

= Major League Soccer =

Major League Soccer (MLS) is a men 's professional soccer league , sanctioned by U.S. Soccer , that represents the sport 's highest level in both the United States and Canada . MLS constitutes one of the major professional sports leagues of the United States and Canada . The league is composed of 20 teams ? 17 in the U.S. and 3 in Canada . The MLS regular season runs from March to October , with each team playing 34 games ; the team with the best record is awarded the Supporters ' Shield . The post season includes twelve teams competing in the MLS Cup Playoffs through November and December , culminating in the championship game , the MLS Cup . MLS teams also play in other domestic competitions against teams from other divisions in the U.S. Open Cup and in the Canadian Championship . MLS teams also compete against continental rivals in the CONCACAF Champions League .

Major League Soccer was founded in 1993 as part of the United States ' successful bid to host the 1994 FIFA World Cup . The first season took place in 1996 with ten teams . MLS experienced financial and operational struggles in its first few years : The league lost millions of dollars , teams played in mostly empty American football stadiums , and two teams folded in 2002 . Since then , MLS has expanded to 20 teams , owners built soccer @-@ specific stadiums , average MLS attendance exceeds that of the National Hockey League (NHL) and National Basketball Association (NBA) , MLS secured national TV contracts , and the league is now profitable .

Instead of operating as an association of independently owned teams , MLS is a single entity in which each team is owned and controlled by the league 's investors . The investor @-@ operators control their teams as owners control teams in other leagues , and are commonly (but inaccurately) referred to as the team 's owners . The league has a fixed membership , like most sports leagues in the United States and Canada , which makes it one of the world 's few soccer leagues that does not use promotion and relegation , a practice that is uncommon in the two countries . MLS headquarters is located in New York City .

= = Competition format = =

Major League Soccer 's regular season runs from March to October . Teams are divided into the Eastern and Western Conferences . Teams play 34 games in an unbalanced schedule : 24 matches against teams within their conference , plus 10 matches against teams from the other conference . Midway through the season , teams break for the annual All @-@ Star Game , a friendly game between the league 's finest players and a major club from a different league . At the end of the regular season , the team with the highest point total is awarded the Supporters ' Shield .

Unlike some soccer leagues around the world , but similar to other leagues in the Americas , the MLS regular season is followed by the 12 @-@ team MLS Cup Playoffs in November , ending with the MLS Cup championship final in early December . Although some commentators have argued that playoffs reduce the importance of the regular season , Commissioner Don Garber has explained " Our purpose is to have a valuable competition , and that includes having playoffs that are more meaningful . "

Major League Soccer 's spring @-@ to @-@ autumn schedule results in scheduling conflicts with the FIFA calendar and with summertime international tournaments such as the World Cup and the Gold Cup , causing several players to miss some MLS matches . While MLS has looked into changing to an autumn @-@ to @-@ spring format , there are no current plans to do so . If the league were to change its schedule , a winter break would be needed , especially with several teams in colder climates , which some believe would lead to a disadvantage . It would also have to compete with the more popular National Football League (NFL) , National Hockey League (NHL) , and National Basketball Association (NBA) .

= = = Other competitions = = =

MLS teams also play in other competitions . Every year , up to five MLS teams play in the

CONCACAF Champions League against other clubs from the CONCACAF region (Mexico , Central America , and the Caribbean) . Two U.S.-based MLS teams qualify based on MLS regular @-@ season results : the winner of the Supporters ' Shield and the winner of the other conference . The third U.S. team to qualify is the winner of the MLS Cup . A fourth U.S.-based MLS team can qualify via the U.S. Open Cup , where U.S. based teams compete against lower division U.S. clubs . Canadian MLS clubs play against lower division Canadian clubs in the Canadian Championship for the one Champions League spot allocated to Canada . No MLS club has won the Champions League since it began its current format in 2008 , with Mexican clubs dominating the competition , but MLS teams have twice reached the final : Real Salt Lake in 2011 and the Montreal Impact in 2015 .

= = Teams = =

MLS 's 20 teams are divided between the Eastern and Western Conference . Each club is allowed up to 30 players on its first team roster . All 30 players are eligible for selection to each 18 @-@ player game @-@ day squad during the regular season and playoffs .

