



MAJOR LEAGUE SOCCER

2024 SEASON PREVIEW





2023 Landon Donovan
MLS MVP Luciano Acosta,
FC Cincinnati

YOU HAVEN'T SEEN MLS LIKE THIS

The MLS regular season is back! The 29th season of Major League Soccer commences with the earliest start in league history as eight-time Ballon d'Or winner **Lionel Messi** and reigning Leagues Cup champion **Inter Miami CF** hosts **Real Salt Lake** on Wednesday, Feb. 21 at DRV PNK Stadium (8 p.m. ET, MLS Season Pass).

An exciting week of season-opening action continues on Saturday, Feb. 24 and Sunday, Feb. 25, highlighted by the **LA Galaxy** hosting **Miami** on Sunday at Dignity Health Sports Park (9:30 p.m. ET, MLS Season Pass).

All 29 MLS teams will play 34 regular-season games, including 17 at home and 17 on the road. The majority of matches in 2024 will be played on Saturdays and select Wednesdays, with local start times of 7:30 p.m., and all matches will be available on MLS Season Pass on Apple TV.

Later in the season, 2024 MLS Rivalry Week will feature top adversary matchups played across four matchdays from May 11-18. Reigning MLS Cup champion **Columbus Crew** will host in-state rival and 2023 Supporters' Shield winner **FC Cincinnati** at Lower.com Field (7:30 p.m. ET, MLS Season Pass, FS1) in a Hell is Real rematch of the 2023 Eastern Conference Final on Saturday, May 11.

For a second consecutive season, **El Tráfico** will take place at the historic **Rose Bowl** with the **LA Galaxy** facing off against the **Los Angeles Football Club** on Thursday, July 4 (10:30 p.m. ET, MLS Season Pass). Last year's match, which was also played on Independence Day, set an all-time MLS attendance record with 82,110 fans in the building.

Columbus will play host to the **2024 MLS All-Star Game presented by Target** at Lower.com Field on Wednesday, July 24 (MLS Season Pass). The action-packed week will bring world-class soccer events, music, interactive fan experiences, and community-focused events to Columbus. The Crew previously hosted both the 2000 and 2005 MLS All-Star Games at Columbus Crew Stadium.

Leagues Cup 2024, the World Cup-style club competition featuring LIGA MX and MLS clubs, will kick off on Friday, July 26 with the tournament final on Sunday, August 25. In 2023, the tournament featured 77 intense matches, capturing the hearts of nearly 1.3 million fans in the stadiums throughout the event.

The final matchday of the MLS regular season with postseason implications on the line – **Decision Day 2024** – is set for Saturday, October 19. The slate of 14 matches will feature all Eastern Conference matches kicking off at 6 p.m. ET and all Western Conference matches following at 9 p.m. ET.

The **Audi 2024 MLS Cup Playoffs** will culminate with **MLS Cup presented by Audi**, with a champion crowned on Saturday, December 7.



MLS CUP CHAMPION COLUMBUS CREW BEGIN QUEST FOR A REPEAT

Only three times in MLS history has a team won consecutive MLS Cups, and the most recent came over a decade ago with the 2011-12 LA Galaxy. Entering the 2024 season, the **Columbus Crew** will look to add a fourth MLS Cup to their trophy cabinet and become the first team in over a decade to defend their title.

The Crew, which captured the Philip F. Anschutz Trophy in 2008, 2020, and 2023, **will look to become just the third team in MLS history to win at least four MLS Cups**, joining the LA Galaxy (five) and D.C. United (four). Second-year head coach **Wilfried Nancy** will also look to become just the fourth coach in MLS history to take his team to an MLS Cup in each of his first two years and the first head coach in league annals to win consecutive MLS Cups in his first two years with a club.

Columbus welcomes back a stable of stars ahead of their title defense, including 2023 MLS Cup MVP **Cucho Hernández**, four-time MLS Cup champion **Darlington Nagbe**, 2023 MLS All-Star **Aidan Morris**, and former Golden Boot presented by Audi winner **Diego Rossi**. One of the most productive players in MLS, the 24-year-old Hernández (25 goals, 14 assists) is one of only three players with at least 25 goals and 10 assists since he entered the league on July 9, 2022, joining Nashville SC's Hany Mukhtar (29 goals, 17 assists) and the Philadelphia Union's Dániel Gazdag (29 goals, 18 assists).

The Crew will begin their title defense with a home tilt against Atlanta United at Lower.com Field on Saturday, Feb. 24 (2 p.m. ET, MLS Season Pass).

2023 MLS Cup
presented by Audi MVP
Cucho Hernández,
Columbus Crew



Columbus Crew Head Coach Wilfried Nancy (right) at championship parade



Lionel Messi,
Inter Miami CF

HOME OF THE G.O.A.T - INTER MIAMI CF'S LIONEL MESSI

Off the back of winning the 2022 FIFA World Cup with Argentina and lifting the 2022-23 Ligue 1 title with Paris Saint-Germain, **Lionel Messi** took his career stateside to join Inter Miami CF in pursuit of more trophies and the opportunity to conquer new competitions.

