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Rowdies hold off Cincinnati FC in third round

Georgi Hristov scored in the 11th minute and the Tampa Bay Rowdies held off surging FC Cincinnati 1-0 Wednesday night in the third round of the U.S. Open Cup.

Cincinnati outshot the Rowdies 14-7 but only had a pair of shots on target and had an 8-3 advantage in corners in the second Open Cup game of their first season as a franchise. Tampa Bay, meanwhile, will travel to Ohio to face off with Columbus Crew SC in the fourth round on June 15.

"We did great with our effort and intensity," Rowdies head coach Stuart Campbell said. "It's tough playing a team from the league because they've got nothing to lose. The longer the game went, the more (Cincinnati) got numbers forward."

Kenney Walker had the best chance of the first half for FC Cincinnati less than ten minutes in with a shot from the top of the box that was pushed aside by Rowdies goalkeeper Matt Pickens.

Hristov let a long, high ball from Neill Collins up the right side take a big bounce in the box in the 11th minute and took three touches to get around the two defenders before slotting it past Cincinnati goalkeeper Mitch Hildebrandt.

"Right before the game, me and Neill were talking about it," Hristov said. "I was ready for that run, I knew he was going to play the ball there and it worked out. The whole team played well and we deserved to win."

Each team had five shots apiece in the first half, but Cincinnati had just one shot on goal compared to three for Tampa Bay.

"It's always crucial to get the first goal and set the tempo of play," Campbell said. "They're a threat going forward and we knew they had goals in them so I never moan anyone for shooting."

Cincinnati came out in the second half pushing hard for a goal. An early chance was easily corralled before a weak shot from the top of the box by Ross Tomaselli was deflected and forced Pickens into a diving save to his right.

Both teams could have had a man sent off with under 30 minutes to play. Pickens came out of his net in the 66th minute and went one-on-one before clearing the ball with no foul given. The

Rowdies came right back when Hristov was taken down from behind at midfield four minutes later. Tomaselli was given a yellow.

Cincinnati had its best chance of the second half with less than five minutes to play. Sean Okoli tapped a header back to Andrew Wiedeman just above the penalty spot, but he sent it way over the bar. Antoine Hoppenot had another chance to level the game a minute later but he too sent it wide of the post.

Advancing to the fourth round is already one step further than Tampa Bay has gotten in recent years. The Rowdies lost the third round in the last two years and last won an Open Cup game against VSI Tampa Bay FC in the second round in 2013.

"This is my fifth season here and we don't have a good record," Campbell said. "I'm delighted to get a win and progress to the next round against a good MLS team. It's about time we had a run in this competition."