Since the 2005 season , MLS has added many new clubs . During this period of expansion , Los Angeles became the first two @-@ team market , and the league pushed into Canada in 2007 . The league will expand from 20 teams today to 22 teams in 2017 with the additions of Atlanta and either Los Angeles or Minnesota , and then to 23 teams in 2018 with the addition of Minnesota or Los Angeles , depending which team joins the league the preceding year . The league plans to have 24 teams by 2020 .

In the history of MLS , twenty @-@ three different clubs have competed in the league , with ten having won at least one MLS Cup , and ten winning at least one Supporters ' Shield . The same club has won both trophies six times .

Several teams compete annually for secondary MLS rivalry cups that are typically contested by two teams , usually geographic rivals (e.g. , Portland vs. Seattle vs. Vancouver) . Each cup is awarded to the team with the better regular @-@ season record in games played between the two teams . The concept is comparable to minor trophies played for by American college football teams .

Beginning with the 2015 season , teams are aligned as follows :

= = History = =

Major League Soccer is the most recent of a series of men 's premier professional national soccer leagues established in the United States and Canada . The predecessor of MLS was the North American Soccer League (NASL) , which played from 1968 until 1984 .

= = = Establishment = = =

In 1988 , in exchange for FIFA awarding the right to host the 1994 World Cup , U.S. Soccer promised to establish a Division 1 professional soccer league . In 1993 , U.S. Soccer selected Major League Professional Soccer (the precursor to MLS) as the exclusive Division 1 professional soccer league . Major League Soccer was officially formed in February 1995 as a limited liability company .

MLS began play in 1996 with ten teams . The first game was held on April 6 , 1996 , as the San Jose Clash defeated D.C. United before 31 @,@ 000 fans at Spartan Stadium in San Jose in a game broadcast on ESPN . The league had generated some buzz by managing to lure some marquee players from the 1994 World Cup to play in MLS ? including U.S. stars such as Alexi Lalas , Tony Meola and Eric Wynalda , and foreign players such as Mexico 's Jorge Campos and Colombia 's Carlos Valderrama . D.C. United won the MLS Cup in three of the league 's first four seasons . The league added its first two expansion teams in 1998 ? the Miami Fusion and the Chicago Fire ; the Chicago Fire won its first title in its inaugural season .

After its first season , MLS suffered from a decline in attendance . The league 's low attendance was all the more apparent in light of the fact that eight of the original ten teams played in large

American football stadiums . One aspect that had alienated fans was that MLS experimented with rules deviations in its early years in an attempt to " Americanize " the sport . The league implemented the use of shootouts to resolve tie games . MLS also used a countdown clock and halves ended when the clock reached 0 : 00 . The league realized that the rule changes had alienated some traditional soccer fans while failing to draw new American sports fans , and the shootout and countdown clock were eliminated after the 1999 season . The league 's quality was cast into doubt when the U.S. men 's national team , which was made up largely of MLS players , finished in last place at the 1998 World Cup .

Major League Soccer lost an estimated \$ 250 million during its first five years , and more than \$ 350 million between its founding and 2004 . The league 's financial problems led to Commissioner Doug Logan being replaced by Garber , a former NFL executive , in August 1999 . MLS announced in January 2002 that it had decided to contract the Tampa Bay Mutiny and Miami Fusion , leaving the league with ten teams .

Despite the financial problems , though , MLS did have some accomplishments that would set the stage for the league 's resurgence . Columbus Crew Stadium was built in 1999 , becoming MLS 's first soccer @-@ specific stadium . This began a trend among MLS teams to construct their own venues instead of leasing American football stadiums . In 2000 , the league won an antitrust lawsuit , *Fraser v. Major League Soccer* , that the players had filed in 1996 . The court ruled that MLS 's policy of centrally contracting players and limiting player salaries through a salary cap and other restrictions were a legal method for the league to maintain solvency and competitive parity .

= = = Resurgence = = =

The 2002 FIFA World Cup , in which the United States unexpectedly made the quarterfinals , coincided with a resurgence in American soccer and MLS . MLS Cup 2002 drew 61 @, @ 316 spectators to Gillette Stadium , the largest attendance in an MLS Cup final . MLS limited teams to three substitutions per game in 2003 , and adopted International Football Association Board (IFAB) rules in 2005 .

