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## **Restrepo leads Strikers over Kickers in penalties**

Diego Restrepo was looking for redemption. Twice during the regular season, the Ft. Lauderdale Strikers went to penalties and both times he failed to stop a shot.

He recovered in a huge way in the third round of the Open Cup.

Restrepo saved three of four penalties and made three saves in the game as the Strikers beat the Richmond Kickers 2-0 on penalties after drawing 1-1 Wednesday afternoon. They will take on DC United in the fourth round on June 15.

“I’ve always been confident in my penalties,” Restrepo said. “Penalty shootouts are what goalkeepers dream of — it’s our big chance to showcase our talent.”

On the first shot of the game, Manny Gonzalez gave the hosts a one-goal lead after a bending free kick goal just two minutes in. Less than 30 minutes later, Richmond’s Yudai Imura got in behind the back line for the equalizer.

Victor Pagliari Giro scored the first PK for the Strikers and Geison Moura won it on the fourth try. Restrepo saved three of the four shots from the Kickers and the other was missed wide of the net. It was the first time a shootout finished 2-0 in the modern Open Cup history.

“It was one of the toughest atmospheres in terms of field conditions that I’ve played on in my life, Restrepo said of the 90-plus degree temperatures and high humidity. “It wasn’t great for either team.”

Strikers midfielder Adrianinho was brought down just outside the 18-yard box right after the opening whistle and Gonzalez’s ensuing free kick bent around the Richmond wall for the opening goal of the third round and tying the fastest Open Cup goal in Strikers history.

Facing an early deficit, the Kickers pushed forward. Richmond’s Anthony Grant, Imura, and defenders Alex Lee and William Yomby all had shots on goal for the Kickers, but Diego Restrepo kept them at bay.

After a short water break due to temperatures nearing triple digits, Grant fed Imura with a low ball that he slotted past Restrepo. Both teams had their chances the rest of the half, but neither could capitalize.

That trend continued in the second half until the 76th minute when lightning was spotted and the game was delayed for 30 minutes. After the delay, both teams pushed for the game-winner but Restrepo continued his big day with two saves.

Ramon Nuñez's free kick found Maicon Santos, who headed it home for what looked like the go-ahead goal at the beginning of the first half of extra time for Ft. Lauderdale, but it was called back after an offside call.

Restrepo continued his huge game in the shootout, saving three penalties and keeping an opponent scoreless for just the second time in the modern era of the Open Cup.

With the draw, however, Ft. Lauderdale now has a six-game winless streak, tying Orlando City U23, Chico Rooks and Carolina Dynamo for the modern era Open Cup record. The Strikers will look to snap that streak against DC United on June 15 at the Maryland Soccerplex.

After losing two of its first four NASL regular season games, Ft. Lauderdale hasn't lost in five straight in five straight games in all competitions. The Strikers host league-leading New York Cosmos this Saturday and travel to Edmonton on June 12 before continuing the Open Cup.

"There are only five guys from last year on this year's roster so it takes some time to bond," Restrepo said. "Time makes everything better and we're clicking. Now and we've got keep fighting and playing."