

Major League Soccer Media Conference

Wednesday, July 23, 2025

Commissioner Don Garber Press Conference



DON GARBER: I love to start these things where it's always great when you have traffic coming to a soccer game. I can remember the days when there was no traffic on the way to a game.

We have a fun night. It has been a terrific couple of days here in Austin. I have to start by saying it's really heartwarming to see the excitement for our league and the passion for Austin FC. We all know that there was challenges in leading up to the launch of this club and getting this stadium built.

But to see the great work that Anthony Precourt and Eddie Margain and a new owner that's come into the partnership, it represents everything that's exciting about Major League Soccer. You get a great ownership group, build a good facility, you create a brand that fans can be super passionate about, that is a great formula for success.

Let me start by acknowledging the people throughout this state who have been impacted by the really horrible floods in the Hill Country and Curry County. For those that have suffered this incredible loss, our hearts are with them. It's been moving to see the work of first responders and how people in this community have come together.

I'm very proud of what we have been able to do with our three Texas teams, Austin, Dallas and Houston, the ownership group in each of those cities, to come together with the league and create a nice joint effort to aid in recovery efforts.

All week and during tonight's game, and certainly events leading up to it, we're honoring the resilience and spirit of all of those affected. We have been experiencing as a community lots of challenges and lots of loss. Every now and again sport can come together and really give people an opportunity to take a step back and celebrate the passion and connectivity of our sport. I'm really proud of everything that our teams have done here in this city.

But we're here for our All-Star Weekend. As I said, the events have been spectacular. It's probably one of our most successful in history. We had a board meeting today

and showed a video of the events that started with Soccer Celebration over the weekend. That event continues to grow with great sponsors, with lots of people in downtown Austin that really kicked off this All-Star week celebration with record crowds.

We had a bunch of fans at our MLS NEXT All-Star Game, including the son of a guy I used to work with back in the day who lived in Orlando, played in the Orlando City Academy, their MLS pro team. Came back from college and signed a professional contract. That is the dream, the connection being a kid looking through the fence, seeing what it might like to be a pro. I'm really proud what we've been able to achieve with MLS NEXT.

We've had more corporate engagement and activation for this All-Star Game than ever before. Over a dozen of our partners have been activating throughout the city, the state and the country. We have a sellout for tonight's event.

If any of you had an opportunity to go to the Hometown Heroes community outreach event, I'm really proud of it. It honors people in the community. We have our All-Star Game for work they do in the community. It has nothing to do with soccer. It's how can we celebrate and honor them and reward them for all the great work they do in their communities.

Anthony and Eddie have done a great job. They along with Matthew McConaughey and the rest of the ownership group have not just built a great team, but a runway to build this All-Star Game. Along with our partners at Liga MX and Mikel Arriola, the many club owners here over the last couple of days, it is an opportunity for us to celebrate, an opportunity for us to take a step back, but also an opportunity for us in the league midway through our 30th season to reflect on where we are and really how far we've come.

It is hard to believe for myself and for many of you, I know for our owners and those players that have been part of this journey with us, that we've been at this for 30 years.

When our original founders, Lamar Hunt and Robert Kraft came together to launch this league coming out of the World Cup in '94. 10 teams, a big vision. I don't think they would have ever expected that vision would be realized quite the way it has been here in the United States and

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Canada. 30 teams, 20 soccer stadiums, more to come. Almost a thousand players. I think about that a lot. All those players and administrators and staff that are making a living working in the sport they love and for a league that they love. It really is pretty remarkable.

Think about it's not just our 30 teams, it's MLS NEXT pro teams, and most of those markets it's MLS NEXT, MLS GO, it's building the foundation of the sport from the bottom up. We're very excited and proud about that.

Since the league has been founded, 160 million fans have come to our games. Attendance remains strong. On track for another great year. Multiple matches in this year alone have drawn 60,000. I am confident we will finish with another increase in our attendance.

When you're constantly growing, it's hard to continue to increase, but that's our goal, that's what we're focused on. It's not just about playing games, it's about how do we ensure those games provide great fan entertainment and experience from the time the people get to the stadium until the time they leave to go home.

Sponsorship, (indiscernible) marketing will grow by double-digits this year over last. Another record year. Big announcement we have coming up in a couple weeks. One of our largest sponsors will join the MLS family. I think we're going to announce that in a couple weeks. Stay tuned for that.

