

Major League Soccer Panel Discussion

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Kaylyn Kyle

Gary Stevenson

Barney Francis

Mike Wurteen

Jim DeLorenzo

Panel Discussion



different ways, right?

Our product is on the field, on the pitch. I think it's well-known how much we've invested in the pitch. We're investing in NEXT Pro. We're investing in NEXT. We're investing in bringing new players to the league. So, our product on the pitch has improved dramatically, and I think that's hard to argue.

Then you think about our in stadium product, and our owners have just made such dramatic investments in our stadiums, and so the experience for our fans in stadiums is incredible.

The third leg to that stool really is our video, our live game content that's broadcast all over the world. So about four years ago when we were looking at this strategy on what's next for us in the media world, we found a number of different things through both consumer research, some input we got from our corporate partners, but that is that our video content, our live production product was just not good enough.

So at that moment we decided that there was a way for us to build a new product. We had been partners with NEP for 22 years, and we've had a lot of reps with them in a lot of areas. We've been partners with IMG for over ten years and doing some production services globally.

We've been partners with AT&T, who is the best in the world at moving video and data content around the world, so we had all the pieces in place to do our own production, number one.

Number two, what we knew is that fans -- it was difficult. You almost had to be a researcher as a fan to know when your games were. We had 63 different start times. You've heard us say that a lot. Start days and start times.

There were so many different networks where you had to go, and so when we put together a strategy and we put all that out and put it on a piece of paper and we went to Apple and said, listen, this is our vision. They responded, and Jim actually was the architect from the beginning on

KAYLYN KYLE: I'm Kaylyn Kyle, former Canadian Olympic Bronze Medalist and now one of your voices here at "MLS 360," the Saturday whip-around show. It's fun. It's electric, and there is a lot of goals and a lot of action, so I can't wait to have that one kicking off on the 25th.

Now, I thought my résumé was pretty good until I got handed the script that I'm about to read. Gary Stevenson, Major League Soccer Deputy Commissioner and President of MLS Business Venture.

Jim DeLorenzo, Apple. I have to actually have a word with you because my mom -- it's too hard for my mom to get ahead of me nowadays.

Mike Wurteen, NEP Group Global President of Broadcast Services. And Barney Francis, IMG Productions Executive Vice President and Head of Global Production.

Should we get started? Do you feel like you're a little bit on the hot seat?

GARY STEVENSON: No, actually, Jim and I have been on the hot seat for a year.

JIM DeLORENZO: Yeah, actually year and a half.

KAYLYN KYLE: We'll cool the hot seats down a little bit. Gary and Jim, tell us why Apple and MLS partnership makes sense, and how do these priorities align? Let's start with you.

GARY STEVENSON: Well, what I would say is I think the Commissioner touched a lot on the reason why this makes sense because at MLS we think about our product in three



this project. He said, you know, that's our vision too, is how can we build a product that is simple for fans to use that is a way where a fan can just pick up their phone, pick up their iPad, whatever that device it is, and it's easy. It's easy to watch your favorite team.

That was the germ of the idea. And, of course, it's gone from here and you're going to be doing studio shows in here every week that's going to allow fans to get in and out of matches, and we're going to have the ability to tell stories about players. You know, we have players from 82 countries, and I'll bet you that if we went out and did a survey of people and say, you know, what league in North America has the most players from different countries, I'm not sure we would come in first. When we're done with this project, we sure better come in first because we have the ability to tell all those stories to fans.

So it really was fan-focused, as the Commissioner outlined, and we're just thrilled to be here and go to work on Saturday to deliver this great content to the world.

JIM DeLORENZO: Yeah, I think Gary said it right. You know, when Apple decided to get deeper into sports, we had a lot of ideas about how we were going to try and make it as fan-friendly, as customer-friendly as possible because that's what we do with everything. All of our products and services, we always start with trying to figure out what problems are we going to solve for fans, what problems are we going to solve for customers?

It's one thing, though, for us to say that. It's another thing to find a partner who is like-minded and has that same devotion and commitment to the fans to try and make the experience better. So when we came together and we really saw, like, oh, my gosh, this is actually something where both sides are thinking the same way from the start, it was super exciting for us.

We're seeing that manifest itself now where we took all these matches from being mostly local to now every one of them is global. There's no such thing anymore as local blackouts. These are all things -- the schedule -- these are all things that will maybe it --

GARY STEVENSON: English, Spanish, French.

JIM DeLORENZO: Right, multiple languages. So much easier for fans to not just find their favorite clubs and players and to follow them, but to be able to watch with this elevated experience that we're going to have.

KAYLYN KYLE: I love that you said that because I've been living in America for 11 years, and my mom has never been able to watch me on TV, so I'm thanking you, but I'm

not really thanking you because the amount of text messages I'm going to get from her every Saturday saying, Sweetie, great job. I'm going to be, like, Mom, I'm 34, come on now.

Barney, I want to go to you. What is IMG's role in the MLS Season Pass Production, and what can fans expect from "MLS 360," "MLS Countdown," and "MLS Wrap-Up."

