



COLUMBUS CREW

2023 Season Preview



In a year of missed opportunities, the Crew are ready for a refresh and a return to the postseason for the first time since their MLS Cup title in 2020.

Despite a roster full of talent and a brilliant new home in Lower.com Field, Columbus underachieved under former head coach Caleb Porter the last two years. Failing to make the playoffs in consecutive seasons was not an acceptable outcome for a founding member of the MLS. Now, in comes Wilfried Nancy, who last season lead CF Montréal to the 2nd best record in the Eastern Conference and a conference semifinal appearance. Nancy is expected to be the difference on a team that finished 8th, missing the

Wilfried Nancy was announced as the next Crew head coach on Dec. 6 after departing CF Montréal. His success in developing young talent and aggressive tactics will be a refreshing shift (MLSsoccer staff, 2022).

playoffs by a mere two points. During the 2022 season, the Crew took a lead in 10 of their 34 games only to drop points, finishing with a tie or loss in those games. The hope is that Nancy will bring a fresh message to the locker room and a more aggressive approach on the pitch to finish off these matches.

Coaching will not be the only significant change in Columbus as long-time captain and center back Jonathan Mensah was traded on February 10 for \$500k in general allocation money. While there was no one on the team without blame for the consistent in-game collapses last year, the defense hardly seemed the main culprit. The Crew defense allowed just 41 goals, tied for 2nd best within the Eastern Conference. Meanwhile, the attack struggled to score with only 46 on the season, a major factor in drawing 16 times, which was a league high. More curious is the timing of the trade, occurring just 15 days before the start of the season.

The loss of Mensah, along with fellow champions Pedro Santos and Artur shows the team's first moves off their title team. Without any major acquisitions, there will clearly be a reinforced focus on developing through Crew 2 and their academy. Nancy's hiring falls right in line with this theory as one of his strengths include the development of young talent.

Prediction: 51 points, 5th place in the East

Zelarayán and Hernandez need to take the next step as an offensive dynamic duo. They scored a combined 19 goals with Hernandez joining the team deep into the regular season. A full off-season together should allow for more connectivity on the field. Darlington Nagbe will need to remain steadfast in the midfield and take on more of a leadership role with Mensah's departure. Lastly, Aidan Morris will need to have a breakout season. In his 2nd season after his torn ACL, the hope is that the hometown kid can consistently show the quality he's flashed in the past.

A refreshed look, along with new management should provide an exciting spark for fans this season. The growth of soccer in the region has never been higher, shown by a new average attendance record of 19,237 during the 2022 season. So, expect Lower.com Field to be a fortress this season for the Columbus Crew.



On decision day for the 2022 season the Crew fell short. Needing a win or draw to advance to the playoffs they blew a 1-0 lead to eventually lose 2-1 to Orlando City. This unfortunate theme plagued the team all season (Columbus Dispatch, 2022).



Jonathan Mensah spent 6 seasons with the Crew. The long time captain was part of the 2020 MLS Cup team and was widely seen as the heart and sole of the team. He was traded to the San Jose Earthquakes on Feb. 10 (USA TODAY Sports, 2020).



Cucho and Zelarayán have the potential be one of the most dynamic attacking duos in all of MLS this season (USA TODAY Sports, 2022).
