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2023 US Open Cup Round 1: UDA Soccer from New Mexico State becomes first college team to advance

MARCH 23, 2023 BY [ANDREW MOSIER](#)



More than 500 fans came out to support UDA Soccer at New Mexico State University to see them play the Park City Red Wolves. It was the largest crowd the team has ever had for a game. Photo: UDA Soccer

UDA at New Mexico State University made history Wednesday night beating Park City Red Wolves 1-0 in the First Round of the 2023 Lamar Hunt US Open Cup.

Jose Puente calmly slotted home a 78th minute penalty kick to put UDA through to the Second Round where they will face New Mexico United (USL Championship) on the road.

"That was such a tight, incredibly hard-fought game, we knew it was going to come down to one mistake either way," said UDA head coach Blake Ordell. "We were able to take advantage and we did a good job keeping the shutout. I'm incredibly proud of everyone. We made history tonight."

More than 500 vocal fans—the largest in the program's two-year history—packed the New Mexico State University Soccer Complex to cheer UDA on to its first tournament win in its Open Cup debut. With the win, UDA becomes the first team affiliated with a college or university to advance out of the First Round in the Modern Era (1995-present). The only college team to even qualify since 1995 was BYU of USL League Two (then known as the PDL). They qualified three times in 2006, 2007 and 2015 but failed to reach the Second Round.

It was clear the game was going to be a test of wills from the opening whistle. The two youth-filled amateur teams took turns running at the other without creating any real chances on goal.

Thirty minutes in, the visitors called for a penalty when UDA goalkeeper made contact with Park City forward Zachary Lifferth as he went to goal. The speedy Lifferth gave UDA defenders fits all night, but was unable to get anything threatening on goal.

The second half started as the first ended, with both teams looking for some modicum of control, which neither team was willing to concede.

"They made things incredibly difficult for us," Ordell said. "Credit to them. They would not let us play the way we like to play."

It wasn't until the 70th minute of the match that UDA was able to string multiple passes together in their attacking third. Attacking down the left flank, that sent Selah Alyones in on goal in the 78th minute. Alyones was unceremoniously chopped down from behind for a clear penalty.

Up stepped Puente while Park City did everything they could to get into his head. Multiple players had words with him while Ronaldo Onu kicked the turf at the penalty spot away. Onu received a caution for his efforts.

"They were doing everything to get in my head," Puente said. "I just tried to focus on making the shot, not what they were doing."

" This says it all! ??? pic.twitter.com/OzITJELp7j

— UDA Soccer Academies – UK and USA (@UDAUKSOCCER) **March 23, 2023**

Puente paused during his approach, making the goalkeeper move early. He calmly put the ball the other way and took off to celebrate in front of the standing-room-only crowd.

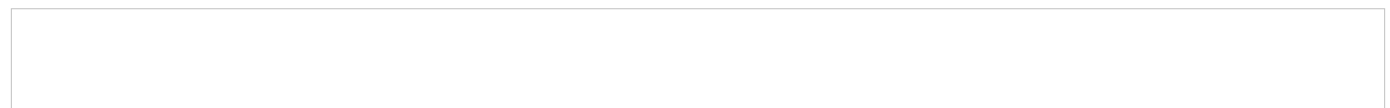
The final 10 minutes was hectic and chippy as Park City threw everything they had forward,

missing two opportunities and forcing UDA goalkeeper Mario Castillo to make several important saves to keep the clean sheet.

With the win, UDA advances to face a pro team for the first time in Round 2. They will take on New Mexico United who had an impressive Open Cup debut of their own back in 2019, reaching the Quarterfinals. The game will take place in Albuquerque at the University of New Mexico Soccer Complex on April 4.

"Tactically, I expect things to be very different in the next round," Ordell said. "We're looking forward to the challenge. Hopefully we can keep making history."

UDA NMSU U.S. Open Cup Match



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The image features a collage of four photographs showing soccer players celebrating with trophies. The top photo shows a player in a red and black jersey holding a trophy. The bottom-left photo shows a player in a white jersey holding a trophy. The bottom-right photo shows a player in a white jersey holding a trophy. The background of the collage is a crowd of people.

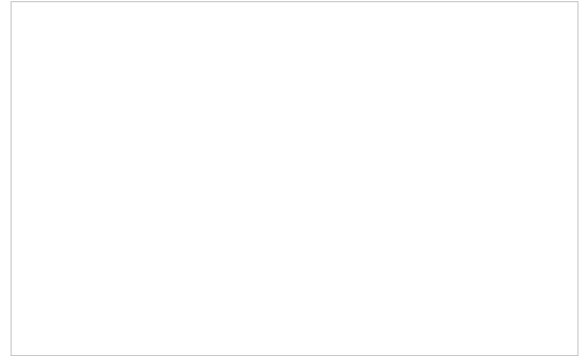
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Unfortunately, in the long history of the US Open Cup, this was not the first time that there have been more than a few incidents where games were halted due to referee abuse.

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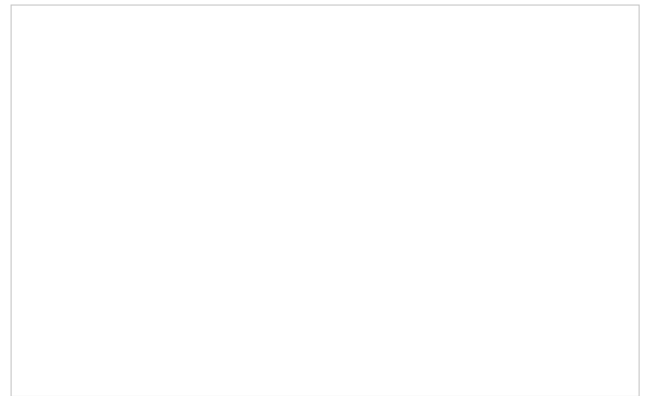
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