

PortlandTribune

Gooooaaal! Major League Soccer coming to Portland

Friday morning announcement clears way for new 'Timbers' to play in a couple of years

BY JIM REDDEN

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Let the party begin.

Major League Soccer Commissioner Don Garber told a noisy press conference crowded Friday morning with local soccer fans that Portland has been awarded the 18th team in the league. The new team could begin play by 2011.

Portland businessman and team owner Merritt Paulson told the crowd that the team would be called the Portland Timbers, citing its long history in Portland.

The Hilton Hotel room was packed with members of the Timbers Army, who sang and chanted throughout it.

Those same soccer fans planned a full day of parties Friday, beginning with a rally outside the downtown hotel where the MLS announcement was made and ending at the University of Portland Friday night, where the United League Timbers played the professional New York Red Bulls to a 0-0 draw.

"This is a great day for soccer and Portland," said Bruce Eaton, a member of the Timbers Army fan club staging the rally.

Paulson offered to spend \$40 million of his own money for the expansion MLS team. Portland's City Council has agreed to spend around \$70 million to support the deal, with the details to be finalized if Portland gets the team.

Both Mayor Sam Adams and city Commissioner Randy Leonard praised Paulson for his commitment to the city and Major League Soccer for its faith in Portland as a location for its newest franchise.

Adams, noting that soccer is the most popular sport in the world, predicted that the Timbers would put Portland on the world map when the team begins play in two years 2011.

Leonard thanked Commissioner Dan Saltzman for providing the third council vote to support Paulson's bid. Saltzman did not attend Friday's event.

MLS officials said the decision to put a team in Portland included the city's "storied history" of soccer and the Timbers, who were title contenders in North American Soccer League during the mid- and late-1970s.

Portland also is home to the North American headquarters of adidas, the official athletic sponsor and licensed product supplier for MLS and all its teams since 2005.

"Adidas is synonymous with soccer and bringing the MLS to Portland is a great next step in our goal of inspiring a soccer nation," said Patrik Nilsson, president of adidas North America. "Adidas is passionate about soccer. Portland loves soccer. Together as fans of the sport we will build on the traditions and passion that exist around soccer in our hometown."

Portland becomes the third Pacific Northwest city in MLS, and its geographic rivalries with Seattle and Vancouver, British Columbia, will be contested on the soccer field in front of spirited, colorful crowds.

By 2011, the league will have added a second team in Los Angeles, expanded its footprint to cover more



JONATHAN HOUSE / PORTLAND TRIBUNE
Major League Soccer Commissioner Dan Garber, right, presents Portland Timbers owner Merritt Paulson with an honorary jersey Friday morning. Portland will get a new MLS franchise beginning in 2011. The team will be called the Timbers.

Real Salt Lake and Chivas USA joined in 2005, Houston Dynamo began play in 2006, Toronto FC debuted in 2007 and the San Jose Earthquakes returned as an expansion team in 2008.

Thursday night, the new Seattle Sounders FC played the team's inaugural match. In 2010, Philadelphia begins as the league's 16th team.

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