Debuting for Miami in Leagues Cup 2023, Messi took the tournament by storm in its inaugural World Cup-style format. From seemingly effortless free-kick goals to stoppage-time game-winners, the Argentine icon introduced himself to MLS and LIGA MX in style. Messi scored in all but one game, finishing as the tournament's top goal scorer with 10 goals and earning Best Player honors as he led Inter Miami to their first-ever trophy as an MLS club.

His impact was immediately felt outside of the Leagues Cup as well, with two assists in the Lamar Hunt U.S. Open Cup semifinal win against FC Cincinnati that helped his side advance to the final after a penalty-kick shootout. Messi recorded two assists and scored an AT&T Goal of the Year candidate in his first three MLS regular-season games while leading Argentina to a 5-1-0 start on its 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifying campaign.

The year ahead will be filled with firsts and high expectations as Miami will compete in the Concacaf Champions Cup for the first time in club history at the beginning of the year. While three MLS clubs have won the tournament in its various formats since 1962, Miami could become the first MLS club to win the tournament in their first appearance as well as the first Eastern Conference club to win it since D.C. United in 1998.

The 2024 MLS regular season will also be Messi's first full season in Miami, and his name will be in MLS All-Star, Golden Boot, and MVP conversations from the jump. For Miami to lift more trophies this year, Messi will have to play at those levels throughout the 2024 season.

As one of the greatest players to ever play the game of soccer, Messi has claimed domestic and international titles wherever he's played, and 2024 is his time to do the same with his new club, Inter Miami CF, in his new home, MLS.



ON THE HUNT FOR HARDWARE: 2024 AWARDS CONTENDERS

Discussion about the Landon Donovan MLS MVP inevitably centers around Inter Miami CF forward **Lionel Messi**, who immediately made his impact on his club after arriving in July. Messi, alongside a star-studded lineup, is poised for an impactful 2024 season.

Breaking the trend of no back-to-back Landon Donovan MLS MVP winners would be FC Cincinnati's **Luciano Acosta**. Acosta, who was instrumental in earning Cincinnati its first Supporters' Shield last season, has been a dynamic force since joining the club in 2021, boasting 34 goals and 43 assists. Finally, historical success in the MLS Golden Boot presented by Audi, won by **Dénis Bouanga** (LAFC) with 20 goals last season, also hints at potential MVP contention.

Between the sticks, a plethora of European talent will be the frontrunners for the Allstate Goalkeeper of the Year. St. Louis City SC's **Roman Bürki** took home the honor last season and **Stefan Frei** (Seattle Sounders FC) had one of the most underrated goalkeeping years in recent memory. World Cup winner and English Premier League veteran **Hugo Lloris** joins LAFC and will immediately become a serious contender for the honor. Finally, established MLS talent like **Andre Blake** (Philadelphia Union), **Pedro Gallese** (Orlando City SC), and **Patrick Schulte** (Columbus Crew) will all be in the hunt to bring home the hardware.

When looking at the Young Player of the Year award, Atlanta's **Thiago Almada** produced a sensational season in 2023, which earned him the honor; however, it also showed that second-year MLS players tend to lead this category. A few notable names that fit this mold in 2024 include **Carlos Gómez** (Real Salt Lake) and **Gabriel Pirani** (D.C. United). Additionally, Homegrown players who make a leap like Jesús Ferreira (2022) or Ricardo Pepi (2021) are strong candidates and Chicago Fire FC's **Brian Gutierrez** will look to replicate that path while coming off his most productive professional season.

In the spotlight of goal scorers, the MLS Golden Boot presented by Audi will feature contenders like **Bouanga**, **Giorgos Giakoumakis** (Atlanta United), **Cucho Hernández** (Columbus Crew), and **Hany Mukhtar** (Nashville SC), among others, competing for the honor. The stage is set for an exciting season with standout performances and potential award winners.

Giorgos Giakoumakis,
Atlanta United





Pedro de la Vega,
Seattle Sounders FC

DESTINATION MLS: BIG NAMES & RISING STARS TO KEEP AN EYE ON IN 2024

Major League Soccer continues to be a premier destination for international stars from across the world and many of those elite talents will be on display during the 2024 season. Four clubs - the **Chicago Fire**, **Colorado Rapids**, **FC Dallas**, and the **LA Galaxy** - have broken their club record of incoming transfer fees, and eight clubs have done so in the last calendar year.

This class of offseason signings illustrates the presence MLS clubs in the global market as players signed since December 1, 2023, represent 28 different countries (as of February 1). With an average age of 23.94 years old, MLS clubs continue to sign players entering their prime and choosing to challenge themselves at the peak of their careers in front of a global audience in MLS.

This offseason saw Inter Miami CF add another world-class forward to their Lionel Messi-led front line, reuniting their Argentine star with former FC Barcelona teammate **Luis Suárez**. In the West, LAFC filled their goal posts with 2018 FIFA World Cup winner **Hugo Lloris** as they aim for a third consecutive MLS Cup presented by Audi appearance.