Social media continues to grow. It's good to have a player that's got a large social media following, and. Of our clubs are very, very engaged in digital content. IShowSpeed being there last night, being one of the hosts of our All-Star skills competition. Very proud of that event. That event continues to grow. We have a great sense of what that's going to look like in the future.

Consumer products continue to grow year on year, with adidas, with Fanatics, the new Legends Archives Collection. MLS actually can have kits from their early years. If people want to go out, players wearing them, people want to buy them.

I can remember back in the day some of those fun team names, coming in from another sport, not really understanding why we had a team named the Mutiny or the Clash. Excited with those new brands. People are buying those kits in record numbers.

It was the launch of our 30th team. San Diego has been a terrific success, big crowds. Currently the team is doing quite well on the field. We've seen that a bit with our new expansion teams. Somehow they figured a way to put a

good team on the field before other teams have figured out how they've done that. San Diego is riding some great success.

We will be celebrating the opening of the Right to Dream Academy formally in September. That training facility and that whole program is really spectacular. We think it's among the best in the world.

I was down in Philadelphia in Chester, Pennsylvania, a couple days ago. The opening of the new training ground and development center in Philly. It is spectacular. That's not just a training facility, not just a stadium, it's an entire complex.

Our board meeting today we showed what that waterfront looked like and what it looks like today, connecting from an abandoned powerplant to a vibrant office building, great indoor facility, seven fields connected to their great stadium.

We will open up next year a new training facility for Portland. The Red Bulls will open up their training facility in the months to come.

We all involved in our league should really be thoughtful and mindful of the near billion dollars of the investment in the development of the game at the academy level and beyond.

There was a time we couldn't build stadiums. Now every one of our teams is competing with each other to see who can have the most state-of-the-art training facility. We're very excited about that.

It's obviously been a good year for players, not just a great player in Miami in Messi, Evander in Cincinnati. Certainly we're excited about which Chucky and Anders in San Diego. Pasalic has been doing a wonderful job playing in Orlando. We've got a lot of great things going on from the player side. It's just halfway through the season.

It has been a summer of soccer. For all of you who I'm sure have covered many of these matches, covering the rest of our league, other leagues in the country, the World Cup next summer, this is the most exciting, most vibrant, energized soccer market in the world.

It's not just me saying it, it's the President of the United States saying it, the president of FIFA saying it. The Club World Cup we thought was a great success. We're proud of our three teams that participated, particularly Inter Miami that beat a European club in a formal competition for the first time. Advanced to the knockout stage. I think it was one of the defining moments for our league. I was at



almost all of the games, where MLS clubs Seattle, Miami and L.A. participated.

We had a great story with the number of homegrown players that have played in the CONCACAF Gold Cup, from Diego Luna, Matt Freese, who had a great game. Sebastian obviously is doing quite well. Alex Freeman. Canada had two great MLS players playing for their club.

By the end of this summer, by the end of the Leagues Cup, there will be close to four million fans that will attend professional or national team soccer matches here this summer, which is really an astounding number.

Innovation continues to be core to what we do. If you get a chance to go through the stadium, take a walk through the press box and see our innovation of laboratory that we have in the stadium. It's the second year of that.

We're excited about the investments we're making. Really as MLS becomes larger and more competitive in the global front, more and more companies are looking to connect with us. We're proud of those investments that we've made and the opportunities we have to utilize technology on our fields.

The Apple deal has grown. We're averaging 120,000 unique viewers per match. That's an increase of almost 50% compared to last year. Distribution has helped drive a lot of that. Now you can get MLS Season Pass on Comcast, DIRECTV for the first time of any sports league, we're inviting access to fans through EAFC Mobile.

It's clearly one of the most transformational times in the history of our sport. We think Major League Soccer is one of the drivers of the growth of the sport here in this country.

It's all kind of leading up to the World Cup in 2026. It's an opportunity for us to take a look. As I started, what has the 30 years been like and what is the 30 years going to look like going forward.

We have focused on what we have called MLS 3.0, in the next 30 years, a comprehensive strategy to drive our next era of growth, innovation, global competitiveness, which we think is a very important. It's going to fall into a couple give categories.

