



MAJOR LEAGUE SOCCER

2023 Season Preview





2022 Landon Donovan
MLS MVP Hany Mukhtar

NEW CLUB, NEW COMPETITION, & NEW PARTNERSHIP HIGHLIGHT 2023 MLS SEASON

Entering its 28th season of play, Major League Soccer kicks off the 2023 season with excitement at every turn, including the introduction of a new club, a new competition, and new iterations of intense rivalries throughout the league's event-filled calendar.

On February 1, Apple and Major League Soccer launched **MLS Season Pass** – an unprecedented subscription service available to fans in over 100 countries and regions featuring live broadcasts and replays of every match of the MLS regular season, Audi 2023 MLS Cup Playoffs, and Leagues Cup – all in one place and with no blackouts. The majority of games during the 2023 season will be played on Saturdays, and select Wednesdays, with 7:30 pm local start times.

All matches will be available on billions of devices through the Apple TV app on Apple devices, smart TVs, streaming devices, set-top boxes, and game consoles, and the web at tv.apple.com. The launch of MLS Season Pass marks the official kickoff of the 10-year partnership between MLS and Apple, a historic first for a major professional sports league.

MLS is Back with a bang on Saturday, February 25, as for the first time in series history, El Tráfico will be played on opening day as the defending MLS Cup champion Los Angeles Football Club faces off against cross-city rival LA Galaxy at the iconic Rose Bowl in Pasadena (9:30 p.m. ET).

Earlier that evening, **St. Louis CITY SC**, the league's 29th club, will embark on its inaugural season as it travels to Q2 Stadium to take on Austin FC at 8:30 p.m. ET. The following week, St. Louis CITY SC will make their highly-anticipated home debut at CITYPARK against last year's newcomer, Charlotte FC, at 8:30 p.m. ET on Saturday, March 4.

The **2023 MLS All-Star Game presented by Target** is set for Wednesday, July 19 at Audi Field, home of D.C. United. The opponent for Major League Soccer's showcase event will be announced at a later date.

In a monumental new chapter for North American soccer, beginning in 2023, all 47 MLS and LIGA MX clubs will compete in a completely re-imagined **Leagues Cup**: an annual, month-long, Concacaf-sanctioned tournament. The MLS regular season will pause following July 15 for Leagues Cup play and will resume on Aug. 20.

Decision Day 2023, the regular season's final matchday, is set for Oct. 21. All teams in action will face intra-conference opponents with everything on the line in a battle for playoff spots and seeding. All Eastern Conference matches will kick off at 6 p.m. ET with all Western Conference matches following at 9 p.m. ET.



ST. LOUIS CITY SC AND CITYPARK SET TO DEBUT

As Major League Soccer's newest team and one of the few majority female-owned teams in all of sports, **St. Louis CITY SC** has a lofty goal as the team begins its inaugural season this spring: Help fuel the growth and revitalization of the St. Louis region.

The team's stadium, **CITYPARK**, and the surrounding district is the largest urban professional sports campus in the U.S. and the only with a stadium, practice facility, team headquarters, and retail store all in the same footprint. The 31-acre urban campus in St. Louis' Downtown West area will unite the region around its love of sports while serving as the heartbeat of St. Louis. The campus creates a 24/7/365 fan and community experience that drives visitors and development to downtown St. Louis.

Currently, \$3.5 billion in developments have been proposed, planned, or are under construction in downtown St. Louis. MLS Commissioner Don Garber has said that the club's comprehensive stadium plan will "serve as a model for future professional sports teams in the U.S."

On Saturday, March 4, a sold-out crowd of 22,500 fans will gather inside CITYPARK for the club's inaugural home match. However, prior to playing its first match, the team has already broken records, from season ticket deposits to ticket sales, to merchandise and kit sales.

This world-class, next-gen club and facility is unlike anything else in professional sports and features:

- **Powerful public art honoring a lost St. Louis neighborhood:** Pillars of the Valley (watch informational video [here](#)), designed by St. Louis resident and nationally-acclaimed artist Damon Davis, stands as a remembrance of Mill Creek Valley, a thriving, predominantly Black St. Louis neighborhood in the late 1950s in the name of urban renewal. CITYPARK and its surrounding stadium district sit where the Mill Creek Valley neighborhood once stood.
- **The best matchday menu in sports:** [CITY Flavor](#) is changing the game for stadium food. Led by James Beard Award winner Gerard Craft, CITY Flavor showcases 25 award-winning food partners from across the St. Louis region, so every match will feel like a food festival.
- **State-of-the-art technology:** CITYPARK is the first post-pandemic stadium built to avoid long lines and crowd surges, and the first MLS stadium to offer checkout-free shopping for fans. Its technology is headlined by a campus-wide, converged network similar to the connectivity built into SoFi Stadium.
- **A robust sustainability plan:** CITYPARK is the first MLS stadium to launch as a zero single-use consumer plastic stadium, with programs including post-event food rescue partnerships and in-stadium composting.

St. Louis CITY SC
goalkeeper Roman Bürki





INAUGURAL LEAGUES CUP KICKS OFF IN JULY 2023

In a monumental new chapter for North American soccer, beginning in 2023, MLS and LIGA MX will pause their respective league seasons each summer and all 47 first division clubs in Canada, Mexico, and the United States will compete in a World Cup-style tournament: **Leagues Cup**.

The annual, month-long competition will crown a winner among MLS and LIGA MX. The champion, as well as the second and third-place finishers will also qualify for the 2024 Concacaf Champions League and an opportunity to earn a spot in the FIFA Club World Cup.

Leagues Cup 2023 will begin on Friday, July 21 with the final taking place on Saturday, August 19. The competition will feature a total of 77 matches played across the U.S. and Canada.

As the 2022 MLS Cup champion, Los Angeles Football Club qualified directly into the Round of 32 of Leagues Cup 2023. LIGA MX champion Club de Fútbol Pachuca earned the bye as the LIGA MX champion with the most combined points accumulated across the Clausura and Apertura seasons in the 2022 calendar year.

The Leagues Cup 2023 groups are based on clubs' 2022 performance along with their geographic regions. The 15 groups will be broken up into four regions: West, Central, South, and East. Each region will have four groups, except the West, which will have three groups due to LAFC's entrance in the Knockout Stage. Pachuca will enter the Knockout Stage in the South, opposite side of the bracket from the MLS Cup champion and in the opposite quadrant from the top MLS seeded club based on the final 2022 Supporters' Shield standings.