The Colorado Rapids have their eyes set on rebounding from a disappointing 2023 season as they signed a trio of U.S. Men's National Team players in midfielder **Djordje Mihailovic**, defender **Sam Vines**, and goalkeeper **Zack Steffen** this winter. Serial winners in Europe, winning six domestic titles and cup competitions between them, the Rapids have added proven star power to their roster as they look to regain their footing in a stacked Western Conference.

The Hudson River Derby will welcome new faces to the rivalry in 2024 with **Emil Forsberg** signing with the New York Red Bulls from RB Leipzig and U22 signee **Agustín Ojeda** joining New York City FC from Argentinian side Racing Club. Forsberg brings a wealth of experience to a young Red Bulls team still looking for its first MLS Cup title while the 19-year-old Ojeda will help lead NYCFB in their quest to return to the postseason in 2024.

Argentine forward **Pedro de la Vega** became Seattle Sounders FC's first-ever Young Designated Player at the end of January. The 22-year-old is a rising star looking to carry the torch of victory lit during Nicolás Lodeiro's time at the club and has even taken on the responsibility of wearing the Uruguayan's No. 10 jersey heading into the 2024 season.

FC Dallas made waves with their U-22 Initiative signing of 17-year-old Romanian international **Enes Sali**, who became the youngest debutant in Romanian National Team history at 15 years, 8 months, and 22 days old.



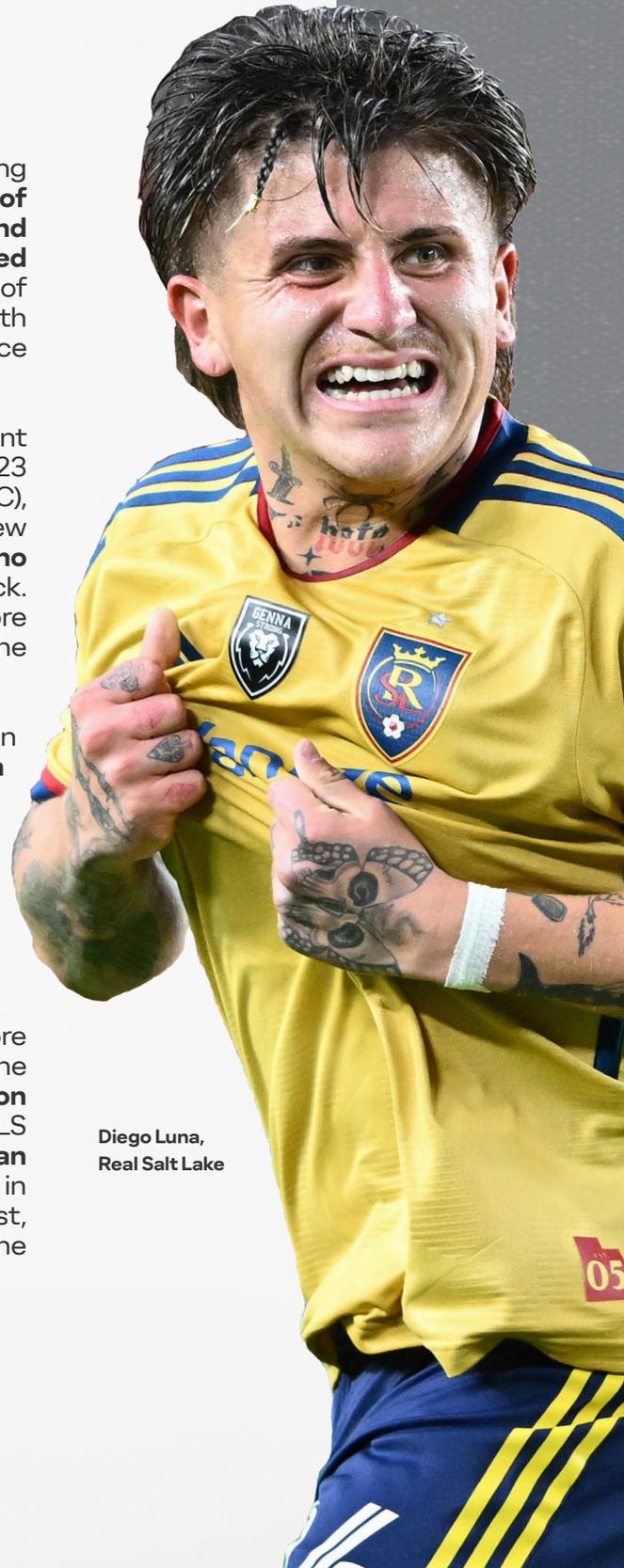
YOUTH MOVEMENT CONTINUES ACROSS MLS

Now more than ever, MLS teams are focused on the impact that young domestic and international players can make on a season. **Over 25% of all minutes played in the 2023 season were by players 23 and under, and MLS had the youngest average age (26 years, 129 days old) compared to the top men's soccer leagues around the world.** The introduction of the U-22 Initiative and Young Designated Players, in conjunction with more opportunities for Homegrown players, has made a real difference in the younger composition of club rosters.