First is calendar alignment. We continue to evaluate the potential to transition to the FIFA international match calendar. I'm sure somebody will ask a question on it. We're not making any announcements on it today. We continue to do an enormous amount of work with our fans, partners, all of our chief soccer officers, our clubs, to get ourselves closer to the point where we're able to make that

decision. We believe that alignment is something that makes sense.

The second part of that is a review of our entire roster strategy. As we're going into CBA negotiations, it is a time for us to rethink as we're developing the future of our league what our roster strategy should be.

As you probably know, we're looking at an evolution of our competition format that looks at a different structure to our regular season. Think of different structures for conferences. Think of a different playoff format that we think will be something that will maximize the competitiveness of our league, make it every regular-season game count more than it does today and engage our fans.

We're going through a deep analysis of player development to ensure that all of the investment north of a hundred million dollars a year at the youth level, MLS NEXT level is paying off a return. That's what we spent a good amount of our board meeting on this morning.

Leading innovation is going to continue to look at how do we evolve our Apple relationship and our Apple deal. Nothing to announce today, but a lot of work being done with them. Very engaged and thoughtful and committed partner.

What do we need to do three years in, think about what the rest of this deal is going to look like to provide more access, to provide more distribution and perhaps make it easier for our fans to get access for our games.

It is about moving forward as we always do with energy and with purpose and with ambition. It is about the next era of growth for our league.

So I've been probably speaking longer than I usually do, as I'm sure we'll have lots of questions. That's what I've got to say about that.

THE MODERATOR: We will go to questions.

Q. Obviously you expanded a little bit about what Austin is doing. It's a big year for us in the state of Texas. Talk about how good of a job the city of Austin and Austin FC have done this week.

DON GARBER: Let me start with what a great job they've done for their club. We had the most senior people from Apple here. We have some of the largest corporate sponsors in America here. We have many, many of our owners here. They've been able to experience some of the great energy and uniqueness of this city.

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But very importantly coming to the stadium, most of them were at the skills competition last night. This stadium is one of the best in MLS. It was a journey to get here, but the payoff was really great for the people here in this city, and certainly for Major League Soccer and for the rest of our clubs.

When you get a city that's got energy and ambition and understanding the public/private partnership of how sports can work in community, which is why we want to give back and pay back like we're doing with these programs we have for flood relief, they came together and put an All-Star bid before us that has set a new bar.

When I was in Charlotte just last week announcing that our All-Star Game would be there, two weeks ago, we said, You're on the clock. Austin has set a bar that is going to raise the expectations but also the deliverables for our All-Star Game.

It's about the game, but it's about the activity around it, the youth events, fan events. Hats off to the mayor, the people here in this city. Best days are going to be ahead in years to come with new cities that we've committed to bring the All-Star Game to.

THE MODERATOR: 81 consecutive sellouts here. Pretty impressive.

Q. The calendar change that you alluded to. Why hasn't a vote happened? Is there a reason for that? Does the league have to have an agreement with the MLS PA to make this happen? Is there any sense or worry of a missed opportunity for it to not happen after the 2026 World Cup?

DON GARBER: Well, if it's going to happen, it's going to happen after the 2026 World Cup. That I can assure you of.

When you have a league for 30 years that's based on a basic premise, what do leagues do? They set the schedule. If you were going to look at the job description for a commissioner and a league office, the first thing they do is set the schedule. Then they're about how do you properly bring owners together to make decisions with the governance of the league, how do you build all the activities from your player, player pool, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

Making this change is seismic. It's not something we should do lightly. We obviously have teams across multiple climate zones, multiple time zones unlike any other league in the world. If we do make the change, we're

not going to go back on that decision.

There are a number of key benefits to it. Aligning with the world standard we think is important for our brand as we try to continue to engage as one of the important influential leagues in the world.

We want to align on the calendar to be able to be even more engaged on the player transfer market. This year by year end we could have \$150 million in player sales. Compare that to where we were years ago, imagine where that will be when we're aligned on the international calendar.

We also have our most important games in the busiest part of the calendar. I think where we are today in the fall or winter might be very different when the league was founded. The league continues to have its Cup later and later and later in December. That is a challenge that has got to be addressed.

Very importantly, how do we ensure when we make that decision, our facilities are ready for it, our fans are ready for it, and our corporate partners are ready for it.

I would rather get it right and take our time than get it wrong and do it quick. Because life is a long time when it comes to something like your schedule.

