STRYKERS GAME NOTES

MATCHDAY 1
AT SAN DIEGO SOCKERS

Saturday, November 28 · Frontwave Arena
San Diego, Calif. · 6:05 pm PT · Yahoo Sports Network

2025-26 IN REVIEW

Records
Empire: 12-11-1 (33 points, 6th in MASL)
San Diego: 16-6-2 (44 points, 1st in MASL)

Points Leaders
Empire: Justin Stinson, 27 (15 G, 12 A)
San Diego: Nick Perera, 36 (19 G, 17 A)

Leading Goalscorers
Empire: Justin Stinson/Mounir Alami; 15
San Diego: Nick Perera, 19

Assist Leaders
Empire: Robert Palmer, 14
San Diego: Nick Perera, 17

Points Per Game Leaders
Empire: Mounir Alami, 1.2
San Diego: 3 Players, 1.6

Blocks Leaders
Empire: Robert Palmer, 45
San Diego: Mitchell Cardenas, 26

Power Play Goals Leaders
Empire: Anthony Powell, 2
San Diego: Nick Perera/Sebastian Mendez (2)

2026-27 SCHEDULE

Date	Opponent	Time
Nov. 28	at San Diego Sockers	6:05 pm
Dec. 13	vs. San Diego Sockers	5:05 pm
Dec. 17	vs. Utica City FC	7:05 pm
Dec. 19	at Baltimore Blast	3:05 pm
Dec. 20	at Lehigh Valley Spirits	12:05 pm
Dec. 27	at San Diego Sockers	4:35 pm
Jan. 3	at Tacoma Stars	4:05 pm
Jan. 14	vs. Tacoma Stars	7:05 pm
Jan. 16	at Milwaukee Wave	4:05 pm
Jan. 23	at Kansas City Comets	4:05 pm
Jan. 24	vs. Kansas City Comets	6:05 pm
Feb. 7	vs. San Diego Sockers	5:05 pm
Feb. 13	at St. Louis Ambush	5:05 pm
Feb. 18	vs. Tacoma Stars	7:05 pm
Feb. 21	vs. San Diego Sockers	5:05 pm
Feb. 28	vs. Lehigh Valley Spirits	5:05 pm
Mar. 7	vs. St. Louis Ambush	5:05 pm
Mar. 11	vs. Milwaukee Wave	7:05 pm
Mar. 14	at Utica City FC	12:05 pm
Mar. 20	at San Diego Sockers	6:05 pm
Mar. 24	vs. St. Louis Ambush	7:05 pm
Mar. 26	at Tacoma Stars	7:05 pm
Mar. 28	vs. Baltimore Blast	5:05 pm
Apr. 3	at Baltimore Blast	3:05 pm

All times Pacific Standard Time
All home matches played at Toyota Arena

BY THE NUMBERS

45 Strykers head coach Robert Palmer ranked third in the MASL last season with 45 blocked shots

115 Empire conceded just 115 goals last season, the fewest in the MASL

5 Brian Orozco ranked in the top five in last year's MASL regular season with a 4.98 GAA and a .698 save percentage

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MATCH PREVIEW

Empire Strykers Open 2026-27 Season at San Diego
Strykers open year two of Palmer era in San Diego

Ontario, Calif. — The Empire Strykers kick off year two of the Robert Palmer era on Saturday, November 28, when they make the two-hour trip down the 15 freeway to visit the San Diego Sockers. Kickoff is scheduled for 6:05 pm PT from Frontwave Arena.

Empire is coming off a second consecutive playoff berth after finishing with a 12-11-1 league record and a three-match win streak to cap the regular season. The year began with a thrilling 5-4 overtime win at San Diego, a result the club will look to duplicate this weekend ahead of what hopes to be another successful year.

“We want to play on the front foot, at a high intensity and do everything with intent,” Palmer said. “With the ball, we want to play forward and attack with purpose. Without it, we want to hunt together to get it back.”

Saturday’s season opener will also be the first match in league history and first of 25 in the Major Arena Soccer League (MASL) this season to air on Yahoo Sports Network, after the league announced the full schedule on Tuesday.

