

# Major League Soccer Media Conference

Thursday, June 23, 2022

**Commissioner Don Garber**

**Mayor Muriel Bowser**

**Danita Johnson**

**Max Brown**

Press Conference



DAVE JOHNSON: I show up with this crew, and something good must be about to happen. There was a pretty cool video playing as well. I'm Dave Johnson. I'm the voice of D.C. United; have been for the last 27 years, I'm proud to say.

God, I love this team, I love this sport, and I love this city. That's important. We love this city. It is our nation's capitol.

A special welcome to all that are not with us today. Maybe you're watching online worldwide because soccer is the world's game, and we think of Washington, D.C. as the world's city.

Here today we're going to talk about -- and this is why it's an exciting day in my mind. What happens when there's belief in a sport, belief in a city, and also belief in people, and those people on the stage you're going to be hearing from today are very special people.

To my left, immediate left, is Major League Soccer Commissioner Don Garber. And trust me, when you invite Don someplace, something good happens. So we're here for a great announcement.

To Don's left is the president of business operations, Danita Johnson of D.C. United. Little sidenote, Danita is just so dynamic and represents not only our diverse, dynamic ownership, but our front office in D.C. United, which represents, I think, the diverse, dynamic city that we have.

When I first met Danita Johnson 20 years ago without meeting her because I also do the Washington Wizards, as you might know, my name is Dave Johnson. My e-mail was DJohnson. She was working at the time for the Washington Mystics, and sometimes I would get her

e-mails, and I was so impressed because she was all about the fan experience and making it happen.

I'm thinking, who is this person that everyone is saying can you make my tickets better? I want to be a fan. I want to buy season tickets. So I was always nice, and I always forwarded it to the right person, and I'm glad.

Now, Danita doesn't let me have a D.C. United e-mail. That's okay. But she is making it happen for D.C. United.

Of course someone who needs no introduction but I will give an introduction, our honorable mayor of our nation's capitol, Washington, D.C., D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser.

I hope you feel that applause, because Muriel Bowser is on the verge of doing something that only one other person did, a very special person in our city did, become the three-time mayor of our city.

And a very special person who cared about this city, mayor Marion Barry is that three-time person. I heard you say on your election night you were going to follow in his footsteps. I knew what she meant. She didn't mean she was going to show up 45 minutes late to every press conference.

What needs to be said -- and you know this, Muriel Bowser -- the reason Marion Barry was always late, and that's why today in part it's a celebration of a belief in people. Because Marion Barry was busy doing what? He was talking to the citizens of Washington, D.C.

Those are the people he wanted to talk to. He didn't care about the media, nor should he. He really cared about the city and the people. And Muriel Bowser also should get the award for the best -- if you're watching worldwide, you probably hear terrible political commercials that make you cringe, but I mean to tell you, you ran a campaign that was so special -- there was a woman with a clear voice, but you could tell she's a little bit older, and she stated all of Muriel Bowser's accomplishments.

In the end, she just says, and please vote for Muriel Bowser, my daughter.

So we have to hire Joan Bowser to sell something, because Joan -- I wasn't going to vote for you, but if Joan

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says, I thought I'd better vote.

Also up here is Events D.C. chairman Max Brown. Let's say hello to Max. Max is going to spend only 20 minutes with us. We have a beautiful Washington Convention Center. It's a long walk from where we are right now, but it's happening in D.C. Check out Events D.C. website, and of course our special announcement that will be made will be part of Events D.C. as well.

So that's who we're going to hear from today.

I mentioned this is a celebration really of belief in a city, and think about it, 30 years ago, as I look down -- let's, by the way, have a nice round of applause for Ben Olsen, Ryan Neilsen, Alecko Eskandarian, and the coolest guy on the planet, Jaime Moreno.

Also, I still think the best player ever in Major League Soccer, and no one is going to argue with me on that, so special, all four to our league.

You think about it, 30 years ago we were playing professional soccer in this country in high school stadiums. 20 years ago or something like that, do you remember, we were marching in the streets of this city just trying to get support for a stadium, and now we are here at Audi Field because Jason Levien and his partners believed in the city.

Because what's the first part of our club's name? D.C., D.C., it always has been and always will be. Jason Levien and his partners believed in the city, and so where we're coming to you today, you may not know this if you're watching live, we're at Audi field in Washington, D.C., at the EagleBank Club.

So my right, if you step off the patio, that's the capitol down the street, that's the Washington Monument to my left. According to Forbes Magazine in 2018, we're in the middle of the coolest neighborhood on the planet, the Navy Yard in Washington, D.C.

