

# 2022 MLS Cup: LAFC vs Philadelphia

Thursday, November 3, 2022

Los Angeles, California, USA

Banc of California Stadium

**Commissioner**

**Don Garber**

Commissioner Press Conference

(Video shown.)

THE MODERATOR: Let's get fired up. Welcome, everybody, to Los Angeles, MLS Cup, Philadelphia Union-LAFC. I'm Dan Courtemanche with Major League Soccer. We appreciate all of you joining us today.

As we look at today, I'm going to actually invite our commissioner, Mr. Don Garber, to join us on the stage.

Commissioner Garber will get started with some remarks, then we'll go to a Q&A. We're going to start with our folks in the room and then go to folks on Zoom.

DON GARBER: Thank you very much, Dan, and welcome, everybody, to Los Angeles. As we all know, our 27th MLS Cup. A big shout-out to our long-term partner Audi. They're the sponsor of our MLS playoffs and MLS Cup.

I want to particularly welcome, as we do these events, the crew of journalists continues to grow, so we appreciate all of your support and everything that you do to write about and cover our league throughout the year.

A shout-out I think to Michael Lewis. I was told that Michael is going to be here attending MLS Cup. I think he is one of only a handful of people that has attended every MLS Cup. I think Michael is sitting over there.

Appropriate to join Michael in one of the few people, we think there are only three or four in the country that have attended every MLS Cup, this will be Mark Abbott's last MLS Cup as our founder. He's obviously deputy commissioner and president and leaving us after this year. Mark has been to every MLS Cup, as well.

As Dan mentioned, we couldn't ask for a better matchup. Both LAFC and the Union are playing in their first MLS Cup, and for the first time in almost 20 years, the two top



seeds from each conference will meet in the MLS Cup final.

The game is a total sellout, as are all games at Banc of California, and if you've never been to an MLS game at that stadium, it's a sight to behold. It's one of the most exciting and passionate environments in professional sports, and I'm sure it's going to be another rocking day when the game takes place on Saturday.

The game will be broadcast domestically on network television, on Fox and Univision, and in Canada on TCN and TVA, and will be distributed globally to an audience of over 100 countries.

As we wrap up our 27th season, I thought I would take a couple minutes before questions and just reflect on what's been another really great year for Major League Soccer. We began the year with the announcement of David Blitzer and Ryan Smith purchasing Real Salt Lake, and they transformed that team from day one, both on and off the field. Their ownership has been strong, and I think the changes you'll see there are going to be dramatic.

Charlotte FC joined the league as our 28th club and took the city by storm from their opening day, which set an MLS attendance record of 75,000 fans. The club continued throughout the year to capture the hearts and minds of soccer fans and Charlotte FC fans throughout the region.

But coming -- and this is a stat most people might not know, along with Seattle and Atlanta, the third team, three of our teams averaged over 30,000 fans per game, which led to very, very strong attendance league-wide. We set a regular season attendance record with over 10 million fans coming through our turnstiles.

We had success on TV, as well, with both ABC and ESPN seeing viewership rise over 16 percent. It was among the best records that we've had on television. We hit record highs with merchandise sales, with social media and digital engagement.

As you'll see on Saturday, if you haven't been to the Banc of California Stadium, development is one of the most



defining and differentiated aspects of our league. The stadium boom continued this year with the opening of Nashville FC's GEODIS Park, our 26th soccer stadium; and at 30,000 seats, it is the largest soccer-specific stadium in the United States.

Later this month St. Louis City will debut their new downtown sports complex featuring a spectacular stadium along with their training ground and team offices. I encourage you to take a look at what that game is going to look like. They're going to have an exhibition later in November. It is absolutely spectacular. I think anybody who loves the game and loves our league will be really impressed by what's going on in St. Louis.

After over 10 years, maybe more, of hard work and lots of questions from all of you, our friends in the media, about what's happening in Miami, Inter Miami secured final approvals for Miami Freedom Park, which will be a billion dollar sports and entertainment complex.

From a sporting perspective, the year began with the continuation of our commitment to be an active participant in the global transfer market, something that you've heard me talk about in press conferences in the past.

In fact, during the earlier transfer window in January, we were among the top five leagues in the world for investment and transfer fees, both in what we spent and what we earned in fees in and out of the league.