Every team will play two matches in the Group Stage, with the top two teams from each group, as determined by points, advancing to the Knockout Stage. No matches in the Leagues Cup Group Stage will end in a tie. If a game is tied after 90 minutes, the game will proceed to a penalty shootout.

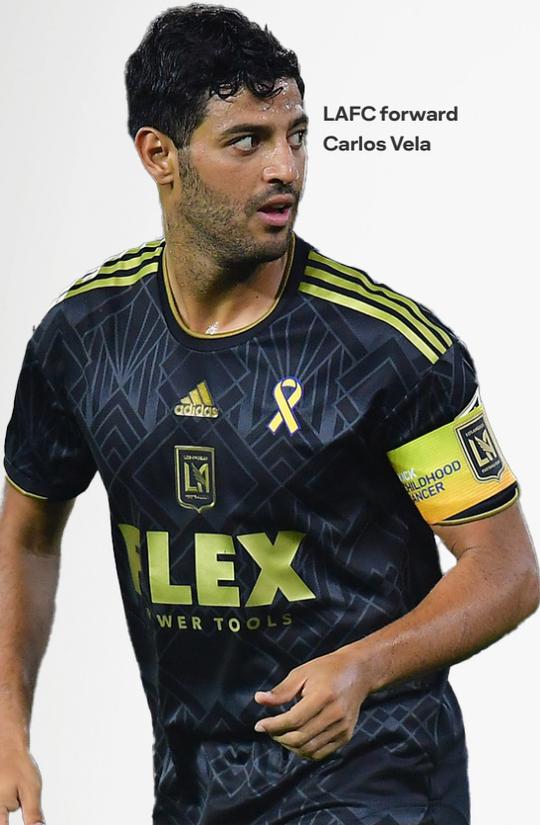
Fans around the world will be able to watch Leagues Cup* on MLS Season Pass on the Apple TV app, which is available on Apple devices, smart TVs, streaming devices from Roku, Amazon, and Google, game consoles, and the web at tv.apple.com.

In addition, TelevisaUnivision, FOX Sports, TSN, and RDS will be the linear broadcast home for select Leagues Cup matches. The Leagues Cup Final will be available on Univision in Spanish.

**This excludes viewers in Mexico*



Houston Dynamo FC
midfielder
Héctor Herrera



Lafc forward
Carlos Vela

2022 MLS CUP CHAMPION LAFC LOOKS TO REPEAT

Only three times in MLS history has a team won back-to-back MLS Cups, and the most recent came over a decade ago with the 2011-12 LA Galaxy. In 2023, the Los Angeles Football Club will try to replicate what their crosstown rivals did by bringing the Philip F. Anschutz Trophy back to BMO Stadium, thanks to their star-studded roster.

Lafc, which took home its second Supporters' Shield in its brief five-season history, will also look to become just the fourth team in MLS history and the first since the 2010-11 LA Galaxy to win consecutive Supporters' Shields. They also have the opportunity to become just the fifth club – and the first non-MLS original – to win at least three Supporters' Shield titles.

Lafc's incredible comeback win against the Philadelphia Union in MLS Cup 2022 was led by a core group of players and first-year head coach Steve Cherundolo, which has remained mostly intact. The roster still features the likes of Carlos Vela, Kellyn Acosta, Giorgio Chiellini and more of the league's best players. Yet, the group could still get better in 2023 with Denis Bouanga in his first full season, new U22 initiative signing Stipe Biuk (20 years old), and the addition of U.S. Men's National Team defender Aaron Long.

Lafc begins their MLS Cup defense against crosstown rival LA Galaxy at the Rose Bowl on Saturday, February 25 at 9:30 p.m. ET on MLS Season Pass.

MLS: THE MOST GLOBAL SOCCER LEAGUE IN THE WORLD

With players from 82 different countries represented on MLS rosters in 2022, Major League Soccer is the most globally diverse league in men's professional sports in North America and is the most diverse soccer league in the world.

The number of countries represented in 2022 was nearly double that of the next closest men's league in North America (NBA, 45 countries represented), and was also higher than top men's soccer leagues around the world, including Italy's Serie A (62), France's Ligue 1 (60), the English Premier League (59), Spain's La Liga (54), and Germany's Bundesliga (52).

While reflecting the rich global diversity here in North America, Major League Soccer continued to offer more opportunities for domestic talent every year. The 2022 season saw nearly 400 domestic players competing on MLS rosters as of March 17, 350 from the United States and 46 from Canada, a figure that increased by nearly 20 percent over the past five years.

MLS' global representation was on display at the 2022 FIFA World Cup, as the league had players representing five of the six FIFA confederations and, for the first time, competing in all eight world cup groups. In all, 12 different countries had at least one current MLS player on their World Cup roster, led by Canada (11 players) and the United States (nine players).



Toronto FC
midfielder
Mark-Anthony Kaye



AWARD CONTENDERS EMERGE ACROSS THE LEAGUE

No Player has Ever Won Back-to-Back Landon Donovan MLS MVP Awards

Nashville SC's **Hany Mukhtar** hopes to change that in 2023. Mukhtar produced an incredible 34 goal contributions (23 goals, 11 assists) in 2022, ranking as a top-five season in MLS history. However, the German will have stiff competition to try to retain the crown, including four notable second-year breakout candidates.

Second-Year Talents Look to Stake their MVP Bids in 2023

Columbus Crew forward **Juan 'Cucho' Hernández** jumped out to nine goals and three assists after he made his debut in July. With Wilfried Nancy coaching the Crew in 2023 and implementing his attacking style, Hernández expects to be in the running for both the MVP and Golden Boot. On the West Coast, **Riqui Puig** got off to a blistering pace with eight goal contributions and helped quickly turn the Galaxy's season around.

After becoming the first active MLS player to win the FIFA World Cup, Atlanta United's **Thiago Almada** has big aspirations in 2023 for the Five Stripes. Finally, north of the border resides **Lorenzo Insigne**, as he looks to become the third different MVP under Toronto FC head coach Bob Bradley.

