The Weekly Chowdah:

DEFYING EXPECTATIONS, THE NEW ENGLAND REVOLUTION ARE PLAYOFF BOUND

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Last Wednesday, on Oct. 14, the New England Revolution defeated FC Cincinnati 3-2 in Cincinnati, Ohio. Forward Dor Turgeman recorded a brace with a goal scored in each half, and winger Peyton Miller recorded an assist on each of those goals. Goalie Matt Turner also helped stave off a fierce Cincinnati attack that recorded 22 shots, eight of which were on target.

With 49 points accumulated over the course of the season and, at the time, five games to spare, New England could not drop below the ninth seed in the Eastern Conference. This guaranteed a playoff berth for the team — their first since 2023.

On Sunday, New England earned a 1-0 win against playoff-bound Chicago Fire FC at home in Foxborough. This win increased their point total to 52, granting the team a comfortable lead in the standings that will ultimately secure them a guaranteed spot in round one and home-field advantage.

If standings remain relatively stable over the next couple of weeks and New England stays as the No. 3 seed, they will once again face off against the Philadelphia Union, a rematch from the 2023 playoffs. New England will undoubtedly look to improve their 2023 performance, where they got swept by Philadelphia in two games.

New England's 2026 performance has come as a big surprise to many. The team was coming off a rough 2025 campaign where they finished 11th in the Eastern Conference, only accumulating 36 points and notching nine wins. Head coach Caleb Porter was then promptly fired after just one season with the team. To put it succinctly, many thought the future was bleak last offseason. It was believed they were one of the worst teams in the league going into 2026.

On Nov. 10, 2025, New England announced the hiring of Marko Mitrovi, the 10th coach in franchise history. Mitrović previously coached the U-20 US Men's National Team to a moderate amount of success, and this success helped him earn what would be his first head coaching role with a professional team. Though the franchise and fans had faith in him, it was shocking to see just how quickly Mitrović turned the team's prospects around.

In the 14 weeks leading up to the mid-season break for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, New England won eight games, including a seven-week stretch in which they didn't lose a single match and one game against FC Cincinnati where they routed them 6-0 at Gillette Stadium. The few poor games came against Nashville SC, who are clearly playing at a level far above any other MLS team this season.

Mitrović's success has been attributed to several things, but one of the biggest ones is his tactical ability. He employs a very fluid and aggressive style of play that balances the stamina that comes from the team's youth and the experience and game-awareness of the team's veteran players.

This style of place directly feeds and strengthens the mentality that Mitrović hoped to instill in the team upon arriving in Foxborough.

"We will be very aggressive," Mitrović stated in his opening press conference with the team, "We have to understand that we go out there to give everything we have."

Mitrović proved this wasn't just coach-speak with the performances that New England has put on throughout the season.

At the heart of Mitrović's system is captain and midfielder Carles Gil. Since joining New England in 2019, Gil has slowly become a franchise legend after multiple successful individual seasons with the team. He continued his ongoing successful MLS career in 2026 with 12 goals and 10 assists. He also leads the MLS this season in key passes with 84 and is third in total touches with 2,427.

Gil's expertise and ability in the midfield and right-wing has allowed other players on the team to shine. For example, Miller is a homegrown prospect from Unionville, Conn. and has asserted himself as an emerging star with his play this season. The 18-year-old has seven goals and four assists so far and continues to grow his role in New England's attack.

Given all the success, it's important to keep this season in perspective. The team, by all accounts, has played far above any reasonable expectations they had coming into 2026. Therefore, it's easy to miss some glaring issues the team still has. The two back-to-back 0-3 losses to Real Salt Lake and Seattle Sounders FC before clinching a playoff berth against FC Cincinnati served as the necessary perspective check for the fans and the team.

In a way, they are very similar to the 2025 New England Patriots, who also defied very low expectations coming into the season. That team faced immense criticism following what many outside of New England saw as a poor playoff showing despite making the Super Bowl, and proof they weren't as good as their record suggested.

The New England Revolution have already faced similar criticisms, particularly from US national team legend and commentator Landon Donovan, who has continued to rag on the team following those two losses.

Ultimately, New England's playoff berth and the 2026 season are more of an indicator of the team's growth and potential rather than of if they are truly good "now." Mitrović has made this clear with recent comments about balancing short-and long-term goals, as well as appreciating the work done to get to this point, even when emotions regarding game-to-game performances remain present.