MLS underwent a transition in the years leading up to the 2006 World Cup . After marketing itself on the talents of American players , the league lost some of its homegrown stars to prominent European leagues . For example , Tim Howard was transferred to Manchester United for \$ 4 million in one of the most lucrative contract deals in league history . Many more American players did make an impact in MLS . In 2005 , Jason Kreis became the first player to score 100 career MLS goals .

The league 's financial stabilization plan included teams moving out of large American football stadiums and into soccer @-@ specific stadiums . From 2003 to 2008 , the league oversaw the construction of six additional soccer @-@ specific stadiums , largely funded by owners such as Lamar Hunt and Phil Anschutz , so that by the end of 2008 , a majority of teams were now in soccer @-@ specific stadiums .

It was also in this era that MLS expanded for the first time since 1998 . Real Salt Lake and Chivas USA began play in 2005 , with Chivas USA becoming the second club in Los Angeles . By 2006 the San Jose Earthquakes owners , players and a few coaches moved to Texas to become the expansion Houston Dynamo , after failing to build a stadium in San Jose . The Dynamo became an expansion team , leaving their history behind for a new San Jose ownership group that formed in 2007 .

= = = Arrival of Designated Players = = =

In 2007 the league expanded beyond the United States ' borders into Canada with the Toronto FC expansion team . Major League Soccer took steps to further raise the level of play by adopting the Designated Player Rule , which helped bring international stars into the league . The 2007 season witnessed the MLS debut of David Beckham . Beckham 's signing had been seen as a coup for American soccer , and was made possible by the Designated Player Rule . Players such as Cuauhtémoc Blanco (Chicago Fire) and Juan Pablo Ángel (New York Red Bulls) , are some of the

first Designated Players who made major contributions to their clubs . The departures of Clint Dempsey and Jozy Altidore , coupled with the return of former U.S. national team stars Claudio Reyna and Brian McBride , highlighted the exchange of top prospects to Europe for experienced veterans to MLS .

By 2008 , San Jose had returned to the league under new ownership , and in 2009 , the expansion side Seattle Sounders FC began play in MLS . The 2010 season ushered in an expansion franchise in the Philadelphia Union and their new PPL Park stadium . The 2010 season also brought the opening of the New York Red Bulls ' soccer @-@ specific stadium , Red Bull Arena , and the debut of French striker Thierry Henry .

The 2011 season brought further expansion with the addition of the Vancouver Whitecaps FC , the second Canadian MLS franchise , and the Portland Timbers . Real Salt Lake reached the finals of the 2010 ? 11 CONCACAF Champions League . During the 2011 season , the Galaxy signed another international star in Republic of Ireland all @-@ time leading goalscorer Robbie Keane . MLS drew an average attendance of 17 @,@ 872 in 2011 , higher than the average attendances of the NBA and NHL . In 2012 , the Montreal Impact became the league 's 19th franchise and the third in Canada , and made their home debut in front of a crowd of 58 @,@ 912 , while the New York Red Bulls added Australian all @-@ time leading goalscorer Tim Cahill .

= = = 2013 ? present = = =

In 2013 , MLS introduced New York City FC as its 20th team , and Orlando City Soccer Club as its 21st team , both of which would begin playing in 2015 . In 2013 , the league implemented its " Core Players " initiative , allowing teams to retain key players using retention funds instead of losing the players to foreign leagues . Among the first high @-@ profile players re @-@ signed in 2013 using retention funds were U.S. national team regulars Graham Zusi and Matt Besler . Beginning in summer of 2013 and continuing in the run up to the 2014 World Cup , MLS began signing U.S. stars based abroad , including Clint Dempsey from the English Premier League to Seattle , DaMarcus Beasley from the Liga MX to Houston , Jermaine Jones from the German Bundesliga to New England and Michael Bradley who returned from Italy to join Toronto who also signed England International Striker Jermain Defoe . By the 2014 season , fifteen of the nineteen MLS head coaches had previously played in MLS . By 2013 , the league 's popularity had increased to the point where MLS was as popular as Major League Baseball among 12- to 17 @-@ year @-@ olds , as reported by the 2013 Luker on Trends ESPN poll , having jumped in popularity since the 2010 World Cup .