We're continuing to see our clubs managed through this concept of signing world-class international players. This year was an exciting one with Insigne; with Hector Herrera; with Gareth Bale; with Giorgio Chiellini, who you'll see hopefully on the field; Bernardeschi in Toronto. Just to name a few.

This has been an ongoing plan for our players, and it is part of this trend of our league going out and trying to manage the top of the rosters, along now very focused on the very bottom of the rosters with signing young players that have made Major League Soccer their league of choice.

I'm sure all of you were really excited to see Riqui Puig, who signed from Barcelona, play for the Galaxy; Atlanta United's Thiago Almada signing from Argentina. Great young players coming into our league at their prime, marrying with some big-name international players, which gives us a great formula for brand success.

I can assure you our clubs are laser focused in this area, and none of this happens by accident. The league and our clubs are focused on continuing to deliver a competitive

and exciting and compelling product, and that requires deep investment from ownership, both at the bottom of the roster, the top of the rosters, training facilities, technical staff and the like.

Many of you will know that 15 years ago we made it a requirement to have our clubs build academies. With that academy investment came investment in training facilities.

That mandate has led to a boom in the development of home-grown players who have had record minutes, who have had record contributions and record percentage of our First Team rosters.

That story will continue and will give us more stories like the success we've had with the development of Alphonso Davies, with Brenden Aaronson, Tyler Adams, all guys that are playing regular starters in Europe to the current players that are in a league, home-grown players that are MLS All-Stars, guys like Ferreira and Julián Araujo.

So this year, in addition to what we've done with academies, what we've done at the top of the roster, we made a major commitment to fill the development gap in the pyramid with the launch of MLS Next Pro. And that's a league that ensures that we are managing the career of a player from the time he decides to become a professional perhaps through one of our academies and enters the system. Now they can do that through a very organized program like MLS Next and then come through an integrated pathway to be a professional soccer player in Major League Soccer.

The continued expansion of MLS Next Pro, which I think you'll hear more and more about in the months to come, featuring both our clubs but also clubs that are independent, gives us the opportunity to have an exciting and innovative product where we can test a whole bunch of new concepts.

We can manage the development of technical players and do a whole lot of things that are not just about competition but also about building new relationships in the community.

We're very excited about MLS Next Pro and very excited about MLS Next, our youth league. We'll have 13,000 kids, 13,000 young players will have participated in MLS Next this past year, and I think you're going to see more and more investment and expansion in Major League Soccer at the youth level.

As you know, this year was an important one for us as it relates to the continuation of what has been a real focus on delivering exciting content to our fans, and it really kicked off with the announcement of a very, very innovative



10-year partnership with Apple -- Apple, one of the most innovative and exciting and consumer friendly companies in the world -- that we believe will reimagine how our game will be consumed by the next generation of our fans, all who are very digitally native and all who consume the majority of their soccer and football content via digital devices.

As you have heard, we will eliminate blackouts. Every MLS game, almost 500 of them, along with exclusive content from our clubs promoting our teammates and our players, will be distributed to anyone around the world, anywhere, every club, and on every match.

Think about the fact that every MLS game will be broadcast not only in home markets to anybody who has a digital device or a connection, but will be broadcast to any fan or future fan around the world.

We're very, very excited about simplifying our schedule, having more consistent match days and match times. We'll be airing MLS matches, MLS Next Pro matches, MLS Next matches.

All games will be produced with a very consistent look and feel, with an improved production quality, we think among the best that's ever been produced, with advanced data, with pregames and postgames. And that's just in the first year.

There's a lot of excitement to come with our relationship with Apple, so stay tuned.

Obviously our season will end earlier this year than usual because of the World Cup upcoming in Qatar. Later this month we'll see a record 40 MLS players representing their respective national teams in Qatar. Among them will be players for the U.S. national team and the Canadian national team, something that is very, very important to us.

When we launched Toronto in 2007, we were extremely excited about what Major League Soccer could do to help launch the development of the elite Canadian player, and we're excited that the Canadian national team will be back in the World Cup, so stay tuned.

Here's what's in store for 2023: Obviously we're going to launch our Apple partnership, and a lot of work to do there. St. Louis City will debut as our 29th club. Carolyn Kindle and her staff have created an unbelievable exciting opportunity there to build the sport not just in one of America's great soccer cities but also throughout the region. They have over 60,000 deposits for season tickets, so there will be lots of season ticket holders and lots of people that will be on a waiting list.