BARNEY FRANCIS: Great question. Firstly, good morning, everybody. So we've been working on this project for a few months now. I always say to Gary -- Gary uses an expression called "time compression" that no one has had long, but it's allowed us to make some really informed decisions about how we can best bring this great league to life for all the Apple customers around the world.

So what you've seen here is the manifestation of what we're trying to create. Every single match we've got producers and directors all over the country that marry up with Mike's team, and Mike will explain NEP's role. Producers and directors all over the country who are going to bring those games to life. Announcers all over the country who are going to bring those games to life.

So every individual game, as you've heard from Jim and Gary, are available as a single stream. But then, also, we're creating three studio shows out of here. One in English, one in Spanish, and then "MLS 360." So in both English and Spanish language, you'll get the "Countdown Show," which will be talents in the studio talking about the games that are coming at all the different time zones throughout the afternoon and into the evening. Then they'll also do the same in wrapping up the matches at the end of the day.

In here in the "360" Studio it's a whip-around show. Now, whip-around shows aren't new, but what I would like to think our whip-around show is going to do is it's going to bring to life the talents that we've got, including your good self, and all the 80 that the Commissioner mentioned. They're going to get a go at being in the studio and bringing to life all the goals as they happen using this huge screen behind us, using the screens over there.

They're going to be fun. It's going to be light and also serious where it needs to be. I envision penalty at San Jose. We'll come in vision into the studio. We'll have you four guys debating as the replays go through. Was it a penalty? Was it not a penalty? Just having a bit of fun with it and really giving people a sort of one-stop-shop. If you want to watch all the goals and all the instances from the whole afternoon of football within the MLS then that will be the place, "360." If you are devoted to a team, then you're going to watch your own team in full for 90 minutes



and then you might come back into the "360."

So our role is to produce all that content and to create a compelling proposition for the Apple customers and football fans all around the world.

KAYLYN KYLE: We also have a lead referee, Christina Unkel, that is going to be joining us every so often in studio, so we're going to give her a little bit of a hard time because there are some former players in here. She always makes us agree with her at the end of the day.

Mike, how is NEP supporting this effort? Can you share more insights on how you guys are doing this in two to three different languages out of one truck, first and foremost, and this is revolutionary.

MIKE WURTEEN: It is. Great question. Good morning, everybody. The role of NEP in this process is to provide the technical tools for all the storytellers to do their job.

This is something that we've been focused on for over a year on what the infrastructure was going to be, and it's not just the audio portions of it. It's also the video portions of it.

So from a truck in St. Louis, let's say, or any MLS stadium, to be able to provide the different languages which will include English, Spanish, and when required, French, and also home radio so that anybody that is watching on the Apple platform is going to be able to get that content that they want. That's not an easy task.

To be able to take it from location, it's connected to six NEP sites that are throughout the United States, so we've got facilities in Dallas, we've got facilities in Miami, here in New York, which you are sitting in right now, Washington D.C., and Los Angeles. All of that interconnected production to be able to provide all the content that Apple consumers are going to expect is by the paths, the tools that we create.

That allows Barney and his team to be able to tell the stories that they want. That's going to be driven by the great product that's put on the field to a great platform that Jim has described that will be no blackouts for anybody that wants to watch MLS moving forward.

KAYLYN KYLE: Now, Jim, I've been in a lot of amazing studios. I mean, incredible. I walked into this one this week, and my jaw hit the floor. I was like a little kid on Christmas. They were, like, Do you want to wait until you go out for rehearsal?

I was, like, No. I was that kid that would unwrap my Christmas presents and then wrap them up so I knew what

I was getting. I definitely wanted to see this one straight away. What was the thought process in making this so incredible?

JIM DeLORENZO: It's amazing. I think that it's emblematic of the focus that Apple has on design and really trying to use design as a way to improve the customer experience, but a ton of credit here should go to not just the Apple team, but MLS and NEP and IMG to bring this all together because when you look at this studio and you can see how there's all these different parts and spaces of it, it's going to allow them to have a really dynamic broadcast over that five-plus hours of the match night, which is going to be great, again, going back to customers to be able to have that vibrant feel the entire time.

KAYLYN KYLE: I feel like I might be a little too vibrant for this studio. I'll tone it down come Saturday. I promise you that. Mike, fill us in on the technical aspects of this gorgeous studio.

MIKE WURTEEN: It's a beautiful space. 6,000 square feet that we're sitting in right now. This is the primary studio for the "360" show. There's also two other studios for the both English and Spanish pregame and post shows.

This was something that was created on December 17th of 2022. None of this existed. What you are sitting in right now was the effort of a ton of people, both from MLS, Apple, IMG, and NEP to create the space that we're in right now.

The screens that we have, that's also NEP screens, both here and back. This one is 55 feet-by-17 feet, 6,000 pounds. One of the largest that exists in New York City. Obviously, we're very proud of the studio and look forward to seeing you and everyone in this throughout the season.