In 2014 , the league announced Atlanta United FC as the 22nd team to start playing in 2017 . Even though New York City FC and Orlando City were not set to begin play until 2015 , each team made headlines during the summer 2014 transfer window by announcing their first Designated Players ? Spain 's leading scorer David Villa and Chelsea 's leading scorer Frank Lampard to New York , and Ballon d 'Or winner Kaká to Orlando . The 2014 World Cup featured 21 MLS players on World Cup rosters and a record 11 MLS players playing for foreign teams ? including players from traditional powerhouses Brazil (Júlio César) , playing for Toronto FC on loan from Queens Park Rangers FC , and Spain (David Villa) , on loan to Melbourne City FC from New York City FC ; in the U.S. v. Germany match the U.S. fielded a team with seven MLS starters .

On September 18 , 2014 , MLS unveiled their new logo as part of the " MLS Next " branding initiative . In addition to the new crest logo , MLS teams display versions in their own colors that are displayed on their jerseys at every game . This change represents the first time that the MLS logo has been changed since the league 's inception . Chivas USA folded following the 2014 season , while New York City FC and Orlando City SC joined the league in 2015 as the 19th and 20th teams . Sporting Kansas City and the Houston Dynamo moved from the Eastern Conference to the Western Conference in 2015 to make two 10 @-@ team conferences .

In early 2015 , the league announced that two teams ? Los Angeles FC and Minnesota United ? would join MLS in either 2017 or 2018 . The 20th season of MLS saw the arrivals of several players who have starred at the highest levels of European club soccer and in international soccer :

Giovanni Dos Santos , Kaká , Andrea Pirlo , Frank Lampard , Steven Gerrard , Didier Drogba , David Villa , and Sebastian Giovinco . On December 6 , 2015 , MLS announced its intent to expand to 28 teams .

= = League championships = =

MLS Cup titles and Supporters ' Shield Wins

= = Organization = =

= = = Ownership = = =

Major League Soccer operates under a single @-@ entity structure in which teams and player contracts are centrally owned by the league . Each team has an investor @-@ operator that is a shareholder in the league . In order to control costs , MLS shares revenues and holds players contracts instead of players contracting with individual teams . In Fraser v. Major League Soccer , a lawsuit filed in 1996 and decided in 2002 , the league won a legal battle with its players in which the court ruled that MLS was a single entity that can lawfully centrally contract for player services . The court also ruled that even absent their collective bargaining agreement , players could opt to play in other leagues if they were unsatisfied .

Having multiple clubs owned by a single owner was a necessity in the league 's first ten years . At one time Phil Anschutz 's AEG owned six MLS clubs and Lamar Hunt 's Hunt Sports owned three franchises . In order to attract additional investors , in 2002 the league announced changes to the operating agreement between the league and its teams to improve team revenues and increase the incentives to be an individual club owner . These changes included granting owners the rights to a certain number of players they develop through their club 's academy system each year , sharing the profits of Soccer United Marketing , and being able to sell individual club jersey sponsorships .

As MLS appeared to be on the brink of overall profitability in 2006 and developed significant expansion plans , MLS announced that it wanted each club to have a distinct operator . The league has attracted new ownership that have injected more money into the league . Examples include Red Bull 's purchase of the MetroStars from AEG in 2006 for over \$ 100 million .

The league now has 20 investor @-@ operators for its 20 clubs . Hunt Sports owns only one team (FC Dallas) . AEG owns the LA Galaxy and retained a 50 % interest in the Houston Dynamo until December 2015 . For the 2014 season , the league owned the former Chivas USA club , which had suffered from mismanagement and poor financial results under its individual operator relationship . The league eventually dissolved the team , in favor of awarding rights to a second soccer club in the Los Angeles area to a new ownership group on October 30 , 2014 .

= = = Player acquisition and salaries = = =

The average salary for MLS players is \$ 316 @, @ 777 , lower than the average salaries in England 's second @-@ tier Football League Championship (\$ 420 @, @ 000 in 2015) , Holland 's Eredivisie (\$ 445 @, @ 000) , or Mexico 's Liga MX (\$ 418 @, @ 000 in 2015) . The league 's minimum player salary will increase in 2016 from \$ 60 @, @ 000 to \$ 62 @, @ 500 for most players , and roster players # 25 ? 28 will see their minimum salary increase from \$ 50 @, @ 000 to \$ 51 @, @ 500 .