When adopting Mitrović's viewpoint, it becomes very easy to see that the New England Revolution's 2026 season has been a massive success, regardless of if they are truly "contenders" in the upcoming MLS Cup Playoffs.



New England Revolution Defender, Ilay Feingold in a game against the Chicago Fire FC. New England won 1-0.
PHOTO COURTESY OF NEW ENGLAND REVOLUTION ON FACEBOOK



New England Revolution players celebrate after defeating the Chicago Fire FC. The team won 1-0.
PHOTO COURTESY OF NEW ENGLAND REVOLUTION ON FACEBOOK



Notre Dame freshman wide receiver, Devin Fitzgerald, before a game against BYU on Oct. 17. BYU won the game in a 28-24 upset.
PHOTO COURTESY OF NOTRE DAME FOOTBALL ON FACEBOOK

Lombardi's Lineup:

HOW WILL A 24–TEAM PLAYOFF AFFECT COLLEGE FOOTBALL?

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A 24-team College Football Playoff is on the horizon, bringing massive shifts to the sport as soon as next year.

After expanding to 12 teams in 2024, that number is set to double in 2027, pending official approval. The proposed agreement would come with a $325 million annual broadcasting deal with ESPN to be the sole broadcaster of the tournament.

Alongside this expansion, conference tournaments will also become a thing of the past, with regular season champions receiving automatic bids instead. This comes just a year after 7-5 Duke won the ACC championship, allowing two Group of Six programs to reach the playoffs in 2025. Under the new model, the regular season champion from the SEC, Big Ten, Big 12 and ACC, as well as the highest-ranked Group of Six team, will earn an automatic bid. The remaining 19 spots will go to at-large teams.

The new system would feature a first-round bye for the top eight teams, and on-campus matchups hosted by the higher seed. The New Years Six bowls will be played in the quarterfinal and semifinal rounds, similar to the current format.

The Big Ten was the biggest proponent of expansion, and the SEC eventually joined the initiative, both conferences looking to send more of its programs to the playoffs. If the season ended today, the 24-team playoff field would include nine SEC and five Big Ten programs, more than half of the field.

The primary concern surrounding the expanded playoff is that it devalues regular season games. In a sport that previously stressed that every week matters, teams can now take multiple losses and still comfortably make the cut.

Rivalry week currently takes place right at the end of the regular season, but a bigger playoff could also dilute the heated environments that separate college football from any other sport. Many critics argue that instead of these matchups feeling like a fight for survival, they will become low-stakes meetings to decide seeding.

The SEC demanded that all power conference teams schedule at least ten games against high level opponents, meaning other Power Four schools or Notre Dame. This stipulation aims to prevent teams from scheduling easy opponents to boost their chances of making the playoffs, supposedly leveling the playing field.

If this were to go into effect, it could inadvertently further widen the gap between the Group of Six and Power Four. Many top programs are already reluctant to schedule Group of Six contenders, considering they see it as an unnecessary risk. If Power Four programs are limited to just two non-Power Four games, we will likely see more buy games against FCS or bottom-barrel FBS teams, denying the best of the smaller conferences a chance to boost their resume. Despite the playoff field being wider, this change could make it even more difficult for these schools to compete for an at-large.

Another effect the new playoff could have is further destruction of bowl season. With nearly every ranked team heading to the playoffs, every other bowl game will be further cemented as a meaningless exhibition. A few bowls have already begun to fold due to the 12-team playoff, so an even larger field could turn into a massive crisis for the minor bowls.

Notre Dame opting out of the Pop-Tarts Bowl last season may have been the tipping point. It was already routine for star players to opt out of non-playoff bowl games since they were seen as unnecessary injury risks. With entire teams choosing not to play these games, something needs to change to make the model sustainable again.

At its core, the push for playoff expansion is about the money involved. With ESPN willing to pay hundreds of millions of dollars, and individual conferences chasing larger payouts, it's no surprise that these proposals have come to fruition so soon.

A 24-team College Football Playoff feels increasingly inevitable, so fans of the sport will be forced to adapt. However, this deal may exacerbate the existing issues within college athletics, benefitting the elite programs while slowly eroding the unique soul and history of college football.