As it relates to our players, they're one of our key stakeholders, no different than our fans, corporate partners, owners who are building facilities. We'll have to get some of them to be climate-ready.

We'll sit down with everybody at the right time and I'm confident we'll make the right decision.

Q. You mentioned the roster rules or roster strategy. When you talk about the training facilities and you said these teams are kind of trying to one up each other to build a better facility. They are some of the nicest facilities in the world. I think it shows the strength of what your owners are capable of when they have the resources to go out and build what they want to build. How important do you think it is for the growth of this league to truly be competitive in the global market to overhaul completely potentially the roster rules to allow teams flexibility and more resources to fulfill that goal of competing with the best leagues in the world?

DON GARBER: After all these years, we don't have these rules in place because somebody sitting behind a green curtain says, How can I make rules that are going to prevent the league from moving forward? That would be just madness.



We have rules because we're looking at data, we're evaluating where we fit and how our allocation of resources can help our league move forward.

In the minds of fans, I get it, people don't want to hear about roster rules, what can't be done. All they want to hear about is what great players they have and how well they do on the field, both referentially and in league competition.

We have been very thoughtful and I think history will judge us about how we have made decisions to ensure we can manage steady growth over what has been a 30-year period, defying all odds, and doing it in a way where our clubs are becoming teams of choice for top players, as Miami was able to prove, and be able to stand toe to toe with some top clubs.

If the objective is to win the Club World Cup, which it is, we just have to figure out how do we manage that within the overall economic environment that exists today.

What I would say is all revenue and costs are related, and strategy and decision making -- strategy should drive decision making, and we will continue to evolve in ways that will move this league forward.

That means evolving our roster rules, it means hopefully generating more revenue so our clubs can spend more money. It means having a vibrant and robust commercial business. It's having our owners allocate their resources. In Philadelphia they've got their own strategy. It is about player development. Just spent over 130, 140 million dollars on a development facility.

Every team is going to make those decisions, and the league is only going to put structure around that. As we feel the opportunity exists for our clubs... I should say this differently:

As our owners feel that more flexibility will drive more opportunity and competitiveness, then we will move in that direction.

That was a long answer, but I think you know what I'm saying. It all has to make sense at the right time.

Q. You mentioned I believe that your matches on MLS Season Pass are averaging 120,000 unique viewers per match. I think it's the first time we've heard a number like that.

DON GARBER: Is it? Yeah. There you go. Breaking news (smiling).

Q. Do you have a little bit of additional context on how you view that number in terms of where you want to be? Why the change in posture in terms of transparency on the viewership?

DON GARBER: Well, let me start by saying, remember that every single game is treated exactly the same on MLS Season Pass. So how do you evaluate the fact that we have games going on simultaneously, way more games going on simultaneously than any other league.

We're not putting one or two games on a Saturday, then the next game on a Saturday or a handful of games regionally on a Sunday. Other leagues have a game of the night, game of the week, Friday Night Baseball on Apple TV.

All of our games for the most part are on Saturday, all up against each other. So when you have 120,000 unique viewers across that, that's a lot of people. Aggregate all that. Depending on what week it is, you have over a million people that are unique viewers to a match.

What we're struggling with, and I think what the industry is struggling with, there has been no system to be able to evaluate how people are in a subscription service, how they're viewing and consuming games, and what is the metric that matters most.

Is it average minute audience, unique viewers? Remember, we're on a subscription service, which is very different than having your games available on a linear network.

We and Apple have been trying to figure it all out. I know it's frustrating for those who are looking for more information. We and Apple believe we need to start sharing some more information so you can start looking at what does it really mean.

It's the beginning, not the end. We'll continue to share more and more in the next press conference I have, which won't be until MLS Cup.

Q. As much as we appreciate the information, I'm sure that information is stuff that sponsors are interested in getting as well. Is that part of the impetus to make sure that sponsors know what level of exposure they're getting?

DON GARBER: To the extent you can have transparency, you should have as much as you can. When you don't have it, you have to have a good reason for it. So it's for everyone.



Q. You mentioned Lionel Messi in your remarks for his social following. Fans themselves chose they wanted to see him here. He isn't here. I remember a Swedish striker being suspended for not participating in this game. Is there an update on the status of Messi and Jordi Alba?