MLS salaries are limited by a salary cap , which MLS has had in place since the league 's inception in 1996 . The purpose of the salary cap is to prevent the team 's owners from unsustainable spending on player salaries ? a practice that had doomed the North American Soccer League during the 1980s ? and to prevent a competitive imbalance among teams . The salary cap survived a legal challenge by the players in the Fraser v. Major League Soccer lawsuit . The 2016 salary cap is increasing from \$ 3 @. @ 49 million to \$ 3 @. @ 66 million per team .

Teams may augment their squads by signing players from other leagues . MLS has two transfer windows ? the primary pre @-@ season transfer window lasts three months from mid February until mid May , and the secondary mid season transfer window runs one month from early July to early August . All MLS teams have a limited number of international roster slots that they can use to sign non @-@ domestic players . However MLS teams regularly obtain green cards for their non @-@ domestic players in order to qualify them for domestic status and free up international roster slots . In 2015 48 @. @ 97 % of MLS players were born outside of the U.S. and Canada , with players from 58 countries represented .

MLS has also introduced various initiatives and rules intended to improve quality of players while still maintaining the salary cap . Rules concerning Designated Players , Generation Adidas players , home grown players , and allocation money all allow for additional wage spending that is exempt from the salary cap . These initiatives have brought about an increase in on @-@ field competition .

The designated player (DP) rule allows teams to sign a limited number of players whose salary exceeds the maximum cap , each DP player only counts as \$ 457 @, @ 500 (the maximum non @-@ DP salary) against the cap in 2016 . Instituted in 2007 , England 's David Beckham was the first signing under the DP rule . The DP rule has led to large income inequality in MLS with top DPs earning as much as 180 times more than a player earning the league minimum . In the 2013 season 21 % of the league 's wage spending went to just 5 players , this stretched to 29 % on the top 6 players in the 2014 season .

The league 's " Core Players " initiative allows teams to re @-@ sign players using retention funds that do not count against the salary cap . Retention funds were implemented in 2013 as a mechanism for MLS to retain key players ; among the first high @-@ profile players re @-@ signed using retention funds were U.S. national team regulars Graham Zusi and Matt Besler . MLS teams can also obtain allocation money , which is money that the team can use on player salaries that does not count against the cap , and teams can earn allocation money in several ways , such as from the transfer fees earned by selling players to teams in other leagues . MLS teams can also use Targeted Allocation Money (often referred to as TAM) , an initiative announced in 2015 . Teams can use TAM funds to attract high @-@ profile players by " buying down " contracts of players to below the Designated Player level . High @-@ profile players for which TAM funds were used include Omar Gonzalez .

The league operates a Generation Adidas program , which is a joint venture between MLS and U.S. Soccer that encourages young American players to enter MLS . The Generation Adidas program has been in place since 1997 , and has introduced players such as Landon Donovan , Clint Dempsey , Tim Howard and Michael Bradley into MLS . Players under the Home Grown Player rule are signed to Generation Adidas contracts , all players on Generation Adidas contracts are " off budget players " and their salaries do not count against the cap .

MLS has required all of its teams to operate youth development programs since 2008 . MLS roster rules allow teams to sign an unlimited number players straight from their academies and bypassing the draft process . There is also supplementary salary budget made by MLS only for homegrown players that are registered using senior roster slots called homegrown player funds . One of the most prominent and lucrative examples of success in " home @-@ grown " development was Jozy Altidore , who rose to prominence as a teenager in MLS before his record transfer fee \$ 10 million move to Villarreal in Spain in 2008 . The various MLS teams ' development academies play matches in a U.S. Soccer developmental league against youth academies from other leagues such as the Division II North American Soccer League (NASL) and Division III USL Pro , the latter of which has now rebranded itself as the United Soccer League .

MLS formerly operated a reserve league which gave playing time to players who were not starters for their MLS teams . The Reserve League was formed in 2005 , and operated through 2014 (with the exception of the 2009 & 2010 seasons) . MLS began integrating its Reserve League with the league then known as USL Pro in 2013 , and after the 2014 season folded the Reserve League , with MLS now requiring all teams to either affiliate with a USL team or field their own reserve side in that league .

