**Second Round Open Cup April 2 at 730pm**

**By: Katelyn Snyder**

On April 2, Independence brought the Open Cup to their home stadium. They hosted South Carolina United Heat, who had just come off a win themselves. The boys expected them to be on a high after beating Crown Legacy, Charlotte FC’s MLS Next Team. Their game was close but the Heat finished their chance in the last 5 min of the game on a penalty kick. With both teams coming off a win, this match would be a hard-fought battle for whoever would claim the victory.

Heat had been known to sit back and then counterattack. Because of this, Independence needed to press, knowing they would have the space. Also, they needed to keep tight control of the ball to prevent a loss of possession, leading to a potential attack from their opponents. The boys expected to have most of the possession but had to stay sharp, keeping an eye out for United to strike.

Coach Jefferies organized the boys in a 3-4-3 formation. Pack remained at the goal, with Sorenson, Roberts, Spielman, and Dimick as his defenders. The center had Nidaye, Alverez and Djedje. Then, as attackers, Mbuyu, Obregon, and Johnson. With success in the last round, Coach chose to use the same lineup as before but with one minor change: Djedje was in for Ciss. The game began as expected: Independence held most possessions, and United sat back. Both teams were evenly matched throughout the first half. Neither had many opportunities on goal.

In hopes of avoiding overtime or penalty kicks, Independence continued high pressure. Unfortunately, the Heat held firm and the second half ended 0-0. As they moved to overtime, Obregon crossed the ball to Mbuyu, giving them their most significant opportunity on goal. Heat responded with two opportunities on goal. First, they slid an attacker through for a one-on-one to goal. Pack made a beautiful save, keeping the score a tie. Next, with the ball bouncing off deflections, they tried to head the ball but missed. Johnson was the next to make a big move to goal. Heat’s defender missed a kick, landing the ball right before Alverez. He blasted a shot, but it sailed over the post.

You could see the exhaustion of both teams. With heavy legs, they moved on to penalty kicks. Independence was first up. Obregon stepped into the box and missed his shot. United followed by getting theirs in the back of the net! Up next was Spielman. He managed to get the ball in goal for a tie. Heat followed with another finish. The boys were down by one but still in the game. Belmar stepped up to get them back on track with another goal. Pack saved the next shot on goal, allowing the boys to get ahead. Mbuyu scored his goal, and Heat followed, intending to tie it up. Ngah was the final shot. His goal secured a spot for Independence in the next round! It was a draining match, but they earned the results they wanted.