The Strykers return to the pitch with a reupholstered lineup, re-signing Leo Espinoza after the veteran Chilean forward spent a season on loan with Baltimore. Empire also locked up Qudus Lawal, Polo Hernandez, Mounir Alami, and Alan Perez for extended stints with the club.

“Bringing those guys back gives the group confidence. They are familiar with the culture and organization. It shows our new players what we expect in training and on game day,” said Palmer, expressing his excitement to continue what he started in a player-coach role.

Empire will also look to build on its defense after allowing the fewest goals in the MASL last season. In net, Palmer retains Brian Orozco, who yielded just 4.98 goals per contest last season for third league-wide. Orozco posted a .698 save percentage, also good for a top-five standings across the MASL.

Orozco then turned it up in the playoffs, leading the postseason field with a 1.78 goals against average and ranking third with a .714 save percentage.

San Diego enters as reigning Ron Newman Cup champions after going 16-6-2 last year, also closing the regular season on a three-match win streak.

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ACTIVE ROSTER

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Birthdate	Hometown
	Daniel Anthony Cruz Jr.				
	Gerrardo Cazares				
	Salvador Castillo Jr.				
0	Brandon Gomez	GK	5-10	2/13/1996	Los Angeles, Calif.
1	Brian Orozco	GK	5-10	10/15/2001	Colton, Calif.
3	Qudus Lawal	F/M	5-10	9/4/1995	Chicago, Ill.
5	Mounir Alami	F	5-11	7/16/1999	Qued Zem, Mexico
7	Jorge DeLeon	M	5-10	12/3/1992	Waco, Texas
8	Leopoldo “Polo” Hernandez	M	6-0	6/16/1999	
9	Leonardo Espinoza	-	6-0	10/1/1992	Kissimmee, Fla.
10	Justin Stinson	M	5-10	5/29/1997	St. Charles, Mo.
14	Dayerson Graterol	M		5/3/2003	Nací en Venezuela, Trujillo
18	Walter Diaz González	F	6-2	3/18/1996	La Habana, Cuba
19	Issak Somow	F	6-1	11/23/1997	Nairobi, Keyna
20	Alan Perez	M/D	5-11	3/31/1999	Los Angeles, Calif.
21	Andy Reyes	D	5-4	6/25/1992	San Diego, Calif.
22	Steven Chavez	M	5-7	10/2/1996	Arlington, Texas
30	Zakhar Shkidchenko	M	-	11/25/2000	Kyiv, Ukraine
33	Marco Fabián	M	5-7	6/21/1989	Guadalajara, Mexico
47	Antonio De La Torre	M	6-3	11/21/1998	Dodge City, Kan.
67	Ali Somow	M	-	6/23/2002	Nairobi, Keyna
99	Barbaro Shilier	F	6-4	12/4/1997	Havana, Cuba

INACTIVE ROSTER

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Birthdate	Hometown
4	Filipe Dutra	D	-	9/30/1998	Naugatuck, Conn.
34	Genaro Castillo	F	5-11	5/25/1993	Monterrey, Mexico
66	James Togbah	D	5-10	10/27/1995	Monrovia, Liberia
92	Anthony Powell	F	5-7	7/15/1996	Fort Worth, Texas

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Brian **Orozco**	oh-ROZ-koh
Qudus Lawal	KOO-deuce low-WAH
Jorge **DeLeon**	day lee-OWN
Dayerson **Graterol**	GRAT-err-awl
Issak Somow	EE-sak SOH-moe
Zakhar Shkidchenko	zuh-CAR
Genaro Castillo	HENN-uh-ro cass-TEE-yoh
James **Togbah**	TOGG-buh

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PALMER GETS THE KEYS
Robert Palmer was officially named Empire Strykers head coach on May 4, 2026, removing the player-coach title he owned after carrying the Strykers into last year's Ron Newman Cup Playoffs.

Palmer, one of the most respected defenders in Major Arena Soccer League history, has been a central figure for the club as both a player and captain.

A former MASL Defender of the Year and one of the league's most accomplished players, Palmer brings championship experience, tactical understanding, and a deep connection to the Strykers locker room. His transition from player and captain to Head Coach marks an important new chapter for both Palmer and the organization. Palmer will also be evaluating and assembling his coaching staff, including identifying assistant coaches for the upcoming season to help with his role as being a player-coach for at least the upcoming 2026-27 season.

