



NASL makes it official: SF Deltas to play at Kezar next year

By Julio Lara | March 31, 2016 2:30 PM



The North American Soccer League on Thursday made the worst kept secret in Bay Area soccer official, naming the San Francisco Deltas its 13th franchise. The Deltas will begin play in April 2017 with Kezar Stadium, the historic San Francisco venue, serving as the home pitch.

“Today is a great day for Bay Area soccer and sports fans alike,” said San Francisco Deltas CEO Brian Andrés Helmick, who headlines an ownership group of over a dozen investors with ties to companies like Twitter, PayPal and Yahoo. “This game is one that unites us all, crossing all boundaries whether geographical, religious or socio-economic. Now fans of the world’s largest sport will have an opportunity to experience it played at the highest level right here in the heart of the City.”

The announcement comes after a nearly two-year process with Helmick’s group beating out a trio of bids to become the league’s first west coast franchise and shined the domestic soccer spotlight yet again on Northern California with teams like the San Jose Earthquakes (opening of Avaya Stadium), Sacramento Republic (2014 United Soccer League champions, aggressive MLS expansion aspirations) and Burlingame Dragons FC (2015 Premier Development League Southwest Division champions, PDL Rookie Franchise of the Year) making headlines in recent years.

The NASL is a professional soccer league with Division II status in the United States with teams in Miami, New York, Edmonton, Canada and Puerto Rico. With a heavy concentration of east coast teams, the announcement of the Deltas marks the first step in expanding the league to the west coast. San Francisco is the league’s fourth expansion city announced in the last year, capping a week of promising news for the NASL with regards to the league’s overall footprint.

“This is a great day for the NASL and for soccer in North America,” said NASL Commissioner Bill Peterson via press release. “The Deltas are leading our West Coast expansion efforts in a city that has some of the country’s most passionate soccer supporters. The club was founded and will be managed on core principles that represent the Bay Area community, as well as our great sport. The Deltas will be a great club for our league.”

Rumblings of the Deltas joining the professional soccer fold have brewed for a while, with the San Francisco franchise officially announcing themselves to the world during the week of Super Bowl 50. But official news of their participation in the NASL was delayed until the Deltas locked up a home venue. And, after committing to five years at Kezar Stadium and investing close to half a million dollars to renovate the venue, plans for the NASL to formally announce the Deltas finally moved forward.

“Understanding some of the nuances of San Francisco is very, very important,” Helmick said when asked why he felt the Deltas will succeed in San Francisco when others attempts have failed. “Our goal is to grow the sport, first and foremost. I’m just a fan who happens to be in a situation of running a team and that is what’s driving us internally. We’re out there listening to fans ... so our decision-making is by fans, listening to fans, so we’re doing things that other clubs aren’t doing because we’re looking at it through a different lens. I’m not saying it’s good or bad, I’m saying it’s different.”

Next steps for the San Francisco Deltas include identifying a head coach with a targeted date of August 2017. “This is such a critical hire for us,” Helmick said. “This is something we don’t want to rush. We’ve been laser-focused on the stadium ... now that we have a place to play, we can focus on [the technical staff].”