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Onz Chery  · Jun 2 · 5 min read

Sporting's exciting road to their first ever State Cup final, the Flamhaft Cup



Sporting SC's team picture. Sporting SC Images

A former Jamaica U-20 player couldn't stop scoring while an ex-New York Red Bulls Academy keeper held it down in the back, here's Sporting SC's road to the Flamhaft Cup final.

If one was to make a list of the CSL clubs that could make a breakthrough and become one of the league's powerhouses in the next few years, it's safe to say that blue team from the second division, Sporting SC, deserves to be in it.

They have players with shiny soccer resumes like the giants of the CSL, for example, ex-MLSer Ibrahim Abdoulaye and former Jamaica youth player Kendon Anderson. They could be in the top division next season as the club will be playing a promotional match against Stal Mielec NY on Wednesday. And lastly, Sporting could win a State Cup this Sunday, the Flamhaft Cup (Div. 2), which they will play against A.C. Tumi at Verrazano Sports Complex.

One thing that would help SSC become one the giants of the CSL is obviously jumping to the top division but also getting their hands on the Flamhaft Cup. Sporting has never a won State Cup before.

"It means a lot for us. This Sunday we will make history," Sporting's keeper Laurence Girard said. "All of our players bleed Sporting SC blue."

SSC's road to the Flamhaft Cup final started with a forfeit victory against F.C. Ulqini in the opening round.

The following round, Ed Romero's men did step on the pitch this time and cruised past F.C. Japan, 5-1. 5-1 sounds like a comfortable win but midfielder Marin Frasheri-Gjoca would argue that they had to fight their socks off in all of the matches in their road to the final.

"None of the games were partially easy, even the high scoring ones," he said.

"A lot of times it's been about who wanted to grind more, and we've been a team that not only tries to play good football, but we don't mind tracking back and making it hard for the opponent to play."

The midfielder is a former Albania U-21 player and spent nearly 10 years playing in Europe, bouncing around France, Sweden, Finland and Turkey. He's now an

active member of the Fussball Project, an organization that develops and gives players exposure.



Marin Frasher-Gjoca playing for Finland club Warkaus JK.

In the round of 16, things started to get hectic for the second division club. LISFL club Leros gave them a good run for their money. Sporting beat Leros by just one goal, 3-2.

Anderson netted all three of Sporting's goals. Competing in knockout games is nothing new for the forward. Anderson has won several championships in New York's tough Latino leagues. But he's craving to hoist a more notable silverware, the Flamhaft Cup.

"I want to win this cup because that's what I play for. I play to win. I play to win cups," the striker said while raising his voice with passion.



Sporting SC forward Kendon Anderson in a match with Jamaica in Brooklyn's amateur league, the FGSL. Brooklyn Soccer Life Images

After the one-goal victory versus Leros, SSC had to face perhaps their biggest hurdle of the cup. They didn't have 11 players on the field to start their quarter-final match against Forrest Park.

"Starting a match with less than 11 men is always brutal, especially emotionally," Frasheri-Gjoca said.

Despite being outnumbered, Sporting scored the opener. Around 20 minutes later, more of their players showed up. The game finished in a tense 4-3 score line. Frasheri-Gjoca considered their outing versus Forrest Park their toughest match of the tournament thus far.

Anderson proved his desire to lift the Flamhaft cup again in that rough quarter-final, the Caribbean netted two of the team's goals. Don Oba scored the other two goals.

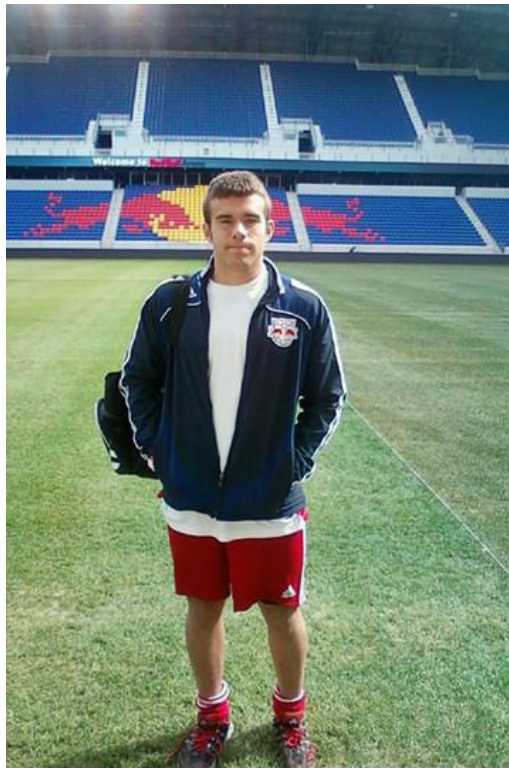
Anderson found the net three times again in SSC's semifinal versus Real Ole F.C., a game they won 5-1. Oba and Abdoulaye were the other scorers.

Anderson leads Sporting in scoring in the Flamahaft Cup with eight goals. When asked if he will shake the net again this Sunday, the 25-year-old said laughing: "I always see myself scoring no matter how the game is. I always see myself scoring."

He later added: "If it's not going my way in the final then I hope someone else can step up because it's a team."

Behind Anderson's goals, way behind his goals, stands a player who also was a key figure in SSC's road to the final. A player who once used to bleed red instead of Sporting's blue color, Laurence Girard.

Girard is a former New York Red Bulls U-18 keeper. He stopped prioritizing soccer when he got to college to focus on school. It was worth it in a way since Girard is now the CEO and founder of a digital diabetes prevention program, Fruit Street, while attending Harvard Extension School.



Sporting SC's keeper Laurence Girard during his time with New York Red Bulls' U-18 team.
Picture by Richmond McCarthy

But meanwhile, the netminder watched some of his former teammates from the youth level go pro as RBNY midfielder Sean Davis and New England Revolution forward Juan Agudelo.

Girard decided to take soccer seriously again last year and joined Sporting. He expressed that the club gave him the opportunity to build on what his youth clubs Met Oval and the Red Bulls gave him as a youngster.

When he just joined the club, the 27-year-old was the reserve team's keeper. But with the help of former Red Bulls/Senegal keeper Bouna Condoul and NYU assistant coach Greg Kenney, Girard hopped onto the first team this season and now he'll be playing in one of the biggest games in Sporting's history on Sunday.