The **U-22 Initiative** has allowed clubs to identify and sign young talent that can immediately make an impact in MLS. Key standouts from 2023 included **Juan Mosquera** (Portland Timbers), **Cristian Olivera** (LAFC), and **Kerwin Vargas** (Charlotte FC), among many others. Among the new U-22 Initiative signings to enter the league in 2024, the Crew's **Marino Hinestroza** will immediately contribute to an already potent attack. Seventeen-year-old Romanian international **Enes Sali** will add more speed and width to FC Dallas' loaded forward group that includes the likes of Jesús Ferreira, Paul Arriola, and Bernard Kamungo.

Several MLS players under the age of 23 will also look to make an impact on the international stage at the **2024 Summer Olympics in Paris**. Men's teams are restricted to U-23 players with three overage players, giving chances to many young MLS stars. It will mark the first time since 2008 that the United States has qualified for soccer at the Olympics. Young MLS standouts like **Diego Luna** (Real Salt Lake), **Jalen Neal** (LA Galaxy), and **Caleb Wiley** (Atlanta United) could each leave their mark on the international stage after successful starts to their MLS careers.

With MLS players departing for the Olympics, it will give even more opportunities for Homegrown players to step up in their absence. The New England Revolution stable includes the likes of **Noel Buck**, **Peyton Miller**, and **Jack Panayotou**, who all have varying degrees of MLS experience in their young careers. For the New York Red Bulls, **Julian Hall** became the second-youngest player to appear in an MLS match in 2023 and expectations are high for the 15-year-old forward. Out west, Seattle's **Reed Baker-Whiting** began to come into his own down the stretch last season, playing in 19 matches for the club.



Diego Luna,
Real Salt Lake



Hany Mukhtar,
Nashville SC

EXPECTED GOALS: MLS MILESTONES ON THE HORIZON IN 2024

A Landon Donovan MLS MVP candidate year-in and year-out, Nashville SC's **Hany Mukhtar** has a chance to make even more history in 2024. In the past three seasons, Mukhtar has combined to produce 88 goal contributions (54 goals, 34 assists) – a remarkable feat that only three other players have matched in MLS history. The German midfielder looks to become the first player in league annals to produce at least 10 goals and 10 assists in four consecutive seasons. If he scores 15-or-more goals, he'd also become just the fourth player in league history to do that in four consecutive years.

One of Mukhtar's biggest rivals for the MVP award will be World Cup winner and Atlanta United star **Thiago Almada**. The Argentine international sits at 31 assists in 60 regular-season games and his 0.52 goals-per-game average is the third-best in league history. If he improves that to over 0.55 per game in 2024, Almada would join the legendary Carlos Valderrama (0.65) as the only player to hold a career average above 0.55. With a tremendous year, the midfielder has a chance to reach 50 assists over three seasons, something only two other players have done in league history (Sacha Kljestan and Valderrama).

Within the coaching ranks, Sporting Kansas City's **Peter Vermes** sits five wins shy of becoming the third coach in league history to hit 200 regular-season victories. Bruce Arena and Sigi Schmid are the lone coaches to hit that mark and Vermes would be the first one to do so with a singular club. A few other coaches aim to hit significant win milestones, including the Philadelphia Union's **Jim Curtin** (132) chasing 150, Nashville SC's **Gary Smith** (85) looking for 100, and LAFC's **Steve Cherundolo** (35) aiming to become the fastest coach to hit 50 victories.

For **St. Louis CITY SC**, all eyes turn to Year 2 after arguably the most successful inaugural season by an expansion club in league history. Those in St. Louis will look at Atlanta United as the pinnacle of second-year success in MLS. After a terrific 2017, Atlanta took it a step further in 2018 when they won MLS Cup behind a record goal-scoring year from Josef Martínez. St. Louis was known for scoring goals in 2023 (62) and they look to become just the third expansion club in league history to tally at least 60 goals in each of their first two league seasons as they chase an MLS Cup title.



HOT STOVE 2024: NEW FACES IN NEW PLACES

Only 75 days separate MLS Cup 2023 presented by Audi and the start of the 2024 MLS regular season and over that span, players found new homes in Major League Soccer through a variety of offseason mechanisms, including free agency, trades, MLS SuperDraft, and transfers. Below is a snapshot of some of the most notable moves of the 2023-24 offseason:

Crépeau, Lodeiro, Robinson Headline Free Agency Class

Difference makers were on the move during the offseason, as several of the league's top contributors found new homes during free agency.

After starting each of the last two MLS Cups with LAFC, Canadian international goalkeeper **Maxime Crépeau** heads north up the Pacific Coast to join the Portland Timbers, where he will look to bring stability to a defensive unit that allowed the third-most goals in MLS in 2023 (58).

Moving from the Pacific Northwest to North Florida is **Nicolás Lodeiro**, who signed a one-year deal with Orlando City SC. Lodeiro joins the Lions after recording 41 goals and 80 assists in 191 games for the Sounders, departing Seattle as the club's all-time leader in goal contributions (121).