We plan to continue our expansion discussions and hope to finalize our 30th team sometime in the first half of the year.

Next summer, as you know, we'll be launching our Leagues Cup, an official CONCACAF competition. These are not friendlies, where all 47 MLS and Liga MX clubs will compete in a World Cup-style tournament. It'll be the only thing like it in the world of professional soccer.

And if this year's league showcase, which took place right up the street where we had 71,000 people attending a friendly double-header, is an indication of what Leagues Cup will be, we think we've got a massive opportunity ahead of us. Very excited about it.

We'll also begin, arguably, the launch, the official formal launch for us in our path to 2026. And as you know, the World Cup will take place 30 years after the anniversary of our inaugural season in 1996. Our league, our teams and all the people that are working in our enterprise are very, very focused on their plans to build the excitement and to obviously harness all of the power and passion of having the World Cup here on our shores.

As we wrap up our 27th season, regardless of who wins and lifts the Phil Anschutz Trophy, it'll be the sixth consecutive season that we will have a different MLS Cup champion. And that's something that I think really does differentiate us from other soccer or football leagues around the world. It's proof positive, in our view, that we have one of the most competitive leagues in the world, and it's a league that we can be very, very proud of.

Thanks for giving me time to give some introductory remarks, and let's go, Dan, to some questions.

THE MODERATOR: I should have started off, this is our first time since 2019 that we've done this in person, so it's really great to be back with everybody in person.

**Q. Yesterday I spoke to Larry Berg, the managing owner of LAFC, and he said one of the things he appreciates most about LAFC is the varied approaches that ownership groups can take to competition and reaching competitive heights, and then the game on Saturday is clearly an indication of that. Can you just react to what Larry said in terms of the different approaches ownerships can take to reaching competitive heights? And both LAFC and Philadelphia, how have the ownership groups influenced what that league does now in 2022?**

DON GARBER: You know, many, many years ago, as we



all know, the league has grown dramatically over the years, and we've said that the league was very focused on building an ownership group that was diverse but, very importantly, had diversity of thought, so varied experiences, that they could come into a market with their own perspective of what would work in their market and how they could drive success, and how could we have a league structure that ultimately could empower that strategy.

We have two strategies that I think are really exhibit A for that. LAFC is here, like the Galaxy, in a market that really is about stars, and it's a sophisticated soccer market, and it's one that needs to break through the clutter of many, many other professional sports teams.

As you all know, what's going on with both the Galaxy and LAFC is really remarkable, and it's something that's captured all the excitement of people here in the community.

They brought in players that they think could provide great impact, and certainly Carlos is an example of that, somebody who we've had our eyes on for all those times that Carlos was beating us as we were fans of our national team or watching games in México.

And I'm really impressed with everything that they've done, and it's resonated with sellouts and it's resonated with breaking through the clutter. It's a different spending approach than certainly other teams, but it works for them, and our system provides for it.

Philadelphia is really a model about how you can bring in the people that understand our system and have a strategy and stick with that strategy and use all of the tools that are available to you that are not just about spending money on designated players and drive success.

And what they've been able to do with their academy system I think is a model in our league. Frankly, I think it's a model in professional sports. European teams are scouting the Union Academy, and have for many years, and just look at the players that have come on through.

Their commitment to development, their commitment to consistency is something that we think is really exciting.

I'm proud of Jay Sugarman and I'm proud of Richard, his partner. I'm proud of what Jim has been able to do. And to me, the excitement of the two teams here are examples of two different pathways to success. One of them is going to win the trophy, and hopefully that will be a model for other teams to be able to capture that excitement and value really.

**Q. Just going a little bit more into the Apple TV deal, how forward are you in terms of implementing it? Have you finalized where production is? Also, you did say when the Apple TV deal was announced there was a possibility of still doing something linear? Fox has the game on Saturday; that would be the last linear game possibly for a while. Just any updates on where linear negotiations stand.**

DON GARBER: So I'll start with linear. We are in the process of finalizing our linear deals. There was no real rush to do that during the MLS season. Might be for those who are wondering what's going to happen going forward, but for us we were very focused on getting through this year and then spending the time and energy which has been all hands on creating the production process and the production strategy to be able to produce games in super high quality with a team of announcers, with content that we think will be new and innovative, with technology and data that is going to take time for us to be able to put together.