COACH IZZY
Perhaps the final tweak heading into the new season is the addition of club historical figure Israel "Izzy" Sesay as an assistant coach.

Sesay, a native of Sierra Leone, began his professional career with the Los Angeles Galaxy as a teenager, eventually making his way to the Milwaukee Wave in 2012.

Sesay reached 100 career MASL regular season points in January of 2024 and hung up the boots following the 2024-25 season with Empire. He was named an assistant coach in 2023 while continuing his playing career.

STRYKERS VS. SAN DIEGO
Empire opens the season against the defending Ron Newman Cup champions San Diego Sockers on Saturday night at Frontwave Arena.

The Strykers are looking to replicate their efforts from last year's season opener, when Mounir Alami sealed the deal in overtime to snap a 14-match skid in the fixture.

NEW FACES
Veteran experience graced the Strykers this offseason with the additions of Palmer and Sesay to the bench.

On the pitch, Empire just on Friday brought in James Togbah from St. Louis and signed Daniel Anthony Cruz Jr., Gerrardo Cazares, Salvador Castillo Jr., and Brandon Gomez.

The Strykers extended the contracts of Qudus Lawal, Leonardo Espinoza, Polo Hernandez, Mounir Alami, and Alan Perez.

ALL-LEAGUE STANDOUTS RETURN
A couple of Second Team All-MASL standouts return for Empire in head coach Robert Palmer and midfielder Justin Stinson.

Palmer ranked third in the league last year with 45 blocks while Stinson recorded a team-high 27 points (15 G, 12 A).

REYES TO LEAD EMPIRE PULSE
San Diego native and current Strykers player Andy Reyes has been tabbed to lead the Empire Pulse, the Strykers' women's indoor team, in its inaugural MASL Women's Cup campaign.

During his initial five-season stint with the Inland Empire club, Reyes established himself as a reliable and versatile player, appearing in all 24 regular-season matches during the 2018–19 campaign. The veteran defender and midfielder subsequently spent time with the San Diego Sockers and Texas Outlaws before returning to Empire in November 2024.

The appointment comes as the Empire organization expands its professional soccer operations through the introduction of the Empire Pulse, providing female athletes with additional opportunities to compete at the professional level while bringing women's arena soccer to the Inland Empire.

Reyes will remain an active member of the Strykers roster throughout the 2026–27 MASL season while overseeing the Pulse's preparations for their inaugural MASL Women's Cup campaign.

STRYKERS FEATURE AT EL CLASHICO
Numerous Empire Strykers featured in El Clashico earlier this month at Toyota Arena.

The two sides met on November 8 in a historic mixed-gender fixture, with the US taking a 4-1 victory.

For Mexico, Marco Fabián led the way alongside Brandon Gomez, Alan Pérez, and Polo Hernandez. For the United States, the Strykers were represented by Justin Stinson, Brian Orozco, and new Empire Pulse head coach Andy Reyes.

Orozco was named USA Men's MVP while Kelsey Keown took USA Women's MVP.

STRYKERS' NEW WOMEN'S SIDE, EMPIRE PULSE, TO COMPETE IN CHALLENGE CUP
The Empire Strykers have announced that their newly established professional women's team, Empire Pulse, will compete in the inaugural Major Arena Soccer League (MASL) Women's National Challenge Cup, a new national competition featuring five women's arena soccer teams from across the United States.

Announced in September 2026, Empire Pulse was established as the sister club of the Empire Strykers, bringing a permanent professional women's arena soccer program to the Inland Empire. The team's participation in the National Challenge Cup will mark its first competitive campaign, with home matches set to take place at Toyota Arena in Ontario.

The competition will feature a single, unified standings table, with each participating team playing four opening-round matches. The top two teams will advance to a single-game championship final to determine the inaugural MASL Women's National Challenge Cup champion.

The Strykers organization has spent the past several seasons developing opportunities for women's arena soccer through showcase matches and community initiatives. Those efforts culminated in the September announcement of Empire Pulse, with the organization seeking to expand professional playing opportunities for women while creating additional pathways into coaching, sports business and leadership.

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