FC Cincinnati bolstered their Supporters' Shield-winning roster with the addition of United States Men's National Team defender **Miles Robinson**, who had been a cornerstone of Atlanta United since being selected No. 2 overall in the 2017 SuperDraft. A two-time Best XI selection, Robinson brings over 120 games of experience and an MLS Cup pedigree to the Cincinnati backline.

Other notable free agency signings include **Corey Baird** (FC Cincinnati), **Omír Fernández** (Colorado Rapids), **Julian Gressel** (Inter Miami CF), **Josef Martínez** (CF Montréal), and **Dax McCarty** (Atlanta United).

Lipscomb's Tyrese Spicer Selected No. 1 Overall in MLS SuperDraft 2024 Presented by adidas

With the first overall selection in MLS SuperDraft 2024 presented by adidas, Toronto FC selected Lipscomb University midfielder **Tyrese Spicer**. A native of Trinidad and Tobago, Spicer was a standout at Lipscomb, scoring 29 times and adding 18 assists in his 57-game collegiate career.

In 2023, Spicer was named a United Soccer Coaches First-Team All-American after he led the ASUN Conference with 14 goals in 16 appearances, including a remarkable 10-game scoring streak. The attacker also earned MAC Hermann Trophy semifinalist honors for his performances this season.

Nicolás Lodeiro
Orlando City SC





Héctor Herrera,
Houston Dynamo FC

TEN MLS TEAMS ENTER 2024 CONCACAF CHAMPIONS CUP WITH EYES ON FIFA CLUB WORLD CUP

Beginning in February, 10 MLS clubs will embark on their quest to earn a berth in the world's greatest club competition – the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup. To do so, they will need to capture the **Concacaf Champions Cup**, the culmination of a 27-club, international tournament featuring the best of the Concacaf region.

Eight MLS clubs – **FC Cincinnati**, **Houston Dynamo FC**, **Nashville SC**, **New England Revolution**, **Orlando City SC**, **Philadelphia Union**, **St. Louis CITY SC**, and **Vancouver Whitecaps FC** – will kick off their Concacaf Champions Cup runs in Round One. After home and away play throughout February, the aggregate score winner from each Round One matchup advances to the Round of 16.

The **Columbus Crew**, as winners of 2023 MLS Cup presented by Audi, and **Inter Miami CF**, as champions of Leagues Cup 2023, each advance directly to the Round of 16, which will begin in early March.

The single-leg final of the 2024 Concacaf Champions Cup will be played on Sunday, June 2 and the winner will receive a berth in the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup, \$5M in financial distributions, and regional bragging rights. **Seattle Sounders FC**, winners of the 2022 Concacaf Champions League, have already secured a berth in the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup.

Below are the MLS teams who have qualified for the 2024 Concacaf Champions Cup and their method of qualification:

Team	Qualification Method
FC Cincinnati	2023 MLS Supporters' Shield winner
Columbus Crew	2023 MLS Cup winner
Houston Dynamo FC	2023 Lamar Hunt U.S. Open Cup winner
Inter Miami CF	Leagues Cup 2023 winner
Nashville SC	Leagues Cup 2023 runner-up
New England Revolution	Next best in 2023 MLS Supporters' Shield standings not otherwise qualified
Orlando City SC	Next best in 2023 MLS Supporters' Shield standings not otherwise qualified
Philadelphia Union	Leagues Cup 2023 third place
St. Louis CITY SC	2023 MLS Western Conference winner
Vancouver Whitecaps FC	2023 Canadian Championship winner



THE WORLD'S GAME IS HERE

In the lead up to the **2026 FIFA World Cup**, all eyes will be on North America as the continent takes center stage in the world of soccer.

Beginning in early February, a familiar tournament restamps a past name on a new iteration of itself for its 59th edition – the **Concacaf Champions Cup** (CCC). With an expanded field of participants (from 16 to 27), a record 10 MLS teams will participate in the 2024 edition of the Concacaf Champions Cup with a berth in the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup on the line. The CCC final will be played on June 2.

For the first time since 2016, **Copa América** will return to U.S. soil, as CONMEBOL and Concacaf come together with the South American confederation's 10 member nations again joined by six qualifiers from North America. Action will take place at MLS stadiums in Atlanta, Austin, Charlotte, Kansas City, and Orlando, among other venues, and the champion will be crowned at Miami's Hard Rock Stadium on July 14. The United States Men's National Team has already qualified by virtue of their Concacaf Nations League quarterfinals victory over Trinidad and Tobago in November. Canada will look to join the USMNT by earning one of the remaining two positions in the tournament on March 23 in Frisco, Texas.

The marquee events continue into 2025, as the United States plays host to the 32-team **FIFA Club World Cup**, which will be played every four years. Concacaf will qualify four teams for the event, including each of the Concacaf Champions Cup winners from 2021-24. In the same summer, the biennial **Concacaf Gold Cup** returns to the United States as the USMNT will look to retake the Cup from Mexico, who won in 2023.