Three-Time MLS Goalkeeper of the Year Blake Looks to Make History

The favorite for the Goalkeeper of the Year award is Philadelphia's **Andre Blake**, who in 2022 became the first player in league history to receive the honor three times. The Jamaican international led MLS in shutouts last season (15) and seeks his fourth Goalkeeper of the Year award. Other potential contenders include **Stefan Frei** (Seattle Sounders), **Zac MacMath** (Real Salt Lake), and 23-year-old sensation **Djordje Petrović** (New England Revolution).

Race for the 2023 Golden Boot Presented by Audi

The keepers above will have to stop some of the best forwards in the league who will be chasing the 2023 MLS Golden Boot presented by Audi. Top scorers from last season who are likely to be among the favorites: **Sebastián Driussi** (Austin FC), **Jesús Ferreira** (FC Dallas), **Javier 'Chicharito' Hernández** (LA Galaxy), and **Brandon Vázquez** (FC Cincinnati). One under the radar player who could emerge is **Sebastián Ferreira** (Houston Dynamo FC), who produced 13 goals in his debut MLS season.

Pair of Union Stoppers Vie for Title of League's Top Defender

Lastly, the MLS Defender of the Year award has yielded five multi-time winners in its history, and Union defender **Jakob Glesnes** looks to hold onto his title to become the sixth different player to do so. Central defenders have predominantly owned this honor and Glesnes' defensive partner **Jack Elliott** also projects to be a strong candidate on one of the best defenses in the league this season. Lastly, MLS veterans have typically been among the frontrunners, so expect to see **Kamal Miller** (CF Montréal), **Miles Robinson** (Atlanta United), and two-time winner **Walker Zimmerman** (Nashville SC) in the race.



LA Galaxy midfielder
Riqui Puig



MLS HOMEGROWN INITIATIVE CONTINUES TO PAY DIVIDENDS

MLS is one of the youngest leagues in the world and a key reason for that is the explosion of Homegrown players. A Homegrown player can be signed if he has been a member of that club's youth academy for at least one year and has met the necessary training and retention requirements. 2023 will mark the 15th anniversary of the rule's implementation and will highlight some of the top young players in the league.

Last season saw Homegrown players shatter almost every previous milestone in MLS history. More than 15% of all minutes in MLS were played by Homegrown signings and 62 different players scored a goal in 2022 - both all-time highs. Additionally, 2022 marked the first time in MLS history that over 200 goals were assisted by Homegrown players. In the past five years, games played have doubled, goals scored increased by 50%, and minutes played rose by 90%.

The total Homegrown numbers are staggering, but last season included several magnificent individual performances. FC Dallas' **Jesús Ferreira** (21 years old) scored the second-most goals (18) by a Homegrown in a single season en route to winning the Young Player of the Year award. Additionally, Chicago Fire FC's **Gabriel 'Gaga' Slonina** (18 years old) recorded the second-most clean sheets (12) by a Homegrown player prior to his move to Chelsea FC.

A few other Homegrown players have big opportunities to make the leap to significant contributors this season. One of the focal points of Philadelphia's run to MLS Cup 2022 was **Jack McGlynn**, who started in the final and contributed the game-winning assist in the Eastern Conference Final. Another midfielder with similar breakout potential is Seattle's **Obed Vargas**. The 17-year-old became a consistent starter for the Sounders before an injury cut his 2022 season short.

With those two players having signed Homegrown deals before 2022, who will be some of the first-year breakout academy stars? In Florida, two of those players will garner lots of attention as 2022 MLS NEXT All-Star Game MVP **Favian Loyola** (Orlando City) along with U.S. and Argentine youth international **Benjamin Cremaschi** (Inter Miami) aim to make big impacts in their debut seasons. Out west, highly-touted youngster **Cruz Medina** (San Jose Earthquakes) could be that player after impressing for the U.S. U-17 Youth National Team.

Homegrown players will continue to be a byproduct of the incredibly talented youth programs in MLS, scoring more goals and creating more breathtaking highlights during the 2023 season.

2022 MLS
Young Player of the Year
Jesús Ferreira





Austin FC forward
Gyasi Zardes

MLS MILESTONES ON THE HORIZON IN 2023

Josef Martínez looks to reach 100 goals at record rate

Only 11 players in MLS history have scored 100 regular season goals, and two others will look to add to that total in 2023: **Josef Martínez** and **Gyasi Zardes**, who will both look to do so with new clubs.

Martínez joined Inter Miami CF on January 18 after spending the first six years of his MLS career with Atlanta United, scoring 98 times in 134 games. **With two goals in his next 25 games, Martínez would become the fastest player in league history to reach 100 career regular season goals.** The current record is held by Bradley Wright-Phillips, who reached 100 career regular season goals in 159 games.

This offseason, Zardes moved to the Lone Star State, joining Austin FC after scoring 10 times in 2022 with Columbus and Colorado. **The product of LA Galaxy's academy system needs just three more goals to hit 100 in his MLS career.**

Also in Austin, **Ethan Finlay** is just **two assists shy from recording 50 career goals and 50 assists.** Only four active MLS players have hit that milestone (Diego Fagúndez, Kei Kamara, Justin Meram, Fredy Montero).

Two Eastern Conference sides, the Philadelphia Union and CF Montréal, enter 2023 on the brink of record home and away runs. **Philadelphia have not lost in 22 straight regular season home matches**, which is the longest in club history and one game shy of cracking the top-five in league annals.

1. Houston Dynamo FC – 30 (7/9/2011 to 4/28/2013)
2. Real Salt Lake – 29 (6/6/2009 to 5/14/2011)
3. Sporting Kansas City – 24 (6/19/2016 to 9/24/2017)
4. LA Galaxy – 23 (4/12/2014 to 5/27/2015) and Colorado Rapids (5/8/21 to 5/22/2022)

For CF Montréal, the season opener against Inter Miami CF comes with an opportunity to become the **first team in MLS history to win eight consecutive regular season games on the road** after closing out the 2022 season strong.

From a coaching standpoint, Toronto FC's **Bob Bradley** (191) aims to become just the **third coach in league history to hit 200 career regular season wins** with just nine needed in 2023 to reach the mark. A three-time Sigi Schmid MLS Coach of the Year selection, Bradley has eyes on the postseason with Toronto in his second year at the helm. He will lean on the likes of Lorenzo Insigne, Federico Bernardeschi, and Mark-Anthony Kaye, who all enter their first full seasons with the club in 2023.