I believe I read that in Forbes. If not, I never let the facts get in the way of a good story, but it feels like the coolest neighborhood. It's a neighborhood where things are happening. I think about the other night, and through our wonderful sponsors Audi, Bayern Munich is coming to Audi Field this summer.

And what our name is about, we have the most diverse, dynamic front office ownership in the city, and our name is about bringing people together. So we had a party right here in the Navy yard at a place up the street. Yes, they had me at beer and brats, but either way I wanted to be there with the supporters.

We brought people together, united. That's what it's all about. It's about belief in people, belief in the city, and belief in having good times together.

We're also here today because of somebody's belief in the sport. You may know the name Lamar Hunt. He actually coined the phrase -- you all have heard of the Super Bowl, that other football's champion. He was the one that coined that phrase, Super Bowl.

But back in 1966 he believed in the sport of soccer, and he never stopped believing in the sport of soccer. His family still is involved in Major League Soccer. He was one of the founding members of Major League Soccer.

He also believed in someone I'm about to introduce. He believed that the sport professionally in this country, Major League Soccer, needed somebody to guide it to its proper place. The world sport in the United States needed that vision, needed that leadership. He believed in a guy named Don Garber.

Think about it. Under Don Garber's stewardship we are -- and I argue about this all the time with anyone who wants to listen on WTLP; like that plug, shameless I got it there -- that we are a major sport.

There are five major sports leagues in this country. When you average over 20,000 per game as a league, when you've been a part of the fabric of American and professional sports for 27 years, and when you have partners like Univision and Fox and ESPN and soon to be Apple -- some company named Apple has gotten on board Major League Soccer for \$2.5 billion -- you are Major League.

We are Major League, and all of you watching today have been a part of the journey to truly make Major League Soccer Major League.

And now for a major announcement, the gentleman I was just referring to that guided us to this place and this day, Major League Soccer Commissioner Don Garber.

(Applause.)

DON GARBER: Thanks very much, Dave. It's great to see you. Thanks to everyone for joining us today.

Major Bowser, this is very much because of you. It's rare that you have a city leader that can have the consistency and belief in a city and the idea that bringing in great partners can improve the lives of your citizens through lots and lots of business activities, Mayor Bowser, but also



through sport.

I remember so many years ago talking to you about what we needed to bring this sport to a new level, or how could we take this terrific team and give it a home that they could call their own and be a part of this growing, part of this important region.

You helped us get that, and we are here because of you and your vision. I want to thank you for that.

(Applause.)

Danita Johnson is going to be, if she isn't already, one of the great leaders in the sports industry. We're so proud, Danita, to have you leading this club and doing all the great things you're doing to drive its relevance and its business operations and to help position it as an important part of the community.

Danita, welcome. We're really proud to have you doing what you do for our club.

(Applause.)

I know we're here for an announcement, but I want to take a couple minutes and talk about the guys sitting here in the front row. I'll start with the best dressed guy of the group, Jaime. We have a national soccer Hall of Fame in our country. It's no different than the Hall of Fames of every other sports league. It has a little bit of a different bent because it is, in essence, about the whole sport, not just Major League Soccer.

The sport's been around for 100 years playing at various levels, and our league is only 25-plus, 27 years old. So the members of the Hall of Fame are people that basically have played and worn the crest representing our country.

The first person who was not a member of the U.S. National Team to get inducted into the National Soccer Hall of Fame last year, really two years ago, was Jaime. So congratulations, Jaime.

(Applause.)

I think it's really appropriate that the second person who didn't play for the U.S. National Team to get inducted into the Hall of Fame was Marco Etcheverry.

So two D.C. United greats that came to this country and helped build this club and have it become a showcase for the sport on the field so that we could have all the great things that we have off the field represented by Jaime and Marco, who's not here. Obviously I'm going to go down the

row here.

Ben Olsen, who did wear the crest and was such an important part of our national team and a great coach for D.C., a great personal friend. We have a family relationship in some ways. So, Ben, welcome to you.

(Applause.)

Ryan, you came to this country, you played for this club, you brought it some greatness, and now coaching, leaving the coaching ranks and becoming an agent, it's great to have you back, Ryan.

And I know I have to announce the All-Star Game, but this stuff actually is as important.

Alecko came to this sport because he grew up as a young kid playing for a dad who played in the NASL and was one of the more recognized players in the history of professional soccer.