== = Stadiums == =

Since 1999 , the league has overseen the construction of twelve stadiums specifically designed for soccer . The development of soccer @-@ specific stadiums owned by the teams has generated a better gameday experience for the fans . The soccer @-@ specific stadiums have yielded positive financial results as teams were no longer required to pay to rent out facilities and gained control over revenue streams such as concessions , parking , naming rights , and the ability to host non MLS events . Several teams have doubled their season @-@ tickets following the team 's move into a soccer @-@ specific stadium . The establishment of soccer @-@ specific stadiums is considered the key to the league and the ability of teams to turn a profit . In 2006 , Tim Leiweke , then CEO of Anschutz Entertainment Group , described the proliferation of soccer @-@ specific stadiums as the turning point for MLS .

Columbus Crew owner Lamar Hunt started this trend in 1999 by constructing Columbus Crew Stadium , now known as Mapfre Stadium , as MLS 's first soccer @-@ specific stadium . The Los Angeles Galaxy followed four years later with the opening of The Home Depot Center , now StubHub Center , in 2003 . FC Dallas opened Pizza Hut Park , now Toyota Stadium , in 2005 , and the Chicago Fire began playing their home games in Toyota Park in 2006 . The 2007 season brought the opening of Dick 's Sporting Goods Park for the Colorado Rapids and BMO Field for Toronto FC .

Near the end of the 2008 season , Rio Tinto Stadium became the home of Real Salt Lake , which meant that for the first time in MLS history a majority of MLS 's teams (8 out of 14) played in soccer @-@ specific stadiums . Red Bull Arena , the new home of the New York Red Bulls opened for the start of the 2010 season , and the Philadelphia Union opened PPL Park , since renamed Talen Energy Stadium , in June 2010 , midway through their inaugural season . The following season , in 2011 , the Portland Timbers made their MLS debut in a newly renovated Jeld @-@ Wen Field , now renamed Providence Park , which was originally a multi @-@ purpose venue but turned into a soccer @-@ specific facility . Also in 2011 , Sporting Kansas City moved to new Livestrong Sporting Park , now Children 's Mercy Park . The Houston Dynamo relocated to their new home at BBVA Compass Stadium in 2012 . In the same year , the Montreal Impact joined the league in an expanded Stade Saputo , which reopened June 2012 , when renovations pushed the seating capacity to over 20 @,@ 000 . The Impact has used Olympic Stadium for early season matches and for games that require a larger capacity . The San Jose Earthquakes , who had played at Buck Shaw Stadium from 2008 until 2014 , opened their new Avaya Stadium before the 2015 season .

The development of additional MLS stadiums is in progress . The Orlando City SC expansion team intended to begin constructing Orlando City Stadium , a soccer @-@ specific stadium , in 2014 to be completed in 2015 . Delays caused by changes to the stadium plans pushed back the new venue 's opening , first to late in the 2016 season and finally to the start of the 2017 season . Orlando City have been playing at the Florida Citrus Bowl Stadium , now Camping World Stadium , while awaiting the opening of their new venue .

Three teams have announced their desire to build a soccer @-@ specific stadium , although these teams have not finalized the stadium site and received all necessary government approvals . D.C. United plays home games at a former NFL and Major League Baseball venue , RFK Stadium ; in 2013 , D.C. United announced the signing of a public @-@ private partnership term sheet to build a 25 @,@ 000 @-@ seat new soccer stadium in Washington , D.C. , and a final deal was reached in late 2014 . The New York City FC expansion team will play their games at Yankee Stadium , a Major League Baseball venue , although they intend to move into a soccer specific stadium in the future . The New England Revolution play home games at a National Football League venue , Gillette Stadium , but are currently in discussion with the City of Boston regarding a potential soccer @-@ specific stadium in South Boston .

Several remaining clubs play in stadiums not originally built for MLS and have not announced plans to move . The Seattle Sounders play at CenturyLink Field , a dual @-@ purpose facility used for both American football and soccer . The Vancouver Whitecaps FC joined the league with Portland in 2011 and temporarily held matches at Empire Field before moving into the refurbished BC Place in

October 2011 , a retractable @-@ roof stadium that hosts Canadian football as well as soccer .

