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D.C. United Scrapes Past Ocean City in U.S. Open Cup Match

D.C. United 2, Barons 0

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D.C. United didn't lose last night, but barely avoided embarrassing itself.

Facing an amateur opponent chock full of college players on summer break and part-timers, United needed 74 minutes to break a scoreless tie and eventually secured a 2-0 victory over the Ocean City (N.J.) Barons in a U.S. Open Cup round-of-16 match before 2,021 at Maryland SoccerPlex.

The Barons were on even terms for long periods, and after Christian Gómez put United ahead with a penalty kick, they had several golden opportunities for an equalizer. United sealed the outcome in added time on Ange N'Silu's goal, clinching United's return trip to this Montgomery County complex for next Tuesday's quarterfinal against the Harrisburg City Islanders, a third-tier pro team that upset MLS's New England Revolution, 2-1, in overtime.

"These games are hard," United Coach Tom Soehn said. "The other team has a lot to gain, and for some of our [players], some guys take it too light. You can't afford to do that."

With a patchwork lineup that included only three regular starters, United made the effort but executed poorly. The match didn't turn in its favor until star rookie Chris Pontius and Gómez, the veteran playmaker, entered in the second half. Any advantage in individual skill was hardly apparent for much of the evening.

Striker Luciano Emilio (knee), forward Jaime Moreno (hamstring) and midfielder Fred (adductor) weren't in uniform, and midfielder-forward Santino Quaranta and defender Dejan Jakovic were away with the U.S. and Canadian national teams, respectively.

United dominated possession early and generated several opportunities but few seriously tested goalkeeper Tunde Ogunbiyi, a backup at the University of New Hampshire who transferred to Boston College.

Thabiso Khumalo and N'Silu, the two front-runners, were the biggest disappointments, failing to beat defenders or make their mark in the 95-year-old tournament open to teams on all levels of American soccer.

In the 54th minute, Barons Coach Neil Holloway was ejected for dissent. After Holloway repeatedly defied referee Jeff Gontarek's orders to leave the field, a police officer approached from behind and tried to escort him away. Not realizing law enforcement had gotten involved, Holloway continued to resist. Upon turning and seeing the uniform, he climbed over a railing and marched through the stands.

Holloway said afterward he had issues with fourth official Andrew Chapin. "I proceeded to ask him: 'Was it all about him, did he want to be the star of the show?' " he said. "And I guess he did. I didn't use any profanity. Next thing I know, I am being asked to leave the field in the biggest game in our history."

Witnesses said he confronted the referees outside the locker rooms and used profanity.

With a league game this weekend, United didn't want to use Gómez. But circumstances required it. Seven minutes after entering, he set up the penalty kick with a perfectly weighted ball into the box for N'Silu, who was upended by the charging Ogunbiyi. The goalie guessed correctly on Gómez's attempt, but the shot was struck with too much pace and zipped under the diving Ogunbiyi.

The Barons pressed for the equalizer, but their pleas for a penalty kick in the 87th minute were ignored.

A minute later, United goalkeeper Milos Kocic made a spectacular save off a redirected free kick and defender Devon McTavish cleared a second shot off the goal line.

In added time, Ogunbiyi fumbled Gómez's free kick, allowing N'Silu to put away the rebound.

"We're still learning some things about some of our guys," Soehn said. "There were positives and negatives to take away. Several guys did well and there are other guys who didn't do enough to make the game-day roster" for league matches.

United Note: Rookie defender Anthony Peters, who didn't appear in any league matches, was waived, creating a second roster opening as the summer signing window prepares to open.

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