

## Oregon, we've got games: new MLS team coming to Portland

By Ben Sherman, OregonLive.com

March 18, 2009, 10:27PM

Major League Soccer will award an expansion franchise to Portland on Friday, sources close to the deal said Wednesday.

Although the league would not confirm an announcement was scheduled, owner Merritt Paulson, the sources said, will be granted a team in the top tier of U.S. professional soccer to begin play in 2011 in a renovated PGE Park.

Friday's announcement will come two days after Vancouver, B.C., won a team and one day after Seattle's team makes its regular-season debut.

### MLS in PDX

The Oregonian's stories about the deals made to get an MLS franchise.

The league had long planned to announce two expansion franchises by today. Portland, St. Louis and Ottawa, Ontario, were candidates for the second choice behind Vancouver, whose selection was widely expected and made official Wednesday.

Paulson, owner of Portland's professional minor league soccer and baseball teams, will pay the \$40 million fee required of MLS expansion teams. He has sought public financial help in renovating PGE Park and building a baseball stadium for the Portland Beavers, who will need a new home once PGE Park is refurbished for soccer.

The MLS has 15 teams, with Seattle the latest to begin play. A team based near Philadelphia is scheduled to begin play next year. The expansion fee for those teams was \$30 million, and the willingness of Paulson and Greg Kerfoot, owner of Vancouver's expansion team, to pay more is often cited as a sign of the league's rising credibility.

The Portland City Council on March 11 approved a plan to give Paulson access to more than \$60million in city-backed bonds for renovating PGE Park and building a Rose Quarter stadium for the Beavers. The financial agreement makes Paulson responsible for 80 percent of the costs, including the franchise fee, Mayor Sam Adams has said. Commissioner Randy Leonard says the deal has "insulated the city" financially.

Even after last week's votes, though, details on the funding remain to be worked out and approved by the city.

Leonard and Adams negotiated the deal with Paulson, and they were cagey Wednesday when asked about the news.

"We definitely have a news conference on Friday, and we hope it's good news," Adams said.

Leonard joked that the league could be coming to Portland to give the city council a hard time for getting only three of five votes in approving the financing arrangement.

Leonard went on to talk about how "transformative" an MLS team will be for downtown businesses.

"It will inject money into our struggling economy at a time when we really need it," he said.

Although MLS represents the top level of competition in the United States, it doesn't compare with the leagues in England, Italy and other European countries. The best MLS players generally are rising U.S. stars destined for European teams or international players whose best days are behind them.

MLS spokesman Dan Courtemanche would not confirm an expansion announcement planned for Friday, but the league has reserved rooms at a Portland hotel.



Thomas Boyd/The Oregonian  
Timbers' owner Merritt Paulson

### Portland's journey to MLS

Merritt Paulson, who owns Portland's minor-league soccer and baseball teams will be granted an expansion MLS franchise Friday.

**What:** MLS is the highest level of professional soccer in the United States. A team in Seattle, which makes its debut Thursday, is the league's 15th franchise. A team based near Philadelphia is scheduled to begin play in 2010.

**When:** Paulson's team and one awarded to Vancouver, B.C., on Wednesday are scheduled to begin play in 2011.

**Where:** PGE Park. Paulson's Beavers baseball team will move to a new stadium in the Rose Quarter.

**How Much:** Paulson will pay the \$40 million expansion fee. The total costs for the stadium plans are \$88.8 million, and Paulson has said he will pay \$12 million of that. He also will use city-backed bonds and redevelopment money.

**How did we get here:** Among the cities expressing interest last year, Montreal withdrew in November. Atlanta and Miami followed, citing economic conditions among other factors.

Courtemanche did say MLS commissioner Don Garber and other league officials will meet with Paulson this week.

Portland's current professional soccer team, which plays one rung below MLS in the United Soccer Leagues, presumably would disband.

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Vancouver, B.C., long regarded as the front-runner, was awarded a team Wednesday. Portland beat St. Louis and Ottawa for the final franchise.