DON GARBER: Anything that relates to next weekend, we're not going to talk about today because the game is not until this coming weekend. We're managing through that process as we speak.

I want to say something that we as a league need to deal with. We have an All-Star Game that we think is a real priority. As do all leagues. You're a sports journalist. All-Star games have a uniqueness as it relates to all the leagues.

Where do you fit it in the schedule and make it a priority for all your stakeholders, not just your players but your fans, partners, taking a break. All the meetings we've had, first time we had all of our CSO's, CBO's, owners here. It is an important mid-season break for us.

At the same time we have a player who has played nine matches in 30 days. We have a schedule. Miami's had a schedule that is unlike any other team. Most of our teams have had a 10-day break. Miami hasn't. We had Leo playing 90 minutes in almost all the games that he played. Somebody gave me the stat, was five games in the last...

THE MODERATOR: Nine games in 35 days. Club World Cup and five. He's played 90 minutes in every game.

DON GARBER: We have to manage through that as a league. At the same time we do have rules. We have to manage through that, as well.

We would have loved to have Leo here. We would have loved to have every player that was selected for the All-Star Game here. After this All-Star Game, we'll figure out what needs to happen this weekend.

I was told this morning that neither Jordi or Messi practiced today. Jordi came off with an injury in the last game. We'll have to manage through what Miami is going to say about that.

Q. The Whitecaps have had a tremendous year. How important is it for the Whitecaps to find a new stadium, construct one, and also find ownership that will keep the team in Vancouver? I know Indianapolis has been lurking. What can you say to the fans that are concerned about the team leaving without a new

stadium?

DON GARBER: We have no plans to move the Vancouver Whitecaps. Right now they don't have a viable stadium situation, and they need one. We have a stadium that we'll lose access to because of construction for the 2026 World Cup. We get 17 days where we can play our games and that's it? We don't have any flexibility, including what happened with their playoff game last year?

The Vancouver Whitecaps need a new stadium and we need to find a way to work with the city and the province and get Greg Kerfoot, who is committed to find a stadium solution.

Not our first rodeo. We'll figure that out. We'll be able to get a stadium I hope. We're working hard at it. We had an update on it over the last couple days. We're hopeful we'll be able to achieve something to at least look at a way that we can have a place for Vancouver to play. We'll continue to deal with what happens if they don't have a place to play.

But there is no plan to move the Vancouver Whitecaps. There isn't any update that I can share with you today. The update is we got to get a new stadium situation for the Vancouver Whitecaps.

I will say the city has been more engaged now than they have been in the past. We appreciate that. I think everybody recognizes the Whitecaps are an important brand. They've been in the city a long time. We'd like to find a solution.

Q. In recent months we've seen a lot of MLS supporter groups speak out through signage against ICE, federal government policy concerning Latinos and immigrants. That's a big community for MLS, making up a lot of your supporters. How is the league thinking about that, the way the federal government is currently treating that community? What role, if any, do you think the league has in protecting these people? Does the league have any role at all in this?

DON GARBER: Well, it's a complicated issue, for sure. The question is, does the league have a role in protecting people. I don't know if you're talking about Latinos. I don't think the league has the ability to serve as an entity to protect anyone.

That being said, we want our stadiums to be safe. We want to ensure that we're having displays that are not going to incite anyone. At the same time not take care of one audience and at the same time having to deal with another audience that might be on the other side of this



issue.

The best way to do that is have the policy we have, which prohibits having political signage or anything to do with legislative acts on display in our stadiums.

I understand and sympathize with those that are impacted by this. I grew up in a very diverse environment. We are a very diverse league. But we have to be very thoughtful about how we engage in this situation.

Our teams, as LA FC has done, teams want to make a statement, they can. I don't think any team should be required to.

Certainly the league has not and will not make a statement on this. We just want to continue to do whatever we can to ensure that our games are safe for all of our fans.

Q. You mentioned about changing maybe the format, structure, as well as the calendar. I've heard mentioned divisions.

DON GARBER: Too early to talk about that. We've got a really exciting format that we'll be ready to present once we go through all the formalities of it. We'll talk about that some time either before or at the end-of-the-year press conference.

But it will be great. It's going to make the regular season more meaningful. It will be more aligned with the rest of the world in terms of how they play their competition.