== Media coverage ==

=== United States ===

As of the 2015 season , MLS matches are broadcast nationally by ESPN networks and Fox Sports in English , and Univision networks in Spanish under an eight @-@ year contract . Each broadcaster has a window for national regular season matches , with UniMas airing a game on Friday nights in Spanish and additional matches on Univision Deportes Network , and ESPN and Fox Sports 1 airing games on Sunday evenings in English . ESPN , FS1 , and Univision will share in coverage of the playoffs , while ESPN and FS1 will alternate broadcasting the MLS Cup final in English . In total , at least 125 matches will be aired per @-@ season across all three networks , and the three contracts have an average estimated value of \$ 90 million per season ? five times larger than the average \$ 18 million value of the previous contracts with ESPN , Univision , and NBC Sports . 7 . Matches not televised nationally are broadcast regionally , often by regional sports networks , such as the LA Galaxy and Time Warner Cable SportsNet .

From 2012 to 2014 , MLS matches were previously broadcast by NBC Sports , with 40 matches per year ? primarily on NBCSN , and select matches broadcast on the NBC network . The move from Fox Soccer to the more widely distributed NBCSN proved successful , with viewership numbers doubling for the 2012 season over those of Fox Soccer .

=== Canada ===

Coverage of MLS expanded into Canada in 2007 with the addition of Toronto FC . Currently , English @-@ language national MLS broadcast rights in Canada are through the TSN networks with a six @-@ year deal for the 2011 ? 2016 seasons . TSN and TSN2 broadcast a minimum of 30 games during each season , all featuring at least one Canadian team . French @-@ language sister networks RDS and RDS2 have similar broadcast rights . The networks also carry additional games not involving Canadian teams . GoTV Canada carries selected all @-@ U.S. MLS matchups .

As in the United States , the individual Canadian teams also have separate broadcast deals for games not aired under the TSN / RDS national contract . TSN and Sportsnet split coverage of Toronto FC non @-@ national games (TSN and Sportsnet 's parent companies own a joint majority stake in the team through Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment) , TVA Sports airs Montreal Impact games , and TSN broadcasts the Vancouver Whitecaps in a separate deal .

=== International ===

MLS signed an international television contract in 2008 through 2013 with sports media company MP & Silva . The figure is reportedly an " eight @-@ figure deal . " MP & Silva explained that high @-@ profile , international players who were lured to MLS by the Designated Player Rule have raised the popularity of MLS in international markets . ESPN International purchased the rights to broadcast MLS in the U.K. in 2009 , and other ESPN networks around the world also broadcast games . MLS also entered into a four @-@ year contract with Sky Sports to broadcast two MLS matches per week in the UK from 2015 ? 2019 . Eurosport will also broadcast MLS between 2015 and 2019 , with four matches per week being screened live to its continental audience .

=== Video games ===

Major League Soccer is a playable league in both the FIFA and the Football Manager series . The league made its video game debut in 1999 with FIFA 2000 . In 2001 , Konami released ESPN MLS ExtraTime 2002 , which , to date , is the only soccer title to be based solely on MLS . The league

made its first appearance in the management series Football Manager 2005 in 2004 .

== Profitability and revenues ==

Major League Soccer began to demonstrate positive signs of long @-@ term profitability as early as 2004 with the single @-@ entity ownership structure , salary cap , and the media and marketing umbrella Soccer United Marketing (SUM) all contributing towards MLS 's financial security . As soccer @-@ specific stadiums are built , ownership expands , and television coverage increases , MLS has seen its revenues increase while controlling costs .

Television coverage and revenue have increased since the league 's early years . In 2006 , MLS reached an 8 @-@ year TV deal with ESPN spanning the 2007 ? 2014 seasons , and marked the first time that MLS earned rights fees , reported to be worth \$ 7 ? 8 million annually . In September 2012 the league extended its distribution agreement with London @-@ based Media rights agency MP & Silva until 2014 in a deal worth \$ 10 million annually . Total league TV revenues are over \$ 40 million annually . In 2011 , MLS earned \$ 150 million when it sold a 25 % stake in SUM .

