

## KEANE YOU BELIEVE IT

ORANGE, Calif.—LA Galaxy captain Robbie Keane has returned to training after a four-week recovery from knee surgery. While the news may come as a relief to Galaxy fans, the question can be asked—should it?

In the 2015 season, the five-time MLS champions went 12-8-4 with Keane and 2-3-5 without him. The Irish international scored 20 goals in 24 games while notching a not-too-shabby eight assists. So why would his absence improve a team that's been reliant on his goal-scoring capabilities?

The unavailability of Keane forced head coach Bruce Arena into some tactical changes, including formational and positional tweaks. The LA Galaxy adjusted from a 4-4-2 to a 4-2-3-1, moving U.S. international Gyasi Zardes to a traditional number nine role and sliding Giovanni dos Santos back to a creative playmaker.

The positional changes relieve Dos Santos of many defensive duties and allow Zardes to hold up the ball and give the outside midfielders time to make runs in behind the opposition's backline.

The changes also specify player roles in a way that a Keane-era Galaxy team has never done. Having a forward capable of picking up the ball in deep positions and creating can be extremely valuable—and has been for the Galaxy. However, with likely the most individually talented squad in the MLS, that role isn't all that necessary. The talent depth at each position is enough for a more traditional, technical style of play, one that can look innovative and artistic purely through its individual execution.

This is where the Keane-less Galaxy has found its success over the last couple games. In Saturday night's 5-2 demolition of previously undefeated Real Salt Lake, five different Galaxy players found the scoresheet. The points of attack shifted and were created through different avenues. A team historically valuing possession felt comfortable sending long-balls to Zardes from its own center back, an outlet Keane cannot provide.

With all that being said, the comparison is not quite fair. A sample size of a handful of games with Keane and without him are not significant enough to suggest sidelining the prolific striker. A revamped Galaxy squad could also be continuing to build chemistry in the early portion of the campaign, improving as the season progresses. Only Keane's return will provide further insight into his contribution and role on the team. Until then, we can just stop, stare and say, "Keane you believe it?"