

Q&A with San Francisco Deltas CEO Brian Andrés Helmick

By Douglas Zimmerman on November 24, 2017 at 2:40 PM



A Deltas fan and Deltas CEO Brian Andrés Helmick pose for a photo after the San Francisco Deltas defeated the New York Cosmos to win the NASL Championship on November 12, 2017 at Kezar Stadium in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, CA. (Robert Edwards-KLC fotos)

San Francisco Deltas CEO Brian Andrés Helmick announced in a [blog post Friday morning](#) that his team would close after winning the NASL Championship.

With the announcement, I asked Helmick several questions about the decision to **fold the team after one season**.

[Reporter's note: Helmick was transparent before the interview that he would not be able to answer all of the questions I would ask before I emailed him the interview questions, but I thought they were important to ask anyways. He promised to share the information in the near future with the public. Several of the answers below reflect his statement.]

Here are some of the questions and answers from our interview via email:

SFGATE: When did you first realize that the Deltas were having problems and might not play more than one season?

Brian Andrés Helmick (BAH): We started the Deltas with a 3 to 5-year plan, but the reality is that future seasons are never guaranteed in professional sports. Transparency has always been incredibly important to us so we'll be releasing a ton of data and information, including timelines, to the public for fans to see what ultimately led to us making this decision.

SFGATE: You have always referred to the San Francisco Deltas as a soccer startup and not a soccer team. Do you feel that the decision to close the team after one season is keeping with the tech startup mentality?

BAH: I don't know if I've ever personally referred to the SF Deltas as a soccer startup. I think it's something that caught on because of my tech startup background and because of our investors who represent many successful startups. For me, this has always been a soccer club first, but I do believe that any club can benefit from the startup mentality of being lean, transparent and always being willing to listen to its fans. We started the Deltas with a 3 to 5-year plan but future seasons are never guaranteed in professional sports. In any business, startup or otherwise, it's important to evaluate the viability of the enterprise and be ready make the difficult decision to change the original plan. Transparency has always been incredibly important to us so we'll be releasing a ton of data and information to the public for fans to see what ultimately led to us making this decision.

SFGATE: In a related question do you think that tech startup mentality (collaboration and transparency) has a place in professional soccer?

BAH: Yes. I think professional soccer could benefit tremendously from greater collaboration and transparency at all levels.

SFGATE: When was the final decision made to pull the plug? Was it your call or was it in collaboration with the primary owner of the team Fabio Igel and/or the other investors?

BAH: Transparency has always been incredibly important to us, so we'll be releasing a ton of data and information to the public for fans to see what ultimately led to us making this decision.

SFGATE: Do you feel that pro soccer can be successful in San Francisco and/or do you feel that pro soccer can only be successful if it is a first division (MLS) team?

BAH: I do believe that pro soccer can be successful in the Bay Area. In the coming months, we will share with fans, and the public with data and lessons learned that we hope will benefit others who are interested in developing the sport here in San Francisco or in other cities.

SFGATE: Do you feel like the San Francisco Deltas will leave a lasting impact in the Bay Area off the field and on the field?

BAH: I sure hope so.

SFGATE: In an interview with Midfield Press earlier this year you said that the Deltas investors were in this for the long hall. Did you have an initial plan to play more than one season? What changed?

BAH: We started the Deltas with a 3 to 5-year plan, but the reality is that future seasons are never guaranteed in professional sports. In any business, startup or otherwise, it's important to evaluate the viability of the enterprise and be ready to make the difficult decision to change the original plan. Transparency has always been incredibly important to us so we'll be releasing a ton of data and information to the public for fans to see what ultimately led to us making this decision.

SFGATE: Can you talk about how much money the team lost on the project and how much was it above your projections?

BAH: In the coming months, we will share with fans and the public with data and lessons learned that we hope will benefit others who are interested in developing the sport here in San Francisco or in other cities.

SFGATE: In your medium post you mentioned that all members of the Deltas and partners will be paid in full. How important was it for you to make sure everyone involved with the team was paid?

BAH: Incredibly important. We started this club with integrity, grace, and class and have continuously repeated those words during tough times and especially now as we wrap things up. I consider all of them family, and it was very important that I keep the promises I made to them.

SFGATE: When did you inform players and staff that about the situation and what was their response?

BAH: I was always very open with them about the health and viability of the club. I met with them regularly and personally, answered all of their questions. I believe they deserved to be in the know because the outcome either way greatly affected their lives. I strived to be honest with them and to always treat them with respect, so I hope that eased hearing facts that may have been hard to accept.

SFGATE: On social media, most complaints were about the cost of tickets, the location of the stadium and the time of games. What do you think was the primary reason or what were the primary reasons the team failed in San Francisco?

BAH: In the coming months, we will share with fans and the public with data and lessons learned that we hope will benefit others who are interested in developing the sport here in San Francisco or in other cities.

SFGATE: Was running a soccer team in the United States anything like you expected it to be when you started the project?

BAH: In the coming months, we will share with fans and the public with data and lessons learned that we hope will benefit others who are interested in developing the sport here in San Francisco or in other cities.

SFGATE: Hindsight is 20/20. If you could change anything you did in the past three years, what would it be?

BAH: In the coming months, we will share with fans and the public with data and lessons learned that we hope will benefit others who are interested in developing the sport here in San Francisco or in other cities.

SFGATE: Did you ever consider having the Deltas joining the USL or another soccer league?

BAH: Yes. We explored all options available.

SFGATE: If you knew what the experience would be like when you first started this project would you still have signed on?

BAH: That's a challenging question to answer because the project caused losses in terms of time, capital, personal, professional. On the other hand, it created incredible moments, memories, and relationships for thousands of people. This will be an experience that I will treasure forever.

SFGATE: In that same Midfield Press article from April, you mentioned that some of your best soccer memories were going to Millonarios games with your grandfather in Colombia. Did you experience as a soccer CEO sour you on soccer or do you feel as strongly about it now as you did then?

BAH: At the championship final I wore a t-shirt my grandfather bought me in Colombia 12 years ago before he passed away. I also left an empty seat next to me that game in his honor so he could be by my side in spirit. Some of my best soccer memories now include watching the SF Deltas beat the New York Cosmos, Pelé's team, in the final with him by my side. This experience did not sour me on soccer. It gave me memories I'll have forever, but it did teach me that we need greater transparency and collaboration at all levels if we want to improve the sport we all love.

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