with 19,256 ...

Glad just passed Morales in MLS starts May 4 against Kansas City with 218 for his career, moving into fifth all-time ... Additionally, Glad's 241 MLS reg. season appearances ranks fifth all-time behind Club legends Nick Rimando (369), Kyle Beckerman (350), Chris Wingert (247), Tony Beltran (245), and just ahead of Morales (240) ...

## ***HOMEGROWN KIDS MAKE MLS DEBUTS ::***

Last Oct. 14 at LA Galaxy, a pair of RSL Academy products made their MLS debuts, as FW **Axel Kei** (15 years, 289 days) and FW **Zavier Gozo** (16 years, 206 days) played the final six minutes plus stoppage in a 2-2 match in Carson ... Kei's debut made him the fourth-youngest to appear in MLS history, and the youngest in RSL's 20 years, eclipsing DF Nik Besagno's 2005 appearance at 16 years, 201 days ... Gozo, who hails from Eagle Mountain, Utah, is the third-youngest debutant in RSL history, just five days older than Besagno ...

Each player recovered from early-season injuries to participate in the back half of Real Monarchs' MLS NEXT Pro 2023 season, and were added to RSL's roster last week via the "Extreme Hardship"

mechanism, as RSL was missing 11 first-team players due to injury, international duty or disciplinary suspension for that rescheduled Galaxy match ... With their participation, RSL used 32 players in 46 matches across all competitions last season in MLS, Open Cup and Leagues Cup action ...

Gozo had a brace in last month's 2-1 Monarchs win over Minnesota United 2, and has been critical to the RSL Academy U17s GA Cup run a few weeks ago ...

## ***ERASING THE GLITCH IN HOME FORTRESS MATRIX ::***

On the flip side from RSL's recent road respectability, RSL's 2023 home form dipped to nearly unprecedented lows, as last year's RSL's home mark of 6W-7L-4T was its worst since 2007, when a 4W-7L-4T record on the Rice-Eccles turf marked the 19-year nadir ... This preseason, RSL players, coaches and leadership have openly discussed the goal of making its Sandy-based America First Field a fortress once again ...

From 2017-22 (barring the 2020 Covid year), RSL posted an MLS mark of 50 wins against just 17 losses and 18 draws, with a +61 goal differential ... During RSL's emergent heyday of 2008-14 – the "Golden Years of RSL" if you will – the Kreis/Lagerwey-built teams were dominant at home, with 70 wins against just 13 losses and 30 draws in MLS action ...

With a spike in 2024 season ticket sales, could RSL return AFF and the RioT fan base to its critical place as a difference-maker, taking advantage of the altitude with increased tempo and possession on the field? In 2022, the Club's first year under its new Blitzer/Smith ownership group, RSL sold out all 17 MLS contests, averaging 20,470 in the 20,000-seat building ... Last year saw just 9 sellouts due to weather and other concerns ...

## ***FINDING FORM AT AFF ::***

While RSL has been a historically elite home team during its 15 years here in Sandy, averaging nearly 2.00 points per game and a .700 win percentage, it took a five-win, two-draw, one-loss aggregate performance elevation during the Summer to even out dismal 2023 start/finish on Utah soil ... RSL started the season with back-to-back home losses in March, including a visit from St. Louis that saw the 4-0 scoreline emanate from four second-half goals for the second-worst home loss EVER ...

Between the league loss to LA Galaxy on May 31 and the 0-3 setback to Monterrey on July 26, RSL dominated visitors by a 15-5 scoreline in that 4W-0L-

2T run, including the 10-1 suffocation three wins against U.S. sides ORL, NYRB and SEA ... The second 45 minutes of the 3-1 win over León recalibrated the recent success at home, despite the 0-3 setback on August 26 against Houston ...

The 2-0 home win over Colorado on Sept. 2 provided a ray of light, with late Sept. matches against Dallas and Vancouver split, RSL going down 0-1 in each; coming back to win against the Whitecaps after allowing 3 in second half to Dallas ...

The Oct. 7 loss in the 2023 reg. season finale against Sporting Kansas City dropped RSL to 6W-7L-4T at home in MLS last year, RSL's worst home campaign since 2007 and its second-worst ever (expansion 2005 season), somewhat counteracting the Club's historically-elite road form, with RSL finishing just 3 points out of 2nd in the West and 6 points from STL atop the Conference ...

