

# Vancouver Whitecaps assess state of affairs after missing playoffs, their reality burdened by expectation

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By Israel Fehr

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If happiness is reality divided by expectation, the same formula provides an equally effective way to measure the success and failures of a professional sports team.

The expectation for the Vancouver Whitecaps in 2013? To return to the playoffs after cracking the top five in the Western Conference in their second MLS season in 2012.

The reality? More wins, more goals, but this year the Whitecaps are left on the outside looking in, the product of stronger intra-conference competition.

Even with big away wins at Montreal and Seattle, the Whitecaps failed to inspire from August through October, going 3-5-4 down the stretch and winning only once in their last six home games.

Camilo's breakout 19-goal campaign, Jay DeMerit's return to the field in just six months from the Achilles injury he suffered in the season opener, and the emergence of young players like Russell Teibert, Johnny Leveron, and Kekuta Manneh will result in no more games for Vancouver this season beyond next Sunday's finale at B.C. Place against Colorado.

It's the second straight year the team has faltered late, leading to the inevitable questions about the future of head coach Martin Rennie.

Team president Bob Lenarduzzi was noncommittal Monday when addressing Rennie's status going forward and

there's a growing sense that Rennie, fairly or not, will not be back in 2014. Frank Yallop, the former Los Angeles Galaxy, San Jose Earthquakes, and Canadian national team manager who grew up in Vancouver, has been floated as a possible replacement.

Now, filtering through the kudos and criticisms of the season does render a curious canvas.

*Positive No. 1: Improving goal-scoring prowess*

The Whitecaps have scored 50 goals in 33 games. Last year they managed only 33 in 34 games.

*Negative No 1: Declining defensive standards*

On the flip side, they've conceded 45 goals in 2013 compared to 41 in 2012.

*Positive No. 2: Emergence of young talent*

As mentioned above, Teibert, 20, Leveron, 23, and Manneh, 18, enjoyed successful runs in the squad at various times throughout the season.

*Negative No. 2: Regression of (other) young talent*

Darren Mattocks, 23, and Gershon Koffie, 22, key members of the squad in 2012, did not enjoy quite the same success in 2013.

*Positive No. 3: Cascadia Cup champions*

For the first time since they've been in MLS, the Whitecaps won the Cascadia Cup, which is awarded to the team that performs best head-to-head among Portland, Seattle, and Vancouver.

*Negative No. 3: Cascadia cellar-dwellers*

Despite the head-to-head advantage, Vancouver can only watch as both their Cascadian rivals finish above them in the standings and advance to the MLS Cup playoffs.

In each area the Whitecaps took a step forward, they also took a step back, but it stills seems early to press the eject button on the head coach just one year after Rennie guided Vancouver from last place to the playoffs. It's easy to forget this is just the organization's third year in MLS.

The reality for the Whitecaps is that they have a number of decisions to make this offseason, including finding a replacement for the retiring Y.P. Lee and choosing whether or not to extend the expiring contract of the 33-year-old Demerit.

The reality for Rennie is that one of those decisions may be to let him go with a year left on his deal. The club's expectations for their manager will decide that.

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