NEW AND NOTEWORTHY PLAYERS SET TO MAKE IMPRINT ON MLS

Portland Timbers
midfielder Evander

Top-tier talent from around the world found a home in MLS during the 2022-23 offseason, including club-record signings in Portland, Real Salt Lake, and Charlotte.

- Signed as a Designated Player out of Danish Superliga side FC Midtjylland, **Evander** joined the Portland Timbers in December 2022 after accruing 50 goals and 38 assists in over 160 matches across all competitions for Midtjylland. The 24-year-old Brazilian looks to provide an immediate jolt to the Timbers offense as the club looks to return to the Audi MLS Cup Playoffs after missing out for the first time since 2016.
- In the Eastern Conference, Charlotte FC looks to continue building on a successful debut campaign in 2022 and tapped forward **Enzo Copetti** from Argentine Primera División side Racing Club to add to their attack. Copetti, who scored 21 goals and six assists in 47 appearances across all competitions for Racing Club last year, joins forwards Karol Świdorski and Kamil Józwiak as the club's third Designated Player. Nicknamed "El Tanque" or "The Tank," Copetti was Charlotte's top target during the offseason and will look to provide a dynamic, fast-paced option at the top of Charlotte's offense.
- In February 2023, the New York Red Bulls acquired Belgian forward **Dante Vanzeir** from Royal Union Saint-Gilloise. Vanzeir, 24, arrives in New York after making 92 appearances with Union SG, scoring 48 goals and tallying 21 assists. In his first season with the club, Vanzeir scored 18 goals and won the Golden Boot in the Challenger Pro League, the second division in Belgian soccer. He led Union SG to win the league and earn promotion to the Jupiler Pro League for the first time in 48 years. This season with the club, he made 28 appearances across all competitions and has added 12 goals and two assists.
- At Real Salt Lake, 20-year-old winger **Carlos Andrés Gómez** joins the club after making 59 first-team appearances with Millonarios in Colombia's top league. Gómez scored 13 goals and recorded six assists in just over 4,000 minutes with the club.

These new players, among many other new and exciting additions throughout the league, will be instrumental in helping their clubs achieve the ultimate goal of lifting the MLS Cup in 2023.





Inter Miami CF forward
Josef Martínez

FAMILIAR FACES ARRIVE IN NEW PLACES

Some of the biggest stars in MLS will don the colors of a new club in 2023 as they continue to build their legacies within the league.

After a six-year stint in the red and black stripes of Atlanta United, former Landon Donovan MLS MVP **Josef Martínez** will wear Inter Miami CF pink. The Venezuelan international arrives to South Florida with an MLS Cup, U.S. Open Cup, and Campeones Cup to his name. Martínez sits just two goals away from 100 career regular season scores during his MLS career.

U.S. Men's National Team defender **Aaron Long** will return home to Southern California with the reigning MLS Cup champion Los Angeles Football Club. The former MLS Defender of the Year won a Supporters' Shield in six years with the New York Red Bulls and brings a wealth of international experience having competed in the Concacaf Gold Cup and World Cup with the USMNT.

Entering his 15th MLS season, goalkeeper **Sean Johnson** arrives at Toronto FC after a sensational six-year stint with New York City FC. Johnson, the MLS Cup MVP during NYCFC's 2021 title run, ranks fourth in MLS history in regular season clean sheets (90) and will look to help shore up a Toronto defense that allowed the third-most goals in MLS in 2022 (66).

Two reigning MLS Cup champions in midfielder **Latif Blessing** and defender **Franco Escobar** will also have new digs in 2023. Blessing, who played for LAFC since 2018, joined the New England Revolution while Escobar stayed in the Western Conference with Houston Dynamo FC. Escobar won an MLS Cup at both of his previous clubs and will look to become the sixth player in league history to win three with three different clubs.

Other notable intraleague moves include 21-year-old defender **George Campbell** and USMNT defender **Aaron Herrera's** moves from Atlanta and Real Salt Lake, respectively, to CF Montréal, 22-year-old USMNT midfielder **Andres Perea's** move from Orlando City to the Philadelphia Union, and **David Romney** joining the Revolution after three years in one of the league's best defenses at Nashville SC.



NOTABLE MLS ANNIVERSARIES IN 2023

While all eyes are focused on the upcoming season, there are several notable MLS anniversaries being celebrated in 2023. Below is a sampling of those milestones.

25 Years Ago (1998 MLS Season)

- The Chicago Fire and Miami Fusion joined MLS as the league's 10th and 11th clubs ahead of the 1998 season. The Fire immediately made an impact in the league, capturing the 1998 MLS Cup and winning the 1998 U.S. Open Cup in their inaugural season.
- On June 4, 1998, the LA Galaxy became the only team in MLS history to score eight goals in a single match in an 8-1 victory over the Dallas Burn. In just 12 minutes of second-half action, Galaxy forward Harut Karapetyan registered the lone hat trick of his career, and former Galaxy standout and current Fire head coach Ezra Hendrickson added two goals in the victory.

20 Years Ago (2003 MLS Season)

- Landon Donovan of the San Jose Earthquakes took home MLS Cup Most Valuable Player honors after scoring two goals in the club's 4-2 victory over the Chicago Fire. The victory marked the Earthquakes second cup title in three seasons.