Then Alecko went to school down here, came and played for D.C. United, scored a goal in the MLS All-Star Game when it was here last, but represents something that we at the league are really proud of. He went from the field to the front office, and now is a very, very important part of the league office, helping us manage our player development program.

So, Alecko, we are really excited and proud to have you part of Major League Soccer, truly are.

Two other people that I wanted to represent, and it's important that Jamil Northcutt is sitting with the MLS greats here, because it's because of guys like Jamil -- give a little wave -- who is working with our players on their post-career engagement.

We're proud of everything you do, Jamil. So thank you.

(Applause.)

Lastly but not leastly -- and he's a D.C. native -- I want to introduce Ed Foster-Simeon, who runs the United States Soccer Foundation. Ed is a guy who is helping to take our sport and embed it deeply into the community in areas where we have underserved folks that are not connected to the game.

Ed's been doing it as the executive director of the foundation for many, many years. Great friend of the league, friend of the sport, friend of U.S. Soccer, and lives here in D.C.



So another local guy. So welcome, Ed.

(Applause.)

There was really very little question that we were going to bring an All-Star Game to Audi Field. When you work with owners like Steve Kaplan and Jason and with staff and you have a vision for what you want your clubs to be, it starts with having a great brand, and this is one of the great brands in sport, not just in soccer.

You have to have a great fan base, a fan base that really understands the game and is passionate about the sport, but very, very importantly believes in what the sport can be in the community.

Then you need a great stadium, and Audi Field is one of those great stadiums. Just a couple of years old, decades in the making, again, thanks to Steve, Jason, and the mayor.

We committed to them early on, build a stadium, we'll deliver you one of the premier events, and the MLS All-Star Game presented by Target is one of those great events.

Can't wait to see what this is going to be next summer, in July of 2023. Well earned, well deserved. It's a great honor for us to have our All-Star Game here next summer. That's the formal part of the announcement, a little out of order for my speaking remarks.

You're going to look forward to a couple of things beyond the game. We're going to have skills competitions. We're going to have great community events, because it's not about just bringing our best players and putting on a showcase to a global audience, it's about doing things in the community that could leave a legacy for our club, a legacy for our city, and a legacy for our sport.

We're committed to continuing the great partnership we have with the community here, and the All-Star Game will be one of those ways we're going to show how we can give back with one of our premier events. Can't be more excited to be here next July.

With that, Danita, it's all yours. Thank you, everybody.

DANITA JOHNSON: Well, what an honor to be standing here today. As I walk past a few of my staff this morning, it reminded me that today is the 50th anniversary of Title IX, so a special moment to be standing in front of you all today.

Thank you, Mr. Commissioner. It's a real honor for us to be able to host next year's Major League Soccer All-Star

Game right here at Audi Field.

I couldn't be prouder to share the stage with you and our city's leadership here today to celebrate this monumental occasion. Our club's mission is to grow the game of soccer both on and off the field, focused on really enriching our community and making this sport accessible to all.

The 2023 All-Star Game accomplishes all of the above. It's an experience we haven't had in the nation's capitol since 2004, an experience that all of our amazing club legends -- thank you for being here today -- Ben, Jaime, Ryan, Alecko, we could not be here without the work you have done for this club.

Ultimately we view All-Star as a way to bring our community closer, something that D.C. United has represented for many, many years here in Washington, D.C.

Now, when we opened Audi Field in 2018 our vision for this stadium was to become a year-round destination for entertainment in the nation's capitol. Thank you to our partners at Events D.C. and Destination D.C. for all of the events that you help us curate and bring into this building here at Audi Field.

We've hosted many professional soccer matches, international friendlies, HBCU football games in partnership with Howard University, and now the biggest party in MLS, All-Star 2023.

We pride ourselves on being a forward-thinking organization and continue to move forward. Thank you to our owners, our co-chairmen, Jason Levien and Steve Kaplan for all the work they do. I speak on their behalf today. They are so appreciative to the league and to all of you who have continued to support us here, and our city. So thank you.

Before I conclude, I'd like to offer a few sincere thanks. Firstly to our staff, who have worked tirelessly to make this happen. Your commitment to this organization means so much not only to me, our ownership, and this city, and without the work that each and every one of you do for us every single day, this would not be possible.

Secondly, to Commissioner Garber and Major League Soccer for awarding us this wonderful opportunity.

And next, a very warm thank you to Mayor Bowser for her leadership of our city and all that you do. I'd like to end with a special line that Mayor Bowser often says, Washington, D.C., is a sports city. Without further ado, Mayor Bowser.

