



Real Salt Lake's Diego Luna, second from right, celebrates with teammates after scoring on an overtime penalty shot against the Houston Dynamo in an MLS playoff match on Nov. 6, 2023, in Sandy. **RICK BOWMER** - Associated Press. Photo by Rick Bowmer.

Will a young Real Salt Lake star be one of MLS's summer sales?

RSL's Diego Luna could attract offers from abroad if he performs well at the Olympics.

By TOM BOGERT

It's about that time again, with European seasons coming to a close and clubs beginning to put plans in motion for the summer transfer window. Once again, MLS players will be in the mix. Last summer MLS clubs exported several big-money players, including:

- Taty Castellanos (NYCFC to Lazio)
- Djordje Petrovic (New England to Chelsea)
- Brenner (Cincinnati to Udinese)
- Luiz Araujo (Atlanta to Flamengo)
- Gabi Pereira (NYCFC to Al-Rayyan)
- Lucas Zelarayan (Columbus to Al-Fateh)
- Cristian Casseres (NY Red Bulls to Toulouse)

This year's potential exports include big stars, young players and some underperforming designated players. All information is via sources briefed on each situation, who are not authorized to speak publicly about potential deals.

OFFERS COMING

Giorgios Giakoumakis
Atlanta United

Atlanta United already rejected an initial offer of around \$6 million from Cruz Azul for star forward Giorgios Giakoumakis, but sources expect Cruz Azul to come back with a new bid for the Greece international. Atlanta could acquiesce to a move if the price is right, keeping Giakoumakis' stay at the club under 18 months.

There's a lot of "ifs" there, but a transfer is a realistic outcome.

Giakoumakis, 29, was signed for around \$4 million from Celtic ahead of the 2022 season, and his departure would see Atlanta go back into the market to bring in a new DP No. 9. The Greek has been elite in his output per 90 minutes, with 24 goals and five assists across 39 league and playoff matches (2,748 minutes).

Adilson Malanda
Charlotte FC

Charlotte FC center back Adilson Malanda has plenty of suitors abroad thanks to his stellar form in MLS, but the club's stance is clear: The French defender is not for sale this summer.

Barring a huge offer, Charlotte intends to keep Malanda at the club through the 2024 season. A deal made in the summer that

would see Malanda move in the winter could work, though.

Malanda, 22, is having a career year as the anchor of one of the best defensive units in MLS. They have kept clean sheets in each of their last four matches, with Malanda playing every minute. The defender was signed from French club Rodez AF in 2022.

Noel Buck
New England Revolution

This season has not matched the heights of a breakout 2023 for Noel Buck. The 19-year-old has been pushed to the bench with just 187 league minutes for the New England Revolution as the club struggles mightily to start the season.

Still, the midfielder has still been a regular with England's U-19 team along the way, and interest from clubs in the country remains. A move there makes the most sense for Buck, but there is also interest coming from Germany and Belgium.

Christian McFarlane, NYCFC

Currently with England at the U-17 European Championships, NYCFC left back Christian McFarlane is a well-known commodity to English clubs. He'll likely soon be there full-time, as The Athletic previously reported a deal to send McFarlane to Manchester City was close. Sources said it was expected McFarlane would remain in New York before joining City in the winter.

McFarlane, 17, is still awaiting his MLS debut but already has 32 appearances with the club's second team. He's expected to make his first team debut at some point after he returns from international duty.

Emmanuel Ochoa,
San Jose Earthquakes

San Jose Earthquakes goalkeeper Emmanuel Ochoa is one of contract this winter and teams from Mexico and Europe are looking to sign him on a free transfer, sources say. San Jose is also hopeful of keeping the homegrown goalkeeper at the club.

Ochoa, who turned 19 this month, already has two full seasons as the first-choice goalkeeper for the Quakes' reserve team in MLS Next Pro. He made his first team debut in a U.S. Open Cup game this season and earned a clean sheet.

Eligible for both the United States and Mexico, Ochoa was most recently with Mexico's U-20s.

WILL IT HAPPEN?

Thiago Almada,
Atlanta United

Once again, we're reserving a section just for Thiago Almada, who may set a new outbound transfer record in MLS.

Once again, unfortunately, there's nothing new to report. Atlanta United still prefers to keep Almada, but if a big enough offer comes, Almada will be free to go. Those offers still have not arrived.

Almada's form has not been to his no, and standard this year, but he still has enough talent and pedigree to command a huge fee. Almada may increase his visibility when he captains Argentina at the Olympics this summer.

OLYMPIC HOPEFULS

Duncan McGuire,
Orlando City

After two deals to Blackburn Rovers fell through in bizarre circumstances this winter, Duncan McGuire is still a player to watch this summer.

Offers have already started to come in. Blackburn recently traveled to the United States to reignite talks (as promised in the winter) and Polish club Legia Warsaw submitted an opening bid to Orlando this week. That bid, however, was not anywhere near Orlando's valuation of McGuire. There is interest from other clubs in the EFL Championship beyond Blackburn, too.

Orlando made a new, long-term contract offer to McGuire and will try to keep the center forward.

Jack McGlynn,
Philadelphia Union

Jack McGlynn has been one of the Philadelphia Union's top performers in 2024, with plenty of clubs taking notice.

There has been interest of varying degrees from England's Championship and Germany, as well as bigger clubs in Belgium and the Netherlands. No offers have arrived yet and it's unclear how much it would take for Philly to agree to an immediate sale. The club could look to structure a deal to trigger in the winter, much like Brendan Aaronson (to RB Salzburg) and his brother Paxten Aaronson (to Eintracht Frankfurt).

Diego Luna,
Real Salt Lake

Real Salt Lake attacker Diego Luna opted to sign with the club from USL in part because of the pathway they laid in front of him.

RSL owner David Blitzer has ownership of several clubs in Europe and the club believed they could help Luna get there.

Nothing concrete has presented itself just yet, but interest abroad remains. He turned heads at the U-20 World Cup and has another chance on the world's stage at the Olympics this summer.

Luna, 20, has more than 100 professional appearances between RSL and El Paso.

A FEW OTHERS ...

• LA Galaxy center back Jalen Neal is one to watch, particularly with his contract expiring in 18 months.

• New York Red Bulls left back John Tolkin has had admirers abroad. This summer (or winter) may be the time for him to go if the deal is right.

• Columbus Crew goalkeeper Patrick Schulte has been linked with several Premier League clubs, though it may be a bit early for the to depart in his second season as a starter.

• Atlanta United left back Caleb Wiley may have the most potential in this group and has plenty of clubs aware of his talent, but he has been careful to choose the right next step rather than jumping at the first offer.

TIME TO MOVE ON

Not all outbound transfers are cause for developmental celebration. Some clubs will be trying to unload underperforming players if they can. In MLS that's particularly important to balance the salary cap.

Xherdan Shaqiri,
Chicago Fire

Chicago Fire attacker Xherdan Shaqiri is out of contract at the end of this season. In his third full year in the United States, it's clear the move hasn't worked for player or club. Shaqiri has 16 goals and 13 assists in 75 appearances with Chicago. The Fire has failed to make the playoffs during his time here and they have only 10 points after 14 matches this year.

If there isn't interest elsewhere, the Fire's sister club, FC Lugano, has been an outlet for several players in recent years, like Ignacio Alaseta and Kacper Przytylko.

Aaron Boupendza,
FC Cincinnati

Aaron Boupendza's time in MLS is likely to come to a close this summer, even if it may be difficult for FC Cincinnati to find a suitor right now.

The club was already ready to cut ties and move on from the striker before his jaw was broken in an altercation at a bar a few weeks ago. He's had his moments in MLS, but has also been suspended by both Cincinnati and the Gabon national team.

Cincinnati paid \$7 million for Boupendza. They are unlikely to receive anything close to that figure back in a deal to send him out and open a DP spot. Another complicating factor is that Boupendza has already played in Turkey, Saudi Arabia and China, three potential markets that could afford his current salary and acquisition costs. Boupendza has nine goals and four assists in 31 matches for Cincinnati. He's still recovering from the broken jaw. It's possible he's played his last game for the club.

Giacomio Vriani,
New England Revolution

Another underperforming attacking DP, Giacomo Vriani is under contract with New England through next season. He has been a regular in the starting XI this season, but hasn't contributed enough. Just two goals in 11 appearances, to bring his total to 15 goals and four assists in 58 appearances with the Revs.

New England spent around \$4 million to sign Vriani from Juventus in the summer of 2022, following the departure of Adam Buksa.

Talles Magno, NYCFC

It feels odd to group the 21-year-old Talles Magno here, but he just hasn't started consistently, whether due to injury or tactical decisions. The talent is there for Magno, but his value will continue to depreciate the longer he sits on the bench. The 21-year-old has played only six minutes this season before being out with injury. He's been an unused substitute in each of the club's last four games.

With all the options NYCFC has in attack, perhaps the best outcome for all parties would be a move abroad. Last summer, Bologna made a loan offer, but NYCFC were only interested in a straight sale.

Emanuel Reynoso,
Minnesota United

Emanuel Reynoso once again had an extended, unexecuted absence this year after doing the same in 2023. A separation is coming this summer, one way or another.

The Athletic reported on Tuesday that Liga MX side Club Tijuana are in advanced talks to sign Reynoso. No deal is done or agreed yet, but talks are advanced.