All of these competitions set the table for the 2026 FIFA World Cup – hosted by the United States, Canada, and Mexico – and will feature a record field of 48 teams. The world's game will truly be center stage in North America over the next three years.

Thiago Almada,
Atlanta United



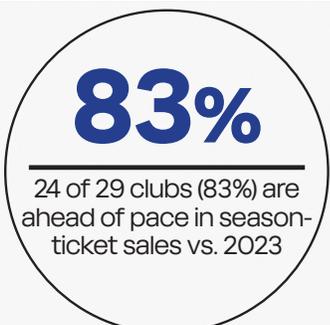
USMNT and Nashville SC defender Walker Zimmerman



MORE RECORDS EXPECTED IN 2024

On the heels of last year's historic season, demand for MLS is at an all-time high and more records are expected to be broken in 2024.

Overall Attendance



Riqui Puig, LA Galaxy

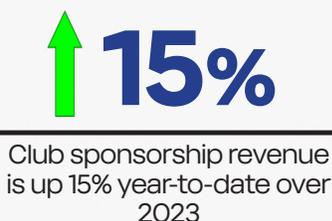


Rose Bowl Rematch: LAFC vs. LA Galaxy at the Rose Bowl on July 4 is expected to eclipse last year's MLS record of 82,110 fans.

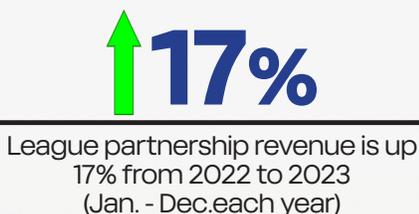
Consumer Products



Club Sponsorship



League Partnership Revenue



\$1B+

With MLS' success on and off the field, the value of MLS clubs rank among the world's best. **Sportico values four MLS clubs (LAFC, Atlanta United, Inter Miami CF, LA Galaxy) at more than \$1 billion each, and ranked 20 MLS teams among the world's 50 most valuable soccer teams, the most of any soccer league in the world.** The English Premier League was second among global soccer leagues with nine clubs in Sportico's ranking. MLS clubs are collectively worth nearly \$20 billion, seven times greater than the collective value of MLS teams 10 years ago.



LEAGUES CUP 2024: WHAT'S NEW IN YEAR TWO

The inaugural edition of **Leagues Cup** in its World Cup-style format in 2023 made for an enthralling month of soccer between **MLS** and **LIGA MX**, culminating in a **Lionel Messi-led Inter Miami CF** lifting the trophy after a back-and-forth victory over Nashville SC in the final.

This year, Leagues Cup 2024 will begin on Friday, July 26 with all 47 first division clubs in Canada, Mexico, and the United States pausing regular season play in MLS and LIGA MX as they battle it out to claim the Leagues Cup title on Sunday, August 25.

The new format for Leagues Cup 2024 consists of 15 groups based on the 2023 MLS Supporters' Shield standings and the LIGA MX clubs' records based on the cumulative 34 matches in the 2023 Apertura and Clausura. Additionally, the four regions from 2023 have been consolidated into two, East and West, for the 2024 tournament. This new format provides competitive balance as it rewards club performance in the regular season when the groups are drawn.

The champion and the three highest-ranked LIGA MX clubs – **Club América**, **CF Monterrey**, **Chivas Guadalajara**, and **Tigres UANL** – will have hosting privileges to mitigate travel. Once assigned a region, América can host through the semifinals, CF Monterrey through the Round of 16, Chivas through the Round of 32, and Tigres during the Group Stage.

This year's Group Stage features electrifying match ups, including reigning champions Inter Miami taking on Apertura runner-up **Tigres** and **Puebla** in East 3 action. West 2 will host the first-ever Cali Classico in Leagues Cup between the **San Jose Earthquakes** and **LA Galaxy** as well as potential reunions for Cade Cowell and Javier 'Chicharito' Hernández with their former MLS clubs when Chivas takes on the Southern California clubs.

Fans in over 100 countries and regions will be able to watch all 77 Leagues Cup matches on MLS Season Pass on the Apple TV app, the subscription service from Apple and Major League Soccer that is available on smart TVs, streaming devices, Apple devices, set-top boxes, game consoles, and the web at tv.apple.com. In addition, TelevisaUnivision, TV Azteca, FOX Sports, TSN, and RDS will be the linear broadcast home for selected group stage matches in the United States and Canada.

Drake Callender,
Inter Miami CF



ADDITION OF TWO INDEPENDENT CLUBS AND RETURN OF PICK-YOUR-OPPONENT PLAYOFFS HIGHLIGHT 2024 MLS NEXT PRO SEASON

MLS NEXT Pro's third season kicks off March 15. Below are a few of the highlights to look forward to in 2024.



Independent Clubs Join as League Continues to Grow

After the 2023 season, three independent clubs were announced to join MLS NEXT Pro, with **Jacksonville Armada FC**, **Chattanooga FC**, and **Connecticut United FC** joining previously announced **Carolina Core FC** and **Cleveland**. Carolina and Chattanooga will begin play in 2024, bringing regional rivalries and excited fan bases to the league. Cleveland, Jacksonville, and Connecticut will take the field in coming years.