KAYLYN KYLE: I'm glad that you read that. I dropped that in your notes earlier on. Just quickly, Gary and Barney, how is the viewing experience improving for MLS fans with this season pass?

GARY STEVENSON: Well, what I would say is part of what Jim's team and Barney's team and our team have contemplated from the beginning was improved picture quality. So all of our matches will be at 10 ADP.

We've described both Spanish and English, and both of those will be called from the same place. Not the same physical space, but on site at the matches. You'll hear that the sound is better on the shows. You'll see that the graphics, which Apple Design Team has built for us. The graphic package is unparalleled in sports in my opinion.



You'll see that some of the work we're doing with IMG Arena at harvesting advanced data will end up on the screen in ways that has never been done before, which will give the viewer better insight as to how a particular player made a run and what the percentages are from different places on the field.

We've had none of that in our shows. And, quite frankly, in my judgment that's been a little bit void in football broadcasting around the world. Barney, by the way, was the leader of Sky's broadcast forever, and I got to know Barney in that role when MLS was being broadcast in Sky.

I think what's interesting about this is we knew that we wanted to do our own production, but we also knew that because of technology and the changing of technology and the ability to move video and data content between stadiums and to a facility and even overseas so we can create some of the graphics is so much easier now. You don't have to have a facility that you own one huge structure, which happens so much in especially linear programming today.

So we contemplated this, I guess, two years ago we were talking about, and honestly, we learned a lot in the bubble when we were building those matches in the bubble. The League's Cup was born out of the bubble. We had a lot of time down there to think and talk. I can tell you that.

So we've taken a lot of reps over the years, and this is an opportunity for us to pull it all together. But the thing that changed the game, the game changer for us, was when Apple joined in as our partner because not only are they the greatest consumer marketer, but they're also the greatest technology company.

So a lot of the things that you're going to see in a typical case you wouldn't have the ability to implement them and implement them so fast, but I think what you are going to see are so many changes to the look and feel of our broadcast. Barn, I'll let you --

BARNEY FRANCIS: Just to add to that, the picture quality is better, the sound quality is better, the graphics, everything that Gary has mentioned there and alluded to. But it's also about the storytelling, and that comes with better replay sequencing. It comes with bringing to life some of the rituals that are so preeminent in this league.

But, then also we think -- we are TV producers, we are program producers, sports producers, but underlining everything that we thought of is, how do we make the customer experience as good as it can possibly be? Apple have created this incredible platform, so it's so easy to

access whatever you want, but actually the bit that we do is providing the content that fills those tiles has to be premium quality as well because Apple customers demand that.

So it's hugely exciting. It's currently 29 franchises. It is all the colors of a great league that is vibrant and glowing, and everywhere I go around the world talking to football federations, this partnership is the envy of them all.

KAYLYN KYLE: Well, you got my 4-year-old changing clubs on me. He is now obsessed with Austin since watching the rituals on MLS Season Pass because of the sights, the scenes, and the colors.

My last one, because we do have to wrap it up, is for you. It's kind of a hot-seat question because, A, I am asking basically why you have hired me? But you put together a unique team of broadcasters, soccer legends --

GARY STEVENSON: Because you're close.

KAYLYN KYLE: -- to lead this MLS Season Pass coverage. How did you go about assembling this wonderful colorful team?

GARY STEVENSON: I would say a couple of things on that one. It's not just the broadcast talent, but it's also the producers and the directors that lead that talent. I would put our producer and director list up with anybody in the world, the group that Barney has assembled. You know, we've all worked on it, but Barney's team has assembled it. You have to have great producers and directors. It starts with that.

They'll never get any of the credit, but you'll see different shows we believe as a result of them, number one.

Number two, when we announced this project, I think a lot of broadcast talent were intrigued by it. We would like to think that the intrigue was around MLS, but I think Apple had a lot to do with that as well.

So we had so many incoming calls from people that were interested in being part of this project, and a woman that's worked very closely with me over the years, Kristen, kind of led this project and helping us decide who to hire from both studio but also talent.

But another guy that was, like, really helpful in this process to me was Taylor Twellman. He is the first guy that we signed. The guy loves this league. You know, he is undeniably one of the biggest supporters of Major League soccer, and his energy and his enthusiasm and him talking to so many people out there about this, I think, helped the



incoming calls, but then Mo came on, and you came on and so many people came on and once we had that energy, unfortunately, we had to disappoint a few folks because there were some really talented people that got left off the list.

This is a long life, and we've got a lot of content to create over the next ten years. This is a ten-year partnership. So there's going to be a lot of space for a lot of talent going forward, but we are thrilled with the talent line-up we have in English, Spanish, and French going forward.

KAYLYN KYLE: I'm grateful for this opportunity and grateful that all you guys are here with us. Thank you, guys, for taking the time to sit down and chat with all of us and have fun with this.

We've kind of seen the studio, the colors, the sounds, the technical aspect of it, but let's take a look at what we're going to be seeing on the pitch in 2023.

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