In Open Cup, Leagues Cup and the MLS Cup Playoffs, RSL posted a home record of 3W-1L-1T (w/ a shootout win in that draw) to bring the home mark to 9W-8L-5T overall, hopefully stoking the fires for nearly 14,000+ season ticket members to renew, recruit and grow their base for 2024 and beyond, reestablishing America First Field and The RioT fan group as a force within both MLS and CONCACAF ...

### ***DOMINANCE AT AMERICA FIRST FIELD TO RETURN IN 2024?::***

Despite last season's stumbles, RSL's overall performance in Sandy remains dominant over its history, with a 151-49-66 W-L-T mark in MLS action since moving into the suburban Salt Lake venue 15 years ago ... Across all competitions, RSL is now 178-65-77 (W-L-T) at the place now known as America First Field and affectionately housing the "RioT" fan clubs, with a 6-2-3 mark in the MLS Cup Playoffs, 8-1-2 in CONCACAF Champions League, 9-5-2 in the Lamar Hunt U.S. Open Cup, and 2-3-0 in various Leagues Cup competitions ... In international exhibition play, RSL is only 13-8-9 (W-L-T) ...

That perennially-consistent excellence on Utah soil provides RSL fans an incredible value proposition in North American major-league sports, with 2024 season tickets starting at approximately \$16 / match for a club that has proven to win nearly 70% of its home games over 15 seasons ... Visit [www.RSL.com](http://www.RSL.com) for season tickets and more information on the Club's 2024 Major League Soccer campaign, as the Utah side looks to build upon the last two years' 26 MLS sellouts and the 2022 Club-record average attendance of 20,470, RSL's new standard after 19 MLS seasons ...

### ***HOMEGROWN FACTORY ::***

RSL's roster boasts a League-high 15 homegrown on its roster, including one young player who did not attend the vaunted RSL Academy during either its Arizona or Utah iterations but do occupy "homegrown" roster status – MF **Diego Luna** ... A pair of presumed RSL starters on the backline – DF **Justen Glad** and DF **Andrew Brody** – each own HG status, as do backups DF **Erik Holt** and DF **Bode Hidalgo** ... RSL has inked several young Academy standouts in recent years to MLS deals, including DF **Jaziel Orozco**, DF **Zack Farnsworth**, GK **Gavin Beavers**, FW **Axel Kei**, MF **Jude Wellings**, MF **Luis Rivera** and DF **Delentz Pierre** ...

The latest duo to join the list of a League-high total of 39 Homegrown players signed over the last decade-plus are FW **Zavier Gozo** – who saw six minutes of action as an emergency call-up late last year at LA Galaxy – and 15-year-old MF **Luca Moisa**, the youngest player to join RSL in each of the last two preseasons ... Former UCLA DF **Tommy Silva** signed with the Club in December to push the all-time league high HG signing record to 39 players since 2011 ...

Another signing from 2023 – Generation adidas FW **Ilijah Paul**, drafted 7<sup>th</sup> overall in the 2023 MLS SuperDraft from the Univ. of Washington – spent five months at the RSL Academy in Utah as an Arizona native but was unable to sign an HG contract due to not having spent 12 consecutive months prior to his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday as part of the RSL Academy program ...

### ***#GENNASTRONG FOREVER ::***

RSL kicks off its first season since 2013 without former Club Vice President **John Genna**, the former executive who passed away last August following a years-long battle against ALS ... John's generosity of spirit, infectious smile and love of helping others, as well as his tireless work ethic and ability to mediate solutions for all parties, will forever permeate the "RSL Family" ... Please visit <https://www.RSL.com/news/Genna-Strong-Always> for details regarding the Club's continued fight for an ALS cure, as well as other ongoing community initiatives in John's memory ... The Genna family asks that we continue to display our **#GennaStrong** spirit and send donations to [www.projectmainst.org](http://www.projectmainst.org) on Genna's behalf ... Just hours prior to John's passing, RSL Head Coach **Pablo Mastroeni** talked during his Leagues Cup post-game on August 4 following a victory against León about what his relationship with Genna has provided since arriving in Utah during the 2021 season: <https://mls.imagencloud.com/record/~36a7d2f895> ...

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