15 Years Ago (2008 MLS Season)

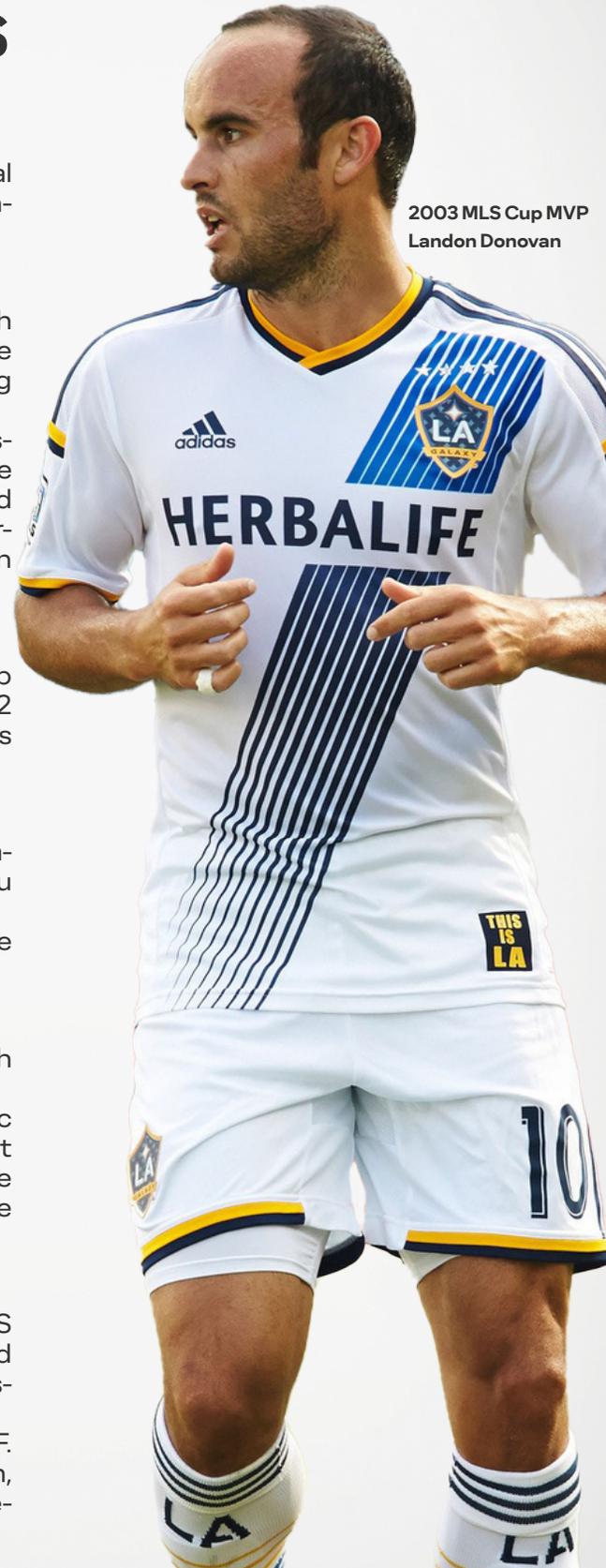
- On February 28, 2008, Major League Soccer announced the Philadelphia Union as the league's 16th club, as well as plans for Subaru Park, the 20,000 seat soccer-specific stadium in Chester, Pa.
- Under the direction of Sigi Schmid, the Columbus Crew captured the Supporters' Shield and won the second MLS Cup in club history.

10 Years Ago (2013 MLS Season)

- On May 21, New York City FC was officially announced as the 20th club in Major League Soccer. NYCFC began MLS play in 2015.
- Sporting Kansas City won their second MLS Cup via a dramatic 7-6 penalty shootout against Real Salt Lake. This was the longest shootout in MLS Cup history. Aurelien Collin of SKC scored the game-tying goal in the 76th minute of the match, as well as the game-winning score in the shootout, and took home MVP honors.

5 Years Ago (2018 MLS Season)

- On March 4, the Los Angeles Football Club played their first MLS match, a 1-0 road victory over Seattle Sounders FC. The club earned the most points in a regular season by an expansion team in MLS history (57) and advanced to the Audi MLS Cup Playoffs.
- Two expansion clubs were announced: Austin FC and Inter Miami CF.
- D.C. United celebrated the debut of their soccer-specific stadium, Audi Field, which will play host to the 2023 MLS All-Star Game presented by Target.



2003 MLS Cup MVP
Landon Donovan



New York Red Bulls
defender John Tolkin

THE FUTURE IS NOW

Top young players to watch in 2023

As the 2023 regular season approaches, young stars have their eyes set on making a name for themselves with success in MLS. Below are a few players aged 22 or younger to watch as they continue their rise:

- **Thiago Almada (21 years old)** returns to Atlanta after being the youngest member of the World Cup-winning Argentina team, playing alongside Lionel Messi en route to Argentina's third title. Almada dazzled in his first MLS season, providing six goals and 12 assists.
- USMNT and FC Dallas forward **Jesús Ferreira (22 years old)** led all players under the age of 22 in goal contributions in 2022, scoring 18 and assisting six more en route to Young Player of the Year honors.
- **John Tolkin (20 years old)** of the New York Red Bulls earned his first USMNT call-up during the January camp after starting 31 matches in 2022, setting career highs in minutes (2,748) and assists (three).
- **Facundo Torres (22 years old)** of Orlando City SC produced nine goals and 10 assists in his debut season as the Lions secured a play-off berth and Torres earned a call-up to Uruguay's World Cup squad.

Young players developed in MLS have been transferred abroad for record fees. The three players below, all under the age of 22, were transferred over the last 12 months.

- The Chicago Fire teenage duo of goalkeeper **Gabriel 'Gaga' Slonina (18 years old)** and **Jhon Durán (19 years old)** were transferred to English Premier League clubs Chelsea and Aston Villa, respectively.
- Philadelphia Union midfielder **Paxten Aaronson (19 years old)** was transferred to the German Bundesliga's Eintracht Frankfurt, joining his brother, Brenden of Leeds United, in Europe.

In April 2021, Major League Soccer announced a new initiative for players under the age of 22 to continue to foster the growth of young players and decrease roadblocks for clubs interested in signing them. The U22 Initiative allows MLS clubs to sign up to three young players, age 22 and younger, to lucrative contracts at a reduced budget charge.

A pair of newcomers under the U22 Initiative will also make their MLS debuts and are expected to be immediate contributors in 2023:

- **Marco Angulo (20 years old)** was acquired by FC Cincinnati from Independiente de Valle of the Ecuadorian Liga Pro. The Ecuadorian midfielder made 45 appearances for the Independiente first team since October 2021.
- **Stipe Biuk (20 years old)** of Croatia was a finalist for the 2022 "Golden Boy Award", an annual award for Europe's best young player. Biuk joins the defending MLS Cup and Supporters' Shield winner from the Croatian top-flight side Hajduk Split, where he had six goals and eight assists in 66 all-competition matches.



NEW CLUB LEADERSHIP IN 2023

The 2023 regular season will see three coaches with new clubs along with two others who were appointed from interim roles following the 2022 season.