Moving Up the Player Pathway

The 2024 season will undoubtedly see more players progress along the professional pathway, earning opportunities in MLS after competing in MLS NEXT Pro. **In the first two seasons of MLS NEXT Pro, more than 400 total players were called up on short-term loans and to date more than 80 MLS NEXT Pro alumni have signed long-term first-team contracts.** Many of these players have already contributed significantly to their clubs, as well as for national teams. Examples of this include **Bernard Kamungo** (FC Dallas), **Benjamin Cremaschi** (Inter Miami CF), **Kyle Hiebert** (St. Louis City SC), **Esmir Bajraktarevic** (New England Revolution), and **Mo Farsi** (Columbus Crew).

The Pathway: For Coaches and Staff Too

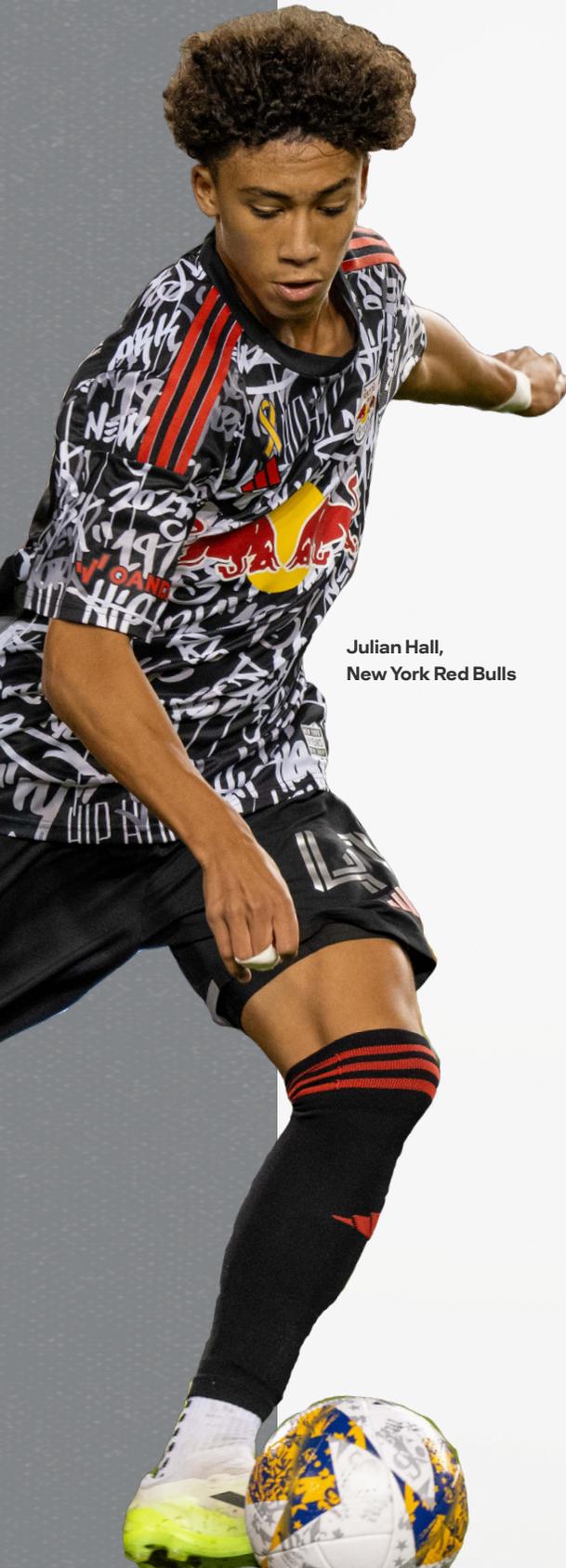
There will be several new faces on the sidelines in 2024 after former MLS NEXT Pro coaches transitioned to MLS first teams during the offseason, proving that the development pathway isn't just for players. After guiding Columbus Crew 2 to back-to-back appearances in MLS NEXT Pro Cup and a victory in the inaugural edition, **Laurent Courtois** became the first MLS NEXT Pro head coach to become a head coach in MLS (CF Montréal). **David Sauvry** (MTL), **Jamison Olave** (RSL), and **Enrique Duran** (LAFC) are among others that recently joined first-team staffs.

Pick-Your-Opponent Playoff Format Returns

MLS NEXT Pro debuted its new "pick-your-opponent" playoff format for the 2023 postseason, which quickly caught the attention of media and fans alike. The unique format led to dramatic non-traditional selections and thrilling upsets in each round, with **Austin FC II** ultimately winning four straight matches on the road against higher-seeded opponents to capture the **2023 MLS NEXT Pro Cup**. The pick-your-opponent playoff format returns in 2024, now with even more teams, more matches and more excitement.