So I've read articles that were behind. We're not behind. Our season doesn't start for a while. Certainly we'll be launching our season with Apple, with great production teams, with all of the bells and whistles that we've been talking about. Stay tuned as we'll soon be announcing a brand and soon announcing the things that will be the innovations that we'll have in that new relationship. So stay tuned.

**Q. Commissioner, we live in interesting and really exciting times when it comes to, certainly from a Fox perspective, broadcasting the MLS Cup this weekend and then going into the World Cup. You mentioned it a little bit briefly in your opening remarks, this constant drive for credibility -- domestically and internationally -- with what MLS is doing on the field. We are going to see players this weekend, and we've seen players all year in Major League Soccer that are also going to represent their countries in the World Cup. How important has that been when you look back over the previous cycle, the international part of it, when it comes to credibility? And then going forward, you mentioned 2026; how are you going to continue to feed that fire, if you will, for that credibility going forward?**

DON GARBER: So statistically I think we'll be among the top leagues in the world that will have players that will be participating for their national teams. I think those numbers will continue to grow, as our league continues to sign more international players; and those players are performing at a level that, in my view, continues to rise and continues to approach world class.

Proud of those 40 players. I actually think when we were coming out here Dan said that more and more players beyond the 40 that we read about, I think it was Costa Rica that just announced three or four of our players --

THE MODERATOR: Just to clarify, we do not decide the national teams. We are projecting around 40 players, just to clarify. But yes, we thought we'd probably see at least one player on Costa Rica, and there are three MLS players announced today on Costa Rica.

DON GARBER: So I think it continues to be important. It'll be even more important in 2026. I think it's really important. I mentioned Canada. That wasn't by accident.

I remember standing up here and saying the real test as to whether or not what MLS was attempting to do in Canada would be can Canada qualify for the World Cup, and there's no doubt in anybody's mind, it's the result of the teams we have there, our development of players, and continuing to have a professional environment.

It's super important. I think it will remain important. I can remember back in the day the MLS Strike Force, when we had a strategy of bringing some players down, and we signed Brian and we brought Landon back, and it was one of these real great moments for the league, and I think you're going to continue to see that going forward.

The path to '26 is an entire soccer ecosystem in North America path. All of us are focused on how can we all capitalize on this unique moment which will be the biggest sporting event that this continent has ever seen.

And I know all of our teams, I know the women's league and I know the USL and all the youth associations, everybody associated with U.S. soccer, has all got -- U.S. soccer foundation, all has got their individual plans, and we ought to ensure that we're using the path to the World Cup and the World Cup itself as a way to give us the rocket fuel that we need to make this sport everything that we dreamed it could be when you were a little kid player and you were over in Italy and you came here and now your broadcast career.

It'll be sort of a shining moment when you're in the studio during the World Cup in '26.

See, I just renewed your contract. (Laughter.)

**Q. Earlier this year, there were reports that NYC FC Stadium was going to be built soon or at least there were going to be plans for it announced. I have a three-part question so you might be ready to write this**

**down. First of all, very basically, could you give us a general update? That's part one. Part two, NYC FC, the defending champions, was forced to play in six different venues this year that they called home. What sort of a look is that for the defending champions and the league itself? And here it is their eighth season in the league; they're still playing in a baseball stadium, baseball park. Did you think it was going to take this long and even longer to get them a soccer-specific stadium in New York City?**

DON GARBER: Well, let me kind of answer all three at once. When we granted the team to New York City, we were on the cusp of finalizing a deal with the City of New York, and we had anticipated finalizing that; and for reasons that you know and most people are aware of, that deal never closed.

That being said, I'm proud of what's gone on in New York. I think we've got a great rivalry with the Red Bulls, we've got a championship team that's doing wonderful things to build soccer affinity for soccer fans in a very large city.

It's not optimal to not have your home. It's not anything that MLS ever intends to do. I think you probably have been around to know and understand that.

What I will tell you, having stood in front of many of you for over 20 years, developing stadiums is an enormously difficult process for anyone. When you want to be as close to an urban environment as possible, it's even more difficult, and doing it in cities like New York and Miami and Los Angeles border on being impossible.

But we have always powered through. We've always gotten deals done.

I could always stay here years later and say, don't ask me about Miami anymore; we're building a stadium in Miami. And I'm confident that we'll have a stadium in New York City.

Then I think all of us will look back on the challenges of getting to this point as the NYC FC 1.0. And then when they're playing in a beautiful stadium that I think will be spectacular, if they're able to get it over the finish line, we'll be very proud of it.

