

Whitecaps served stern reminder: Sounders still the team to beat

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VANCOUVER – The Vancouver Whitecaps were served a stern reminder in Saturday's [2-0 home loss](#) to Seattle: the Sounders are still the team to beat in Major League Soccer.

Seattle came into B.C. Place without star striker Obafemi Martins, [sidelined due to a leg injury](#), and put in a textbook away performance to claim all three points. Chad Barrett, Martins' replacement up front, gave the visitors an early lead with a goal in the fifth minute and struck again in the 38th to make it 2-0.

That was all the Sounders needed. With a strong shape and a few professional tackles and fouls they methodically wore the Whitecaps down. Especially impressive was how U.S. national team standout [Clint Dempsey](#) linked the midfield with the attack and ruled the middle of the pitch.

"They've got some very good, experienced players who know how to manage a game and slow it down," said Whitecaps head coach Carl Robinson.

The 'Caps actually carried a five-game unbeaten streak against their Cascadia rival into Saturday's contest, picking up two wins and a draw in three meetings last season, but that form was certainly not on display in this derby match.

Robinson contended his side played well, and while he isn't wrong, they were by far second best. Vancouver's efforts toward goal, 16 in total to Seattle's seven, were either wide, blocked, or saved easily by Sounders goalkeeper Stefan Frei.

Defensively the Whitecaps weren't sharp either. Both of Barrett's tallies were scored on the counter-attack and made possible by uncharacteristically timid play from centre back Kendall Weston and goalkeeper David Ousted.

In the end, with a comfortable halftime advantage, Seattle controlled the game without even breaking much of a sweat.

"We're not quite at that level yet," said Robinson.

Can they get to that level over the next few months? While the Whitecaps are rightfully identified as a team on the rise, their most recent opponent has been where they're trying to go on multiple occasions and aren't going away any time soon.

The Sounders had the league's best record in 2014 and have finished in the top four in the West every year since 2009. In four MLS seasons, Vancouver has never finished higher than fifth.

"It's early in the season but we wanted to let people know that we are still here. We haven't disappeared," said Sounders head coach Sigi Schmid. "We wanted to let people know the road [in the Western Conference] still goes through Seattle."

Saturday's win brings Schmid's men up to 19 points in 10 games this season. The Whitecaps are at 20 points through 12 games. FC Dallas sits atop the West standings with 21 points from 11 games.

The lustre of a terrific start isn't all gone for Vancouver, but it's become abundantly clear that a series of challenges lie ahead, including two more showdowns with Seattle. There's work to be done.

"Today's a disappointment for us because it is our rivals. But make no doubt about it, we know they're a good team," said Robinson. "We just have to rebound because we're going to lose games this year. The good teams are able to bounce back."

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