

NASHVILLE TOTAL SPORTS

MATCH REPORT | CONCACAF Champions Cup 2026 | Round of 16 - Leg 2 of 2

By: Claudio Villalobos | Editor, Nashville Total Sports



Brian Schwake erupts in celebration at Chase Stadium. Nashville SC advances to the Quarterfinals of the CONCACAF Champions Cup for the first time in club history. | Photo: CONCACAF

INTER MIAMI CF

L. Messi (7')

1

1

NASHVILLE SC

C. Espinoza (74')

NSH ADVANCES TO QUARTERFINALS | Aggregate: 1-1 (Away Goals)

Wednesday, March 18, 2026 | Chase Stadium, Fort Lauderdale, FL

Messi's 900th career goal wasn't enough. On a night when soccer history had its own chapter written in Fort Lauderdale, the Argentine legend struck a milestone for the ages in just the seventh minute. But Nashville SC had their own story to tell, and Cristian Espinoza delivered it in golden ink at the 74th minute. The 1-1 draw at Chase Stadium was all the Boys in Gold needed to eliminate the reigning MLS champion and advance to the Quarterfinals of the CONCACAF Champions Cup for the first time in club history.

ACT ONE: MESSI'S GOAL #900

7'

Lionel Messi (C) — CAREER GOAL #900



Lionel Messi celebrates his 900th career goal, the milestone that shook the soccer world from Fort Lauderdale. | Photo: CONCACAF

It all happened in just seven minutes. Inter Miami seized control from the opening whistle, with Messi gliding across the pitch with that characteristic freedom only the truly gifted allow themselves. A sharp combination through the lines left the Argentine captain one-on-one with Nashville's defense. With his magical left foot, Messi twisted and threaded the ball through Jeisson Palacios' legs, leaving Brian Schwake with no chance. Chase Stadium erupted. The world witnessed the 900th goal of the greatest player of all time, drawing level with Cristiano Ronaldo in that mythical milestone.

For Nashville, it was a gut punch. Going behind in Fort Lauderdale, with the beast unleashed from the opening exchanges, put B.J. Callaghan's side in front of their biggest test of the season. But the Coyotes have character — and this was precisely the night they proved it.

ACT TWO: NASHVILLE DOESN'T BLINK

Head coach B.J. Callaghan reshuffled his pieces at halftime. Nashville needed a goal to advance on away goals, and that reality transformed the team's mentality in the second half. The double substitution bringing on Reed Baker-Whiting for Lovitz and Alex Muyl for Madrigal in the 58th minute injected pace and width into the flanks.

Nashville's best chance before the equalizer came in the 67th minute. Hany Mukhtar stormed forward on a powerful run and found himself alone in front of Dayne St. Clair. Inter Miami protested offside, and replays gave the Herons some reason to complain, but the referee waved play on. The German captain, however, could not finish and sent the ball wide. A sigh of relief for Miami that lasted exactly seven minutes.

THE GOAL THAT MAKES HISTORY

74'

Cristian Espinoza — MVP of the Match

Assist: Alex Muyl (shot — deflection off Gonzalo Lujan)



Cristian Espinoza drops to his knees in celebration of the historic goal. Behind him, Yazbek and Najjar sprint to join the party. | Photo: CONCACAF

The 74th minute will be etched into the collective memory of Nashville's fanbase forever. Alex Muyl drove a shot from the edge of the box and Gonzalo Lujan blocked it with a sliding challenge; the ball looped awkwardly into the air, catching Dayne St. Clair in an impossible position. The Canadian goalkeeper attempted to punch it clear but his momentum carried him — along with three teammates — over the goal line. Cristian Espinoza, lurking like a predator in the six-yard box, had the easiest and most important goal of his life. The 1-1 scoreline meant Nashville SC were through on away goals.

It was his first goal in the CONCACAF Champions Cup and his fifth goal contribution of the season. A player at the peak of his powers who chose the biggest stage to deliver.

THE FINAL MINUTES: A WARRIOR'S DEFENSIVE STAND

The final 16 minutes plus stoppage time were a beautiful agony for Nashville supporters. Inter Miami threw everything forward: Javier Mascherano sent Luis Suarez onto the field in the 78th minute, desperate for the goal that would keep Miami alive. Messi had a clear look in added time, but his shot was blocked by Nashville's backline. Brian Schwake, unflappable as he has been all season, commanded his defense with authority.

When the final whistle blew, Nashville SC had made history. The Boys in Gold eliminated the reigning MLS champion and the greatest player in the world, on his own turf, in their finest away performance in international competition.

"I think we have a group in that locker room that believes a lot in what we do. I think you saw that all night. A relentless spirit that kept fighting no matter what happened on the field. They stuck together, they were rewarded with the goal and they finished strong. So right now, very proud of the whole group and a true team performance. I can tell you that the locker room is full of confidence again. This is a tournament that we respect a lot. We've played against them many times, very good games, and we want to be a team that advances in big tournaments. We want to be a team that chases trophies. We want to be a club that does that, you have to earn your way into each next round. And I think after two games, we earned our way into the next round."

— B.J. Callaghan, Head Coach Nashville SC | Post-match press conference

"A very sad night, a lot of disappointment. We had the belief that we could advance in the competition. A tie that was very, very even and well, today we were in the game, we had some chances to score another goal or two, especially in the first half. But the game was clearly in danger because it was a very tight match against a great opponent. Unfortunately we conceded a goal on a somewhat unfortunate play, a lot of things happen and well, we're out. The reality is that I have nothing to reproach the players for. They did everything possible and well, obviously the one responsible for this elimination is clearly me."

— Javier Mascherano, Head Coach Inter Miami CF | Post-match press conference

GOALS SUMMARY

7' **Lionel Messi — Career Goal #900**

74' **Cristian Espinoza — Qualifier Goal**
Assist: Alex Muyl (deflection off Gonzalo Lujan)

LINEUPS

NASHVILLE SC	
Brian Schwake	Goalkeeper
Dan Lovitz	Baker-Whiting 58'
Jeisson Palacios	Center back
Maxwell Woledzi	Center back
Andy Najjar	Bauer 86'
Matthew Corcoran	Tagseth 71'
Cristian Espinoza	GOAL 74' - MVP
Patrick Yazbek	Midfielder

INTER MIAMI CF	
Dayne St. Clair	Goalkeeper
Gonzalo Lujan	Defender
Sergio Regulon	N. Allen 40'
Facundo Mura	L. Suarez 78'
Micael Dos Santos	Defender
Rodrigo De Paul	Midfielder
Telasco Segovia	Silvetti 61'
Yannick Bright	D. Ayala 78'

Hany Mukhtar (C)	Acosta 85'
Warren Madrigal	A. Muyl 58'
Sam Surridge	Forward

Lionel Messi (C)	GOAL 7' - Career Goal #900
German Berterame	Forward
Tadeo Allende	Winger

PHOTO GALLERY

Photos: CONCACAF



Messi celebrates his 900th career goal with his Inter Miami teammates.



Berterame tries to find space through Nashville's compact defensive block.



Hany Mukhtar organizes Nashville's play in Inter Miami's half.



Messi and a Nashville defender battle for possession in the rain.



Messi drives forward against Nashville's pressure in the second half.



Espinoza and Dos Santos contest a key duel in midfield.

HISTORICAL MILESTONE

Nashville SC advances to the CONCACAF Champions Cup Quarterfinals for the FIRST TIME in club history. The team remains unbeaten through their first 8 matches of the 2026 season (5W-0L-3D), the best start in franchise history. Brian Schwake remains unbeaten in his first 11 starts for the club. Next opponent: Winner of Philadelphia Union vs. Club America.