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MURIEL BOWSER: Good morning, everybody. This is indeed exciting news. We're here at our beautiful Audi Field. We're talking about sport in the sports capital, and we're going to host the MLS All-Star Game next summer. So I am really excited.

Commissioner Garber, I want to thank you for being here with us, and we have indeed been talking about soccer in Washington. I think this stadium deal was the last piece of legislation that I moved when I was the councilmember before I ran for mayor.

And there, we had a wonderful conversation as a city about why the world of sport needed a permanent home here in D.C. and that D.C. United had delivered for us and we were going to continue to deliver for them.

Since then, we have welcomed the Washington Spirit to Washington, D.C., our women's soccer champions. We have hosted a Stanley Cup. Oh, I didn't -- okay. Soccer fans. I was going to mention the World Series and the World Championship Washington Mystics, but maybe another time.

But I just want to say in saying that, that we do big events here and we celebrate sport here. We appreciate not only our professional sports teams, but what an investment professional sport also means for our young people who are playing soccer all over Washington, D.C. in all eight wards, our girls who are excelling in soccer in all eight wards, what we will be able to do, like we did at RFK in building more fields so that we are developing our future players.

So I am very happy also with what the investment here means for our neighborhoods and the capitol riverfront, the Navy Yard, and what it means for the investments we've made in The Wharf and Yards Park, which are also close by.

It is true, as Dave said, when you look around the stadium, the views of the city are spectacular. Probably second to none in the United States. Let's just -- you have the Capitol. You have the Monument. You have the beautiful Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge. That is a connection, a real connection, symbolic and otherwise, between neighborhoods and our city.

So I am looking forward to the All-Star Game, All-Star Week, and everything that we can do together to promote sport, show off our city, get more people excited and engaged.

What I know for sure is that lifting the psychic energy

around winning, it is important. There's a real economic benefit to it, but there's also just a happiness and pride benefit to it, and we are proud to welcome the All-Star Game to Washington, D.C. next summer.

So I also now have the privilege of inviting a partner in sport in D.C. to the podium. Max Brown chairs the Events D.C. board of directors and Events D.C. is, as I said, a major partner in sport in D.C.

Max?

MAX BROWN: Is it morning still or afternoon? Morning. Good morning, everybody. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today. We've had a lot of great comments, so let me be brief.

Let me first thank the mayor again for her leadership, not only in sport in our city, but managing the city in a fantastic way through the pandemic and many other things.

Mayor, thank you for all that you do.

I want to thank Danita for her great work with D.C. United and Jason as well.

Danita, thank you.

Commissioner Garber, thank you for your leadership and bringing this game here. We really, really appreciate it. We're really excited about it, commissioner.

Thank you.

I just want to say a couple quick things, and then we'll move on. The sport of soccer is a uniter of people. I think the biggest uniter of people in sports is soccer. If you track the evolution of soccer in D.C. and Major League Soccer, it's really mirrored the evolution of Washington into a global capitol that people come visit every day.

We had 20 million tourists come here before the pandemic, and we're going to get them back because they're already coming here.

D.C. is open for business, and what soccer does is bring people together. I know it's a hackneyed phrase, but it's true. If you watch soccer and love soccer like I do, you see what it does for a community. We're here in this building because of the work of the Mayor, Jason, Commissioner Garber, and really because it represents what's great about Washington, D.C. It's about our people. It's about our community.

I want to thank everybody. I'm humbled and proud to be

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here today. I'm passionate about soccer. I love D.C. United and I love the Spurs. Go Spurs.

Finally, I want to thank our deputy mayor, John Falcicchio, who does amazing work for the city. Thank you for your work as well.

With that, I'll turn it back over to Dave. Dave, thank you for leading us here today and for all that you've done for the city. Thank you so much.

DAVE JOHNSON: All right. So we've got an All-Star Game coming to D.C. I heard -- I think it was you, Mayor Bowser -- this morning on WTLP, as I get another plug in, saying she has the experience, the energy, and big ideas. You said that, right?

Well, that's what Major League Soccer is all about -- experience, energy, and big ideas.

That's why I say today, yes, we're excited about next summer, and believe me, as you're watching online, you want to come here to Washington, D.C., just to experience the city and this amazing neighborhood. The water is just behind me. It's also just to the right of me. It's just to the left of me. This is an amazing venue in an amazing city.

Days like this happen when you have a belief in a sport, a belief in people, and a belief in the city. I thank you for your attendance today, and we look forward to MLS All-Star Game presented by Target in 2023, being in, the Mayor said it, the sports capital Washington, D.C.

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