Bernard Kamungo,
FC Dallas





Julian Hall,
New York Red Bulls

MLS NEXT ENTERS FINAL STRETCH OF EXCITING 2023-24 SEASON

MLS NEXT, the premier youth soccer program in North America, heads into the final stretch of the season with exciting events and championships up for grabs. The first opportunity for a trophy will come at the **2024 Generation adidas Cup** in Bradenton, Fla. from March 30 – April 7. One of the most prestigious youth soccer tournaments in the world, every single MLS academy along with elite international clubs will compete to take home the illustrious title in both the U-15 and U-17 age groups.



In 2023, MLS academies swept the Generation adidas Cup for the second consecutive year, as the Philadelphia Union emerged victorious in the U-17 age group, while Austin FC captured the U-15 age group title. The tournament featured representation from a record 12 different countries and that number will only increase at the 2024 edition. The tournament has seen world-class talent emerge from Argentina's Julián Álvarez to FC Dallas' Jesús Ferreira, and more.

The 2023-24 regular season has already featured intense matches and several clubs have their eyes set on clinching a place in the **MLS NEXT Cup Playoffs**, which will be moving to a new location this summer – Nashville (June 15-23). An entire season comes down to the hotly contested playoffs, which features the most talented players in MLS NEXT. Last season, players like Aidan Stokes and Julian Hall (New York Red Bulls), Peyton Miller (New England Revolution), and Tyson Pearce (St. Louis CITY SC) all earned professional contracts after successful postseasons.

In addition to regular-season performance, MLS NEXT clubs can qualify for the postseason through **MLS NEXT Flex**, an event held from May 10-14 in Maryland. Clubs are drawn into groups of four, and if they top the group, they will punch their ticket to the **MLS NEXT Cup Playoffs**.

Between the Generation adidas Cup, U-20 and U-17 FIFA World Cups, and in MLS action, players from MLS NEXT academies are making big waves annually. The stars of tomorrow reside in NEXT and will be chasing trophies as they finish the 2023-24 season.



MLS LAUNCHES MLS GO TO INCREASE SOCCER PARTICIPATION AND ACCESS IN COMMUNITIES ACROSS NORTH AMERICA

Last year, MLS and RCX Sports launched **MLS GO**, a recreational soccer program designed to increase participation and access for boys and girls outside of the existing soccer ecosystem.



MLS GO engages with community organizations and local recreation programs to provide boys and girls, ages 4 to 14 with a fun, affordable, local soccer experience. Participants compete wearing MLS branded uniforms, inspiring a new generation of players.

The inaugural program debuted in cities across the U.S. including the home markets of 14 MLS Clubs. Additional cities outside of those with MLS clubs will also be introduced to the MLS ecosystem through the initiative. MLS GO programs in Seattle and Houston are scheduled to kick off play in the spring of 2024.

Additionally, MLS, has curated an educational curriculum that will be introduced this year for MLS GO coaches and participants to enhance their overall playing experience and elevate their soccer skills and knowledge and provide tools for players to improve their skills in the sport. The digital curriculum experience will live on the MLS GO website and be distributed through a partnership with leading youth sports app TeamSnap.

Ahead of the 2026 World Cup, MLS GO will aid in deeper engagement and exposure to soccer for existing fans while creating new fans of MLS and the global game.

Those interested in learning more about MLS GO should visit www.MLSGO.com.



MLS GO players in Los Angeles Football Club (black) and FC Cincinnati (orange) MLS GO jerseys



MLS INTRODUCES NEW ON-FIELD RULES IN 2024

Several competition initiatives which prioritize player health and safety, fan enjoyment, and advancing the game while upholding the integrity of the competition, will be introduced in the 2024 season.

Off-Field Treatment Rule (OTR)

The Off-Field Treatment Rule allows medical professionals time to assess and treat players off the field of play in a less pressurized environment.

If a player with a suspected injury remains on the ground for more than 15 seconds, the referee will pause play and wave the medical crew onto the field to evaluate the player. After initial medical attention, when safe, the player will be removed from the field and remain off the field for a minimum of two minutes, while play commences, for further assessment and treatment. If a player refuses medical care, the referee may allow play to restart. Exceptions to OTR include instances of potential head injury, goalkeeper injuries, serious medical events, and fouls resulting in yellow or red cards.

First implemented in MLS NEXT Pro midway through the 2022 season and continued through the entirety of the 2023 season, OTR has allowed medical staffs time to treat players, while also allowing match play to resume in a timely manner.

Timed Substitution Rule

The Timed Substitution Rule requires that a player being substituted out of a match exit the field of play within 10 seconds. Failure to exit from any point on the field within the 10 seconds will cause the incoming player to wait for a 60-second holding period, before entering the match at the next stoppage. During the holding period and prior to the substitute player entering, the team will play down a player. Enacted in MLS NEXT Pro during the 2023 season, 99.7% of the more than 3,200 substitutions were completed in 10 seconds or less.

Exceptions to this rule include goalkeeper substitutions, injuries and/or medical staff entering the field, special situations that have been pre-approved by the league office, safety/security reasons.

Return To Play Equity

Opposing players who simultaneously incