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Onz Chery  · Dec 7, 2019 · 6 min read

Sporting's November recap: Showing sparks with the new guys

November wasn't the best month but it seems like Sporting S.C. is starting to turn things around with their new squad as they went 1-1-1.



Sporting SC players before a game at Randall's Island. Sporting SC Images

After ending their first two months in the Cosmopolitan Soccer League's top division in last place with a 1-5 record, Sporting SC hit the reset button yet again. They signed a dozen of prominent players and welcomed familiar faces with hopes of igniting a revival.

You could mistake their roster for one of the giants' rosters in the CSL as they added names like Sikele 'Kele' Sylvester and Karim Russell, two former Lansdowne Yonkers F.C. players who won the CSL and the Amateur Cup; Emmanuel Agboola an ex-CUNYAC star, Joseph Lopez, a well-known player in Long Island from his high school and college days and so on.

It wasn't just the new players that improved their roster but also the returnees. Three men who played a vital role in SSC's promotion last season returned to the club: defender Michael Natsu, keeper Laurence Girard and midfielder Maximilian Mansfield.

Mansfield didn't just come back as a player but also became the team's head coach. As expected, the new player-coach noted that it was "difficult" to take all the new players under his wings during the middle of the season and establish chemistry. Nevertheless, with such an attractive roster it was somewhat safe to bet on Sporting to start dismantling other teams in the CSL in November. Roster changes have worked wonders in the CSL time and time again.

The new Sporting team's first fixture was against mid-table side NY Athletic Club. They were home at Soundview Park in the Bronx.

In his first match with Sporting, Agboola was brought down in the box to draw a penalty kick around the 15th minute. All eyes were on the 21-year-old as he stepped inside the 18 to take the spot-kick. It came close to being a dream restart for Sporting but not close enough. Agboola's penalty was saved.

SSC was the most threatening team still throughout the match. But in the dying ten minutes, Natsu didn't clear the ball properly; a NYAC player controlled the poor clearance and went around keeper Julio 'Frankie' Tsasse to score.

Sporting couldn't find an equalizer. They lost their first encounter after the reset, it hurt but it wasn't unexpected.

"We all knew that this could very well happen, 95 percent of the team is new," Sporting manager Edgardo 'Ed' Romero [told CSL reporter Michael Battista](#). "We have talent we just now need to work on our chemistry and putting the right players together."



Game pic of Sporting SC's match versus NY Athletic Club. Sporting SC Images

It was a tough one to swallow for the new man in charge, Mansfield.

“It was so tough. I mean, basically, we gifted them the game,” the player-coach said. “It was heartbreaking for us. We really wanted to start off with a win. We could’ve used those three points. It was tough to get back up. It definitely was.”

Sporting is well known for getting back up.

“We have 3 games left. Nothing is lost. The last thing we will lose is hope,” Ed stated.

The Bronx based club’s next game was against NY Shamrock SC at home. Shamrocks was above them by one point in the table. It was a game the players were eager to win to start turning things around, particularly Frankie.

Shamrocks was the Cameroonian glovesman’s home for three seasons before joining SSC in the summer.



Sporting SC keeper Julio 'Frankie' Tsasse during his time with NY Shamrock SC. NY Shamrocks Images

"I'm like any other soccer player, when you play against your former team you always want to win," Frankie said. "You don't want them to say 'Oh, you left but look at us, we're doing well.' You always want to show that I left and without me you cannot do anything."

"So I spoke to my guys and I told them 'You know what, I need this game more than ever. You got to put your foot on the gas.'"

Frankie has the experience of playing with a newly promoted club from his days with the Rocks. Although it's his first year with Sporting, the 29-year-old is one of the most vocal guys off the pitch. He helps his fellow keeper Girard, who started against NYAC on his return, and assist the coaching staff.

Frankie's teammates didn't let him down against his ex-club.

SSC pressed Shamrocks from the get-go and drew an own goal out of them. Mansfield's men scored again later in the first half when Tavoy Morgan collected Joseph Lopez's through ball before going around the keeper and pushing the ball in the net.

It was Morgan's first game with Sporting and in the CSL. He joined the team after his Jamaican compatriots and Newtown Pride F.C. (Connecticut Soccer League) teammates Kele, Russell and Javaun Waugh.

"It was great to score to show what I'm capable of and help the team go ahead," the 24-year-old said.

SSC missed a couple of scoring chances later in the match and Shamrocks scored in the last minutes. Sporting hung on to their 2-1 lead to break a five-game winless run.

Frankie got his win against his former side, the team crawled out of last place and the players' confidence was boosted.

"I think a lot of the guys had lost belief that we could even win a game. You could see it on their faces when we came out of that game with three points, they were so excited" Mansfield said.

Sporting's next opponent was a team they were anxious to play for a little over a month, Zum Schneider F.C. 03. In their previous fixture on October 13, Zum reported to the referee that SSC's nets were hanging on the turf. The referee agreed and the league granted Zum a 3-0 forfeit victory.

Sporting filed an appeal to the league – they rejected it. They later filed an appeal to Eastern New York State Soccer Association, same result.

"We thought that was completely unfair and unsportsmanlike. You're the [Zum] manager, worry about your team, let the referee worry about the field. Let him do his job," Ed said.

He went on: "We're Flamhaft Cup winners, we're Sal Rapaglia Cup runners up, we just got promoted, we are doing things correctly. We are a good team that needs help not punishment. This is our first year in the first division in our club's history and to see this happen was completely unfair. Especially when we have been playing in this field under these conditions for more than a season. I mean, a game was played before our first team match. We trusted that the state would see our side. This is amateur, let us play but they didn't. So, we lost a game without even playing—a *game*—which is awful, really awful. We received no support from our league that added to the hurt."

On November 24, Ed and his men could take their anger out on the pitch against Zum Schneider itself at Randall's Island.

SSC demonstrated their anger from the start and scored an opener in the 12th minute. Ex-Zum player, Mansfield, hit a pass over the top of the defenders; Morgan brought the ball down then juked a couple of more defenders in the box and hit a shot to the far corner.

Sporting became overconfident, Ed recalled. Zum scored on a counter-attack and from the spot before the break. ZSFC netted again in the second half to go up 3-1 around the 65th-minute mark. All hope was lost then, Ed admitted, they were on their way to another defeat to the team they fervently wanted to get a payback win from.

With a tiny bit of faith, the team made a couple of substitutions around the 70th minute, including the introduction of six-year SSC midfielder Damone Manning. Manning helped rejuvenate the Bronx side.

Morgan headed Saad Afif's cross in the net to make it 3-2. The big forward came close to scoring again, or maybe he did score. The Jamaican whipped a shot off the crossbar or the ball hit the top of the net before beaming back on the pitch. The referee didn't think it was a goal, the SSC players did.

Sporting had another chance to score an equalizer in added time. Morgan drew a free-kick on top of the box. Russell was going to take the set piece but Morgan was red hot from his brace and having drawn the free-kick himself, he asked to take it. Russell consented.

Morgan kept his nerves and steered the ball to the top corner.

"It went in," he said, letting out a happy laugh. "It felt good. When I kicked it I said 'Yeah.'"

Morgan is used to scoring free-kicks but scoring a set piece to not only collect his first CSL hat trick but also to give his new club a late equalizer during a re-building period is definitely one he will cherish.

"Yeah, I score free-kick often," the striker said. "Sometimes they go in, sometimes the goalie saves it. But that one was a special one because we didn't want to lose that game. So it was special."

Sporting didn't amass a winning record in November but with their new signings they surely showed some sparks. November was their best month in the CSL's top-flight. They bagged the most goals, five, conceded the least, five, and amassed the best record, 1-1-1, to jump to ninth place.

The club has a gruesome task waiting for them in December. Sporting will play one of the best amateur teams in the country and Lamar Hunt U.S. Open Cup 2020 participants, NY Pancyprian Freedoms, twice before the winter break. First in the Manning State Cup on December 8th in a quarter final match and then in league play on December 15th.