- **Wilfried Nancy (Columbus Crew):** After shattering many club records with CF Montréal in 2022, Wilfried Nancy moved to the Columbus Crew, where he looks to instill his attacking soccer on another hungry Eastern Conference club. Nancy was the runner-up for the 2022 Sigi Schmid MLS Coach of the Year as the club posted a record number of points (65), wins (20), and goals (63). Now, the Frenchman has the opportunity to work with a talented Crew roster featuring the likes of Juan 'Cucho' Hernández, Darlington Nagbe, and Lucas Zelarayán.
- **Hernán Losada (CF Montréal):** Taking Nancy's place in Montréal is a name familiar to MLS fans – former D.C. United head coach Hernán Losada. In 2021, Losada and D.C. narrowly missed out on the Audi MLS Cup Playoffs with a 14-15-5 record, but the team did produce a high-scoring attack with 56 goals. The Argentine had a 16-year playing career before coaching Belgian club Beerschot and earning them promotion to the top division. Losada will be tasked with maintaining Montréal's success as he takes control of a retooled roster in 2023.
- **Ben Olsen (Houston Dynamo FC):** Another familiar face returns to the technical area in 2023 as Houston Dynamo FC named Ben Olsen the sixth manager in club history. Olsen spent 11 years with D.C. United and led the club to a Lamar Hunt U.S. Open Cup title in 2013. His significant experience in MLS as a player (221 games) and coach (344 games) will help the club's growth in Mexican international Héctor Herrera's first full MLS season with the club.
- **Christian Lattanzio (Charlotte FC):** Lattanzio earned the full-time head coaching role at Charlotte FC after impressing as interim head coach in 2022. Lattanzio, who took over midseason for Miguel Angel Ramirez, compiled a 8-10-2 record with Charlotte and steered the expansion club into playoff contention in their inaugural season.
- **Nick Cushing (NYCFC):** Nick Cushing became the interim coach of NYCFC in June following the departure of MLS Cup champion Ronny Deila and helped the club advance to the Eastern Conference Final after a third-place finish in the conference.



Columbus Crew head coach Wilfried Nancy



THIAGO ALMADA OF ATLANTA UNITED WINS 2022 FIFA WORLD CUP WITH ARGENTINA AS MLS MAKES ITS MARK

A record number of players from Major League Soccer represented the United States, Canada, and nations around the globe and competed at the FIFA World Cup – the biggest sporting event on the planet.

Atlanta United's **Thiago Almada**, the dynamic 21-year-old midfielder of Argentina, became the first active MLS player to be a member of the victorious World Cup squad. Almada, the 2022 MLS Newcomer of the Year, made his World Cup debut in Argentina's 2-0 victory over Poland in the country's final group stage match on November 30.

Major League Soccer was represented by a **league-record 36 players** at the World Cup in Qatar – the most of any league in the Americas and eclipsed globally by the Premier League, La Liga, Bundesliga, Serie A, and Ligue 1 in overall number of players called in to the World Cup. Additionally, one player from MLS NEXT Pro, **Daniel Chacón** of Colorado Rapids 2, was named to the Costa Rican national team.

Below is a look at MLS' impact on the World Cup, by the numbers:

- **36:** MLS players called-up to 2022 FIFA World Cup rosters – the most in league history and double that of the total MLS players that were called up for the 2018 FIFA World Cup.
- **18:** U.S. Men's National Team players with MLS ties (current players, former players, or players that spent time in an MLS academy).
- **18:** Canada Men's National Team players with MLS ties (current players, former players, or players that spent time in MLS academy).
- **11:** An MLS-high 11 players were selected to the Canadian Men's National Team, including a pair of defenders – **Kamal Miller** and **Alistair Johnston** – that started all three of the Canadian squad's games.
- **9:** Nine MLS players competed for the United States Men's National Team, including Nashville SC star defender **Walker Zimmerman**, who started three of the USMNT's four matches in World Cup play.
- **8:** All eight World Cup groups featured at least one MLS player.
- **6:** Six players were contributed by **CF Montréal**, the most by an MLS team. **LAFc** (five players) and **Seattle Sounders FC** (four players) ranked second and third respectively among MLS clubs.
- **2:** Two 2022 MLS newcomers – LAFc's **Gareth Bale** of Wales and Chicago's **Xherdan Shaqiri** of Switzerland – scored for their respective countries in World Cup action, becoming the eighth and ninth different MLS players to score in the FIFA World Cup.



Atlanta United FC midfielder & 2022 FIFA World Cup champion Thiago Almada



2026 FIFA WORLD CUP COMING TO 13 MLS CITIES

All 13 cities selected in the U.S. and Canada are home to an MLS team

On June 16, 2022, FIFA announced the host cities for the 2026 FIFA World Cup in North America. The first World Cup to span across three nations, all 13 host cities selected in the U.S. and Canada are home to MLS teams, with the remaining three host cities located in Mexico.

Additionally, MLS facilities are expected to host teams from around the world as they prepare to compete on the world's largest stage.





SOPHOMORE SEASON SUCCESS: CAN CHARLOTTE REPLICATE AUSTIN'S YEAR TWO RISE?

In their second season, Charlotte FC is going to look to replicate the sophomore success of Austin FC, who tied the MLS record for the largest points improvement (25) from Year 1 to Year 2 for an MLS expansion team in their second campaign in 2022.

Led by 2022 Landon Donovan MLS MVP runner-up Sebastián Driussi, Austin reached the Western Conference Final, becoming just the fourth expansion team since 2000 to reach the Conference Finals in their first postseason appearance. The Verde continuously lit up Q2 Stadium with their play in 2022 and will look to ride that momentum into the 2023 Concacaf Champions League.

After Austin's success, Charlotte FC aims to follow in their footsteps during their second season in MLS in 2023. The Crown pushed for a playoff position down the stretch of 2022 after interim head coach **Christian Lattanzio** took over in the middle of the season, earning him the full-time role in 2023. As a first-year expansion team, Charlotte's 13 wins were the third most behind only Atlanta United (15) and LAFC (16), with 10 of those coming at Bank of America Stadium.

Charlotte forward **Karol Świderski** also aims for a second-year breakout after he dazzled in the Queen City in 2022. Świderski scored 10 goals and had six assists en route to earning a call-up for Poland at the 2022 FIFA World Cup, where the team progressed to the Round of 16. He became the first player since 2018 to score 10 goals for an expansion club in their first season of play.