I think our player format will be really cool, really unique, very different from anything that happens in North America.

Let us get through crossing the Ts and dotting the Is.

Q. On the expansion, MLS 3.0, is there going to be more than 30 teams in the MLS 3.0?

DON GARBER: I don't know the answer to that. I never thought we'd get to 20, 24, 26, 28, 30. We'll have to see.

I think there's a lot of support for MLS in a lot of different cities. When we think, and you all have asked me this question, why don't you figure out ways you can ensure that every team is doing their very best before you expand again. I didn't mention this in my earlier comments.

Part of that 3.0 is a new stadium in Chicago, a new stadium in New York City, and a new stadium in Miami. For those of us that have been around for a long time, that is a game-changer for us. '26, '27 and '28, three of the biggest cities in our country are going to have brand-new

soccer stadiums. That just leaves one, which is New England, who continues to work hard to try to get a soccer-specific stadium.

I feel like we're filling in and maybe we need to expand again. But there's no plans to do that at this point.

Q. All-Star Games are struggling for relevancy recently. You've seen ratings go down for All-Stars. Do you have any plans to change the All-Star format?

DON GARBER: I love the All-Star Game. Most of us probably do. How do you get your players and partners and fans to love the All-Star Game? We made a decision many years ago we didn't want an exhibition, we wanted a competitive game. You've all been to some of these MLS-Liga MX Games. They're playing to win. It's a competitive match. We've seen that fans really like that. The uniqueness of the format is something that we care about.

That being said, we're going to be playing 90-plus percent of Leagues Cup matches are going to be MLS versus Liga MX games. Maybe it is time for us to evolve the format.

As long as we have a competitive game that people care about, I think our All-Star Game will be as successful as it has been in the past. We'll see how it plays out.

We are really focused in Charlotte to make that a really big event coming right out of the World Cup. Tons of attention. I'm confident it will continue to be strong.

Q. You spoke about the summer of soccer that we are currently experiencing. Can you talk more about the momentum of what the tournaments bring into the growth of the game here in this region and how MLS positions itself as being a big player in that?

DON GARBER: Let's take the Club World Cup. Several million people attended that. How many of them are MLS fans? We're doing the data work to figure that out. But let's assume that many of them were not. So that tournament gives us the opportunity to connect with a soccer market that's not necessarily fully connected to Major League Soccer. We got a lot of boats on the rising tide. Now we got to do the hard work. It doesn't get any easier.

As the market continues to grow, our task is to feed that interest. The question about are our roster rules that are in existence today, that have been in existence for many years, going to allow us to do that, or as the market grows and becomes more sophisticated, as people are packing stadiums to see Al Falah, should we be change our



approach so all those people that were supporting Brazilian teams or teams in Saudi Arabia are going to support MLS.

The question is, what is the right formula? How do we do it in a logical, rational, economically viable way so we can continue to move with stability.

Our league, you all are soccer people, we have enormous stability. How many professional soccer leagues in the world have that? How many of them have the parity that we have where at any given time any team can win any game? How many have the stadiums that we have and the billions of investment in those stadiums across the entire league?

I follow the Premier League. Not every stadium there is at the par of an MLS stadium. Might be bigger. Some of them are very old. Some of the super clubs need new stadiums. We've got to check that box.

It's all about how these pieces fit together. If we make the right decisions, we'll capture the right opportunity. I'm a believer these big tournaments are important for soccer in America. The World Cup will be great for soccer in America.

You've heard me say this before. What Gianni Infantino did took real courage. Everybody doubted him. Everybody doubted that FIFA could pull it off. They pulled it off. The Club World Cup is only going to get better in the years to come.

It wasn't easy. Wasn't without challenge. Wasn't without issues related to weather. This is our country. We're going to have those issues. We have those issues now and we're going to have them if we change to the international calendar. You have to deal with those issues and not be afraid. You have to lean in and not run away.

Q. Your opening comments mentioned this was likely the most successful All-Star Game in league history. What metric are you looking at to measure success? What is that metric for Charlotte?

DON GARBER: For any city and any event it's economic impact. We believe this game will have a \$20 million economic impact for the city of Austin. It is a sold-out stadium where you are a part of the conversation. So when we add Soccer Celebration going on downtown, there were packed stands participating with our players and with social media influencers. We here in this very culturally relevant city, we have been the story this week, which is important to any professional sports league.