**Q. Don, you talked about delivering exciting moments to the fans, and I'm sure you know there were multiple reports recently about yet another overhaul of the playoff format in this league. I think we've all lost count of how many there have been over the years. The fans seem to like the current way of doing things. It sure makes the regular season more important,**

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**which was something that the league wanted for a long time. This news seems to signal that some people up there or out there in the league find the current format unsuccessful or unsatisfactory. Do you find it unsuccessful or unsatisfactory, and if so, why?**

DON GARBER: Well, I think the playoff format that we had has been fantastic. It's been amongst the most exciting playoffs we've ever had. It's reflected on attendance and television ratings and buzz and led to where we are today.

But I'm convinced, as our league continues to grow, soon to be 30 teams, somebody will ask about that, you need to evolve your competitive schedule and your competitive format.

In all leagues here in North America in particular -- I shouldn't say that, here in North America, playoffs are a driver of excitement and a driver of sort of focused interest for fans. Our fans are no different.

The league doesn't sit behind the curtain, the mighty Oz curtain and make these decisions because we think it will be fun. We do research with our fans, we speak to our media partners, we gauge what the interest and buzz and energy is around playoffs when they're taking place. And if it makes sense for us to evolve as we have over time, we do that.

I don't think any of the changes that we've ever made in these competitive changes have been bad. Most people would agree with that. So are there changes that you could make which would make good things even better? Perhaps. And in the off-season, as we always do, and other leagues do the same thing, as you well know, sit down with our competition committee, with our chief soccer officers, with input from research that we do with our fans and determine if something needs to be tweaked.

If we can come out where tomorrow is better than today, we'll do it; and if we can't, we won't.

**Q. When I first spoke to you in 2011, it was difficult to get interest in MLS stories in the UK and in Europe. Here we are now years later, and the culture in some of the major markets is quite incredible, to the point where even people I know in the UK are super impressed with the lifestyle, the fans, the traditions that they're building.**

You talk about St. Louis having 60,000 season ticket requests, and most fans don't even know who's going to be on that team. Would you say that the league is now less reliant on international superstars? And is it a good thing that a team like LAFC, with such incredible fans, have

gotten to MLS Cup final without Gareth Bale having a major impact?

DON GARBER: I think it's a really good question, and I think it speaks to sort of the evolution of the league. What did we need to do to drive interest over the lifespan of the league today? I think it actually goes a little bit to the question that Jonathan asked, where how do you make changes competitively to address fan needs? I don't know if Jonathan thinks that we'll think about it from the fan perspective, but I can assure you we are.

When we brought in, made changes to our system to bring in the designated player rule, that was because we did research. And at that time, in the early 2000s, our soccer fans were saying we'd like to see some of the big international names that we're now beginning to see in Premier League games or Bundesliga games that we're now successful on television here in the United States.

So we have a system that we can evolve, make the designated player rule and you bring in a bunch of big-name players like Henri and Beckham and Marquez and et cetera, et cetera.

That sort of became a bit of a brand-forward identity for the league. And then as the league was continuing to grow and players were thinking about this as a place to perhaps come at the latter part of their career, it had the opposite effect of what we were trying to achieve because we did not think of ourselves as a retirement league.

It forced us to think very differently about what we were going to do to develop our product at the bottom of our rosters and use all of that energy on home-grown development, et cetera, et cetera. And now we're sort of moving from the top and the bottom into the middle. And we're no different than any other league.

When somebody talks to me about Lionel Messi and whether he's going to come to Major League Soccer and where is he in his career, and in the same breath they say that he's under contract to his current team who wants to keep him and the president of La Liga says they'd love to have him back in Spain and he's had one of the best seasons in an unbelievably storied career, having a Major League Soccer -- we'd welcome him in our league today without any thought as to what that would do to the perception of Major League Soccer.

I think to your point about how we're represented internationally and the Apple relationship is going to help sort of energize this, is that we do think that having global exposure for our league in easily accessible formats is going to allow us to open up our league to other players

who may or may not be thinking about Major League Soccer today, and obviously other fans who will have more access to our games.

We're in the most global sport, but we're not the most global league; and as everybody knows, the global leagues are spending a lot of time thinking about how they can capture the opportunity here in the United States. Well, we're now thinking about how we can capture that opportunity more broadly internationally, and we're very, very focused on it.

I think the next number of years you're going to see a real enormous amount of energy and opportunity for us abroad, fans, players, sponsors and the like. It's really empowering.

**Q. Tell me a bit about Charlotte's first season, how you assess it with major changes not only at coach but also the transition of their president, and would you like to see Charlotte in a soccer-specific stadium at some point?**

DON GARBER: Well, I said in my comments, when those of us who have been around a while, and I include all of us in the room, many people have been around the sport for a long time, Charlotte was never on anybody's MLS expansion list. It wasn't in the big round that we had years ago where 12 cities bid, where we were thinking about expanding at that time. We didn't have a team that was south of Washington, DC, and look where we are in the southeast with Atlanta and teams in Florida and obviously what's going on in Charlotte. You could almost argue if you're bad at geography that Nashville is in that part of the country. Lots and lots of opportunity moving to that part of the United States.

We never expected that we'd have the excitement and energy of what's going on in Charlotte today. Credit to David Tepper, but I really think it's a credit to where soccer in North America is today. There's not a city in the United States or Canada where you can't have a successful MLS team or a successful professional team, if it's not in Major League Soccer. That's a testament to what's going on in the sport today.

But launching an MLS team now where you're at a very mature level compared to where we were is difficult, and it requires getting up to speed. I will tell you that as I've lived through most of the expansion in the league, there's been a number of teams that have really struggled out of the gate. It took them a number of years to be able to get it right on the field, and many times even get it right off the field.

And I've got great confidence that David and his team will figure it out. They'll have lots of stability, and next year I think that the excitement in Charlotte will be even bigger than what it is today.

Great confidence in what they're doing down there.

THE MODERATOR: Commissioner, she did ask about a soccer-specific stadium.

DON GARBER: Listen, I think when you go through a planning process, when Mark and Alan Rothenberg and others launched the league in 1996, the concept was to be tenants in big football stadiums, and shortly thereafter we figured that's probably not the best idea. Then Lamar Hunt builds Columbus Crew's stadium in 1988 and 1989, and here we are with a brand-new stadium and new ownership in Columbus.

So the evolution of the soccer development process has been really dramatic. We never expected we'd be able to have the kind of energy, excitement in stadium in Seattle.

Arthur Blank, who pitched Atlanta, and I can tell you that many of us did not think Atlanta would be a good MLS market, and Arthur reminded us that even people that have been running leagues for a while don't know everything about pro sports, trust me, it's going to be great. He was right.

And Atlanta United, I'm glad we don't have a soccer-specific stadium there. And we spent time in Alpharetta, we spent time in Marietta, we looked all over Atlanta for a soccer stadium, and thank goodness we're playing in Mercedes-Benz.

I don't know that there is any need today to be thinking about a soccer-specific stadium in Charlotte, but life is a long time. The team is only a year old.

**Q. Question about San Diego. You've been at this a long time. Is this the closest San Diego has ever been to getting an MLS franchise or MLS club? What is it about the specific ownership group, the stadium, this timing in the city that makes it that way? I'm assuming Nick is going to ask you about Las Vegas, but if he doesn't, I'd like to get your thoughts on where San Diego fits with Las Vegas, 30 teams versus 32.**

DON GARBER: So I'm a big believer in San Diego. And like many people told us that MLS would not work in Miami, I think everybody is seeing that MLS is going to work just fine in Miami. I think there's a view that San Diego, it's too nice there and people are out surfing and hanging at the beach, and I don't buy it.

I think San Diego is a great sports market. It's a gateway city. We've got a brand-new relationship that is very formal on and off the field with Liga MX to think about what the opportunities are going to be if we have a team in San Diego and their connection down south, the player development opportunities.

San Diego, we've always believed in the market, and I would say that we're probably closer than ever before.

I will say the only remember referendum we've ever lost was in San Diego, and at that time we obviously were unhappy that it happened, but I look at what the university has done and the development of Snapdragon and the success of the women's team and all the energy and momentum behind professional soccer with Landon's team is fantastic.

So sometimes it takes a step back to take a couple of steps forward, and we did take a step back, but I think it's fantastic that they are where they are. I hope that we can continue to make progress with the ownership group that we're talking to, and we're optimistic, but we've been -- as many of you know, we've been at this place before. We'll see how it all develops.

We still are in discussions in Las Vegas. I believe that Las Vegas, like all other leagues do, is going to be a growing market, both in terms of number of people and its ability to drive success for professional sports.

We've got active discussions there. We've got a potential site. We've got a lot of work to do because you clearly need to build an indoor MLS stadium. Indoor stadiums are expensive. Indoor stadiums are really expensive.

We'll see how all that plays out. So it's not a matter of who's first, who's second. Both are very active discussions.

**Q. Following up on Vegas, you had a potential site, so would that be the one on Las Vegas Boulevard near Warm Springs just off the strip? They mentioned it would be next to the high speed rail station. Additionally, you mentioned the 30th team might be announced early in 2023, and you mentioned it might not be Vegas, it could be San Diego. Just talk about where that sits. Is that still in discussions?**

DON GARBER: Yeah, I didn't say early in the year because then everybody is going to hold me to what does "early" mean. We hope to have something done by the middle of the year, but our deadlines are always movable, as everybody here knows.

We really hit the deadlines we set for ourselves, but you have to have deadlines or then everybody doesn't pay attention.

The site that we were talking to, are talking to about is the site that you mentioned. But I think as you know, I think the landscape of Las Vegas from a sporting perspective today is going to be very different from what it's going to look like over the next five years. There's so much talk going on about what's happening with other leagues and other teams that I sit here today and I can't tell you what Las Vegas is going to look like years from now.

I think it's a testament to what's going on and the leadership of the Convention and Visitors' Bureau, the mayor, and certainly the success of the Raiders and the Knights. We'll have to see how it all plays out.

I don't want to have anybody think that one is leading the next. We've been in discussions with Wes and Nassef for some time. We think they're terrific owners. They've done a great job, Wes in the NBA and certainly their joint ownership in the Premier League. They'd be great owners in Major League Soccer.

**Q. I just wanted to follow up on a statement that you issued last month which touched on some elements of Sally Yates' report into the NWSL's operation. In it you highlighted what you referred to as initial steps taken Merritt Paulson in the aftermath of the club's infractions. Is the league considering any further actions or consequences for Paulson and Peregrine Sports in regard to the findings of that investigation, and did the league learn anything from the report that caused leadership to reconsider Paulson's role within Major League Soccer?**

DON GARBER: I think the best way to answer it is that we at this time don't see any reason at all for Merritt to sell the Timbers.

Obviously Merritt has very publicly acknowledged the mistakes that he and the organization has made. He's taken responsibility for those decisions that he's made, and I think that the steps that he's made in terms of stepping aside and bringing in a new CEO and a termination of two long-term employees, which we supported, were steps in the right direction.

There was nothing that came out in the report that would have us think any differently from what I just stated there right now.

**Q. Obviously the Leagues Cup is a groundbreaking**



**event, and you mentioned Apple TV and the reach internationally. Is there anything on the radar for MLS to continue international relationships with other clubs, maybe with other leagues or maybe having MLS clubs play abroad in the not-too-distant future as perhaps other means to create relationships with leagues outside in the Americas or beyond?**

DON GARBER: You know, you've been around the Galaxy for a long time. I used to do their tours, particularly in the David era, and today it's interesting, you don't see our teams playing lots of friendlies and certainly not having the time to be able to go abroad and play because our calendar has become so crowded.

We won't have congestion with Leagues Cup because we're taking a break, but when you add the U.S. Open Cup, you add the expanded CONCACAF Champions League, it is for us -- and by the way, it is a challenge, as you know, for international clubs to find windows to be able to go play abroad.

But I think the real question is what could we do with Apple to develop those relationships, and are there partnerships that we could form from a content perspective. Are there things that we could do in preparation for players who might be thinking about coming to Major League Soccer. Are there things that we could do with our current owners, many of them who own teams in different leagues around the world.

I think that's all part of the creative process. You are all content producers in your own right, and whether you're doing that for yourself or doing that for others, imagine being in a partnership with the No. 1 content distribution company in the world and having them decide that Major League Soccer is going to be the league that they're going to step into the sports business with.

I think it speaks to the question that was asked before about where are you on the production. This is a 10-year deal, and we've got a lot of runway to do things that I think are going to transform the way fans view Major League Soccer here and our ability to connect with them around the world.

I don't know that I dug in deep enough. Clubs will have their own rooms that are going to be sitting in this global opportunity, and our teams are going to be producing content that now they're producing that might not get the distribution that they're able to get today, whether it's on their own website or through other vehicles, and be able to broadcast that to the world.

It's going to be the capitalist way, that good teams are

going to produce great content, that are going to engage their players, that are going to sign players who believe in this ability to create this global opportunity for themselves and their clubs and the league, and I think it's going to be really cool. So stay tuned.

**Q. Hello from beautiful Montreal. Hope you're doing well. We've talked a lot about the excitement and what's been going on in the MLS. Obviously it's been an exciting year here in Montreal with the team having a great season, a good playoff run. Do you feel as though this franchise is finally on the right path to getting where you would like for it to be? It has still not recorded a season where they have been able to break even financially, but obviously crowds have been coming back. Season tickets are still pretty low, but do you feel like you're on the right path, and if so, what do they need to do to continue trying to get there?**

DON GARBER: You know, it warmed my heart to be up in Montreal and see Joey and his family sitting in the stands and looking out on Saputo Stadium and seeing everything that they always dreamed of, and the Saputo family deserves that. This is a family, as you know, they are not breaking even, that has been in the professional soccer business in Canada for decades, and they have been trying to do everything in their power to deliver for a very sophisticated audience in Montreal that knows the game and really understands what the game can mean in the community.

Joey Saputo has looked to achieve what he's achieved, putting aside their final in what was the CONCACAF Champions League, the iteration of it years ago, that all came to fruition this year. They had an exciting team. They were successful on the field. They were successful off the field.

I'm very, very happy for them. Their new president is doing a terrific job. I think they finally have a great formula in their front office, and I hope that they can get the support from the city that they deserve, and that means if they're going to make the investment in renovating that stadium, they should get the support from the municipality to be able to make that rational for the Saputo family.

Owning a sports team is not a charity. It's something that is certainly about being able to have the opportunity to earn enough so that you can continue to give back to the community in meaningful ways, and I'm hopeful that he'll continue to ride the wave of success that he's had this year.

**Q. Don, you touched on this, but in terms of the**



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**financial realities of the new Apple deal, do you see that having an impact on your roster rules going forward? For example, do you think the designated player rule is here to stay? Do you think an allocation money format is here to stay? How do you see that playing out as you move forward with radically changed financial terms?**

DON GARBER: You know, I don't think there's a correlation between when you have new revenue to how you're going to manage your competitive rules, roster rules and the like.

MLS is still an investment vehicle for -- in investment mode for most if not all of our teams.

What I think is goes back to the first question that was asked, which is do the rules that we have in place now and the structure we have in place now give any individual owner the opportunity with their own thought, their own strategy, with their own belief as to what's going to drive success, to have the tools to be able to achieve that within the environment of their revenues in their local market.

Some teams have older stadiums and don't have the revenue opportunities that you might have in LAFC or you might have in Toronto or you might have in other markets, and yet we have a competitive format with on any given day, anybody can win; in the beginning of the year, any team's fans knows that their team could win MLS Cup.

We have had big-spending teams that have not made the playoffs, many of them this year. We've had low-spending teams that have made the playoffs. We've had low-spending teams that have won MLS cup.

It seems as if the formula is less about -- of driving success is less about do you put in more, but are there ways that you could, to your point, rethink about providing perhaps more flexibility.

Many of you know we have a competition committee. We call it our product strategy committee. They're the ones that sit around and work with our technical directors and with a group of owners to think about is the system that we have now, the rules that we have in place, all of the techniques that provide individual owners and clubs the tools to be successful within their own system. I think that gets tweaked. I don't think it gets eliminated. It actually is working really, really well.

I will say, if this is the last question, leagues around the world come to Major League Soccer, even the biggest leagues, and look at the system that we have, and they say, boy, how can we figure out ways that we can utilize

some of your strategy, some of your technology, some of your innovation, some of your commercial energy, kind of things that we've done with the Apple deal and what we've done with some of our investment and ventures, and how do we take all of that and put it into systems that have been around for 100 years.

We acknowledge that MLS is not the Premier League or it's not the Bundesliga, but I can assure you that owners in those leagues and my counterparts in those leagues look at Major League Soccer as a system and a structure which provides them with I think an element of respect and intrigue.

I think if you were going to start some of these leagues today, they might have more of the structure the way we are than perhaps the way they're structured in their current form.

THE MODERATOR: I'd like to thank everybody for joining us today. We have a wide variety of activities for journalists and an awesome game scheduled for this weekend.

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