Joining Świderski in attack will be new designated player **Enzo Copetti**, who scored 21 goals in all competitions for Racing Club (Argentina) over the past two seasons. Additionally, Charlotte traded up for the No. 1 overall pick in MLS SuperDraft 2023 presented by adidas to select Clemson defender **Hamady Diop**. Charlotte became the first team since D.C. United (2003-04) to pick No. 1 overall in consecutive SuperDrafts, after selecting midfielder **Ben Bender** out of the University of Maryland with the top overall pick in 2022. With a mix of talented returning players and new acquisitions, Charlotte looks primed for a second-year jump in the Eastern Conference.



Charlotte FC forward
Karol Świderski



EXPANSION DRAFT, FREE AGENCY, & MLS SUPERDRAFT 2023 PRESENTED BY adidas HIGHLIGHT FLURRY OF OFFSEASON ACTIVITY

EXPANSION DRAFT

After LAFC lifted the 2022 MLS Cup, clubs got to work starting with the 2022 Expansion Draft on November 11, where St. Louis CITY SC selected five players to build out their roster. St. Louis added **Nicholas Gioacchini** (Orlando City), **Indiana Vassilev** (Inter Miami CF), **Jonathan Bell** (New England), **John Nelson** (FC Cincinnati), and **Jake La Cava** (New York Red Bulls), with La Cava being traded to Miami.

FREE AGENCY

Standout MLS veterans were on the move this offseason via free agency, including an MLS Defender of the Year, one of the league's all-time leading scorers, and a dynamic young winger. After a breakout season (nine goals and six assists) with the Columbus Crew, **Derrick Etienne, Jr.** was one of the first dominoes to fall in free agency and will occupy one of the wings for Atlanta United in 2023. Former FC Dallas defender and three-time MLS All-Star **Matt Hedges** joined Toronto FC, where he will look to solidify the defense during their 2023 postseason push. Forward **Gyasi Zardes**, who split time between Columbus and Colorado in 2022, heads to the Lone Star State with his sights set on making history with Austin FC, needing just three goals to reach 100 in his career.

2023 MLS SUPERDRAFT PRESENTED BY adidas

Twelve of the first 13 selections were acquired via trade, including each of the top seven picks. At the top of the draft, Charlotte FC traded into the first overall position and selected Clemson University defender **Hamady Diop** with the No. 1 overall pick. Diop is the second player from Clemson selected with the No. 1 pick, joining Robbie Robinson, who was the top overall selection by Inter Miami CF in 2020.

The first five picks in the SuperDraft were all members of the Generation adidas class and seven of the top 10 picks were Generation adidas signees. To round out the top-five: Orlando selected **Shakur Mohammed** (Duke), Colorado chose **Moise Bombito** (New Hampshire), New England drafted **Joshua Bolma** (Maryland), and Vancouver took **J.C. Ngando** (UNC Greensboro). After trading the No. 1 overall pick to Charlotte, St. Louis CITY SC made the first draft pick in club history when they selected Creighton midfielder **Owen O'Malley** with the ninth overall pick.

Players from 49 colleges and universities were represented in the 83 selections overall. Twenty-one players selected in the SuperDraft previously played with MLS NEXT clubs.

Charlotte FC defender &
No. 1 overall SuperDraft selection
Hamady Diop





WASHINGTON D.C. TO HOST 2023 MLS ALL-STAR GAME PRESENTED BY TARGET

The MLS All-Star Game is heading to Washington D.C.

The 2023 MLS All-Star Game presented by Target will be held on July 19 at Audi Field, home of D.C. United. The opponent for Major League Soccer's showcase event will be announced at a later date.

The 2023 MLS All-Star Game presented by Target will be presented live to fans around the world through the MLS streaming service as part of Major League Soccer's 10-year partnership with Apple. The first-of-its-kind partnership will see all MLS matches, including marquee games and events, streamed live around the world. Additional broadcast information will be announced at a later date.

D.C. United and Audi Field – Two Tremendous Hosts

While the MLS All-Star Game has been played in Washington, D.C. twice before, in 2002 and 2004 at RFK Stadium, the 27th edition of Major League Soccer's midsummer showcase will be played at Audi Field for the first time since the opening of the stadium in 2018. The home of D.C. United, Audi Field is located in the Capitol Riverfront, the fastest growing neighborhood in downtown D.C. and is within walking distance of several of the city's best hotels, restaurants, and nightlife destinations nestled along the city's waterfront.

The 20,000-seat LEED-certified stadium lies a short walk from the historic National Mall and features views of the Capitol Building and the Washington Monument and a safe-standing supporters' section – affectionately known as the Chico Stand – that is home to the team's six supporters groups.

2023 MLS All-Star Week

The 2023 MLS All-Star Game presented by Target will be the culmination of a week-long series of events throughout Washington, D.C., including community initiatives, concerts, parties, the MLS All-Star Skills Challenge presented by AT&T 5G and more.



Austin FC midfielder and
2022 MLS All-Star
Sebastián Driussi



MLS NEXT PRO ENTERS SECOND SEASON WITH SEVEN NEW CLUBS IN 2023

After a landmark inaugural season in 2022, MLS NEXT Pro enters its second season in 2023. Seven MLS affiliates are new to the league this season: Atlanta United 2, Austin FC II, Crown Legacy FC (Charlotte FC), Huntsville City FC (Nashville SC), LA Galaxy II, Los Angeles Football Club 2, and New York Red Bulls II.



Highlights from the inaugural season of MLS NEXT Pro included:

- A sellout crowd witnessed the league's first-ever match at Hermann Stadium in St. Louis, as St Louis CITY2 hosted Rochester New York FC.
- Over 750 players from more than 80 countries competed throughout the season, led by diverse and talented coaching staffs: 40% of head coaches previously played in MLS, 25% of clubs were led by head coaches of color, and 50% of assistant coaches were of diverse backgrounds.
- Multiple groundbreaking rules were established, including the Off-Field Treatment Rule, Red Card Suspension Rule, and Kicks from the Penalty Mark used to decide matches that end in a tie.
- The league hosted its first international competition, the MLS NEXT Pro Invitational, featuring teams from England's Premier League 2 facing MLS NEXT Pro teams in Utah.
- Four MLS NEXT Pro goalkeepers competed in "Goalie Wars" at MLS All-Star Skills Challenge in Minneapolis, with hometown hero Alec Smir of MNUFC2 winning.
- Matches were streamed in more than 180 countries globally.
- The pro player pathway in action: 28 players have signed MLS contracts after competing in MLS NEXT Pro (as of Jan. 30, 2023), with 81 MLS NEXT Pro players receiving short-term call-ups to MLS first teams during the season.
- Columbus Crew 2 captured the first-ever MLS NEXT Pro Cup in front of an electric home crowd at Lower.com Field in Columbus, led by the league's first MVP, Jacen Russell-Rowe, Goalkeeper of the Year, Patrick Schulte, and Coach of the Year, Laurent Courtois.



Players from St Louis CITY2 celebrate with fans during the first-ever match in MLS NEXT Pro history.

There is much more in store for the 2023 season, including an extended regular season, expanded international competition, a new playoff format, additional players earning opportunities in MLS, and matches streaming on MLS Season Pass on the Apple TV app.

The future is bright for MLS NEXT Pro as the league continues to grow, with additional MLS-affiliated and independent clubs joining in the years ahead, including Carolina Core FC in 2024 and Cleveland in 2025.



THE PATHWAY TO THE PROS BEGINS WITH MLS NEXT

In 2007, Major League Soccer mandated that clubs have youth academies with the purpose of developing homegrown players. Sixteen years later, players developed in MLS youth academies are now significant members of MLS clubs, United States and Canadian national teams, and playing for clubs around the world.

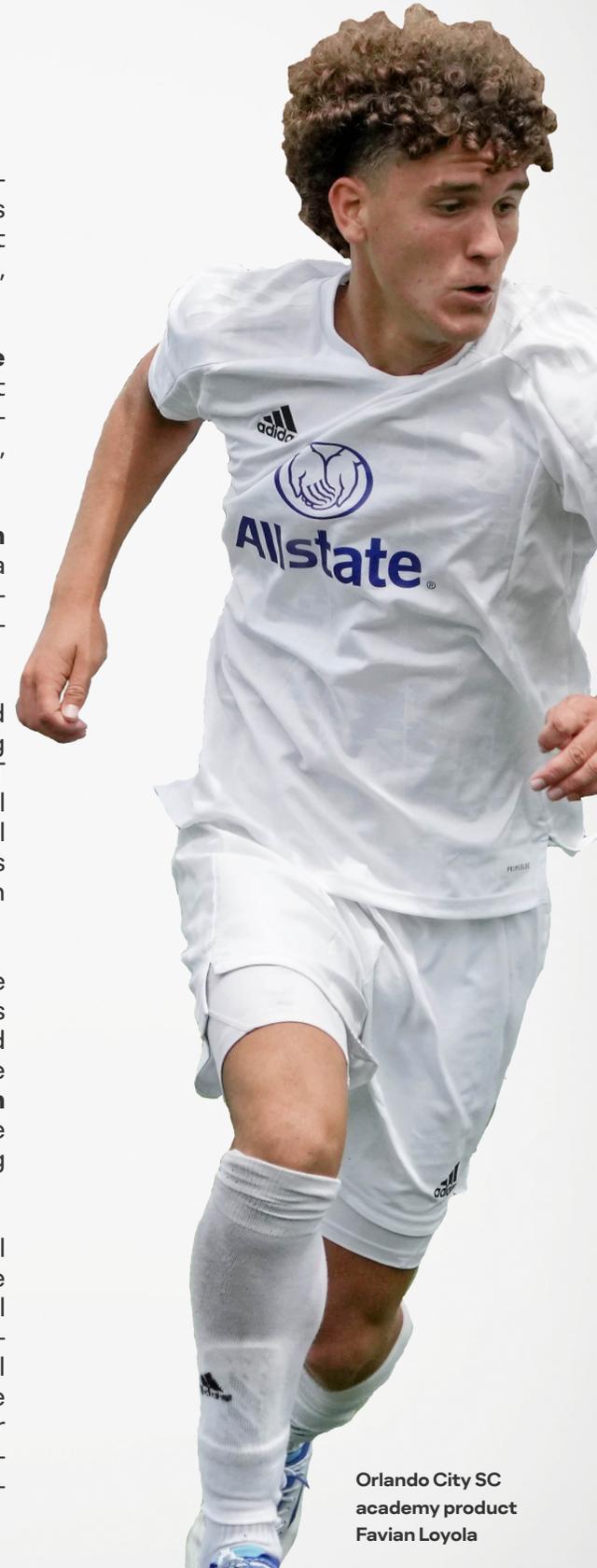
A significant figure in the player development path is **MLS NEXT, the 600+ team youth soccer league in the United States and Canada** that opened its third season of play in September 2022. Over 13,000 players from the country's leading 137 clubs, including all 29 MLS academies, play in up to six age groups: U13, U14, U15, U16, U17, and U19.

MLS NEXT provides the best player development experience in North America. Founded on a collaborative approach to governance and a commitment to innovation, MLS NEXT players have access to the highest levels of competition and to training to prepare them for their futures, both in soccer and in life.

The 2022-23 season features top prospects from across the U.S. and Canada, in both MLS academies and Elite club academies, competing for a chance to become MLS NEXT champions at the 2023 MLS NEXT Cup Playoffs in June. Additionally, the 2023 MLS NEXT calendar will feature three premier events, including Generation adidas Cup in April 2023, MLS NEXT Flex – a qualifying event for the MLS NEXT Cup Playoffs – in May 2023, and the MLS NEXT All-Star Game presented by Allstate in July 2023.

Of the 45 players selected to the inaugural MLS NEXT All-Star Game presented by Allstate, nine players have signed Homegrown contracts with their MLS clubs, including two players each for the New England Revolution – **Esmir Bajraktarevic** and **Jack Panayotou** – and San Jose Earthquakes – **Cruz Medina** and **Emmanuel Ochoa**. Midfielder **Favian Loyola** of the Orlando City SC academy was named the Most Valuable Player of the All-Star match and concluded his standout year by signing a first-team contract as a Homegrown player.

In addition to stellar competition in MLS NEXT, select NEXT clubs will earn their way to compete in the 2023 Generation adidas Cup, an elite international youth tournament featuring 80 MLS and professional academies from around the globe. The event will be held at IMG Academy in Bradenton, Fla. from April 1-9, 2023. Last year, 23 international teams from many of the most notable clubs in the global game were represented at GA Cup, including Manchester United of the Premier League, River Plate of the Argentine Primera División, Celtic of the Scottish Premiership and Flamengo of Brazilian Série A, who were all represented in both the U-17 and U-15 divisions.



Orlando City SC
academy product
Favian Loyola