We will exceed that in Charlotte because David Tepper is a

very competitive guy. He wants to have the best All-Star Game of all time. I was with the mayor last week. The mayor is committed, the state is committed. They put money into helping to support the All-Star Game. You just want to be relevant, to matter and have people have a good time.

Q. Specifically on the climate-related and weather-related stuff. A lot of the chatter around this topic is what might happen during the depth of the winter months, but we also just saw the complaints during the Club World Cup with the summer heat. Getting squeezed on both sides. In an era of climate change, how are you thinking about those two kind of views at the extremes?

DON GARBER: Well, I'll stay away from the climate change question because we're all as citizens of the planet dealing with that. Our league is no different.

It's getting hotter. That's clearly an issue in playing through the depth and the core of the warmest months in many of our markets.

But we're also managing through storms and floods and hurricanes and delayed games and canceled games. That's the uniqueness of being an outdoor sport, not having the same schedule flexibility that baseball might have if they have a rainout. It just adds to the challenges and complexity that MLS has to deal with every day.

As media people ask questions, how are you going to deal with this one issue, that's one of a thousand we're dealing with day in and day out.

We have to make the decision that's going to set us up best for the future. How do we create a calendar or a schedule that minimizes the impact of super cold or super hot. How do we do that in the most number of markets. How do we manage the schedule in a way where it minimizes that.

We have ideas and ways in which we're able to do that. How do you get creative and unique around that so our stadiums are managing that with investments they're making in infrastructure all going into why this has been such a long-discussed project and one that we have to check all the boxes before we could go forward with it.

Q. You mentioned earlier MLS Cup plays later and later in the year. This year do you have a date for MLS Cup? How can you ensure it will not conflict with the World Cup draw?

DON GARBER: Well, I don't know the date of the World



... when all is said, we're done.®

Cup draw yet.

THE MODERATOR: They have not announced it.

DON GARBER: MLS Cup will be December 6th this year. I don't know when the World Cup announcement is. Hopefully it's not December 6th. Maybe they could do it at the MLS Cup.

Q. The league has had a lot of great players over the years, but few have understood it perhaps the way David Beckham has, which maybe makes it a little surprising that Messi isn't at the All-Star Game today. Do you think now it's unquestionable that David is the most impactful and important player in league history?

DON GARBER: Well, it's a good question. I guess the question is, what do you mean by 'impactful'. I don't want to be cute or presumptuous that I know the answer to that from your perspective.

Let me sort of take it as a long answer to sort of cover up David generally, then talk about Messi.

David Beckham is a very, very, very special guy. I think those of you that have been around the sport, those of you who are new to it, have seen the documentary. There is only one David Beckham who has performed at the highest level, the thrill of victory, the agony of defeat, gone through trauma and come out on the other end with a bounce in his step and a unique ability to be incredibly optimistic.

If I had to define, use one word to describe David, it's just 'focus'. I can't do one word, it's 'focus' and 'optimism.' He never gets riled up. You have seen that the way he played on the field. He had no shortage of obstacles to put together Inter Miami, get that stadium project done, form the right partnership with the Mas family, and to be really, really engaged as an owner.

I spoke to David two days ago on just the future of what they're thinking about as it relates to player signings, one that I hope they can announce sometime in the next couple weeks.

He's involved. He's committed. MLS wouldn't be what it is today without David Beckham.

MLS wouldn't be what it is today without Lionel Messi either. I don't think any of us realized what impact this player would have on our league, global exposure, credibility, on creating the thrills and just unique experiences that he's done over just the last couple of weeks, scoring multiple goals in multiple games, playing 90 minutes over the last four or five games, not wanting to

come out of the game. He's an incredible competitor. He's performing at a really high level.

We are received very differently globally because Leo Messi is in our league. We are very different from the way the world thought of us because David Beckham not only played in our league but because he's built a team that is worldly popular.

Q. When did Inter Miami communicate with you that Messi wouldn't attend this match? Why wasn't this addressed earlier in the week instead of the day of the game? Could he be suspended for the next game for not maybe addressing this earlier this week knowing that he has played so much in the last month or so?

DON GARBER: Yeah, we should have known earlier and we should have addressed it earlier, no doubt about that.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you to all of our journalists.

DON GARBER: Thanks, everybody.

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