In early 2005 , MLS signed a 10 @-@ year , \$ 150 million sponsorship deal with Adidas . In 2007 , MLS teams started selling ad space on the front of jerseys to go along with the league @-@ wide sponsorship partners who had already been advertising on the back of club jerseys , following the practice of international sport , specifically soccer . MLS established a floor of \$ 500 @,@ 000 per shirt sponsorship , with the league receiving a flat fee of \$ 200 @,@ 000 per deal . As of July 2014 , sixteen teams had signed sponsorship deals to have company logos placed on the front of their jerseys (and another team is directly owned by its shirt sponsor) , and the league average from jersey sponsors was about \$ 2 @.@ 4 million . As of February 2016 , all teams in MLS have jersey sponsors .

The Los Angeles Galaxy made a profit in 2003 in their first season at The Home Depot Center , and FC Dallas turned a profit after moving into Pizza Hut Park in 2005 . For each season between 2006 ? 2009 , two to three MLS clubs (generally clubs with a soccer @-@ specific stadium) were reported as profitable by the league .

By 2012 , the league had shown a marked improvement in its financial health . In November 2013 , Forbes published its first valuation of MLS teams since 2008 , and revealed that ten of the league 's nineteen teams earned an operating profit in 2012 , while two broke even and seven had a loss . Forbes estimated that the league 's collective annual revenues were \$ 494 million , and that the league 's collective annual profit was \$ 34 million . Forbes valued the league 's franchises to be worth \$ 103 million on average , almost three times as much as the \$ 37 million average valuation in 2008 . The Seattle Sounders FC franchise was named the most valuable at \$ 175 million , a 483 % gain over the \$ 30 million league entrance fee it paid in 2009 .

The trend in increased team values has continued with MLS teams seeing a strong 52 % increase in franchise values from 2012 to 2014 . In August 2015 , Forbes released the updated list of MLS franchise values with the most profitable team weighing in at \$ 245 million and the least at \$ 105 million . The average value jumped from \$ 103 to \$ 157 million .

== Rules and officials ==

MLS follows the rules and standards of the International Football Association Board (IFAB) . The playoff extra time structure follows IFAB standards : two full 15 @-@ minute periods , followed by a penalty shootout if necessary . Away goals apply to the playoff stage of the competition , but do not apply to overtime in the second leg of any two @-@ legged playoff series .

U.S. Soccer hired the first full @-@ time professional referees in league history in 2007 as part of the league 's " Game First " initiatives . Major League Soccer has been implementing fines and suspensions since the 2011 season for simulation (diving) through its Disciplinary Committee , which reviews plays after the match . The first player fined under the new rule was Charlie Davies , fined \$ 1 @,@ 000 for intentionally deceiving match officials .

=== Team names ===

For more information on MLS team names , see the individual team entries .

Originally , in the style of other U.S. sports leagues , teams were given nicknames at their creation . Examples include the Columbus Crew , the San Jose Clash and the Los Angeles Galaxy . Several of the club names in MLS originated with earlier professional soccer clubs , such as the 1970s @-@ era NASL team names San Jose Earthquakes , Seattle Sounders , Portland Timbers and Vancouver Whitecaps .

D.C. United and Miami Fusion F.C. were the only two MLS teams to adopt European naming conventions during the 1990s . However , European @-@ style names have increased in MLS , with expansion teams such as Real Salt Lake and Toronto FC , in addition to 2015 entrants New York City FC and Orlando City S.C. , along with several re @-@ brandings such as the Dallas Burn (now FC Dallas) and Kansas City Wizards (now Sporting Kansas City) .

The beverage company Red Bull GmbH owns the New York Red Bulls as well as other sports teams .

== Player records ==

Statistics below are for all @-@ time leaders . Statistics are for regular season only . Bold indicates active MLS players .

Updated July 26 , 2016

=== Player records (active) ===

Statistics below are for all @-@ time leaders who are still playing . Statistics are for regular season only .

Updated July 26 , 2016

== MLS commissioners ==

Doug Logan (1996 ? 99)

Don Garber (1999 ? present)

== MLS awards ==

At the conclusion of each season , the league presents several awards for outstanding achievements , mostly to players , but also to coaches , referees , and teams . The finalists in each category are determined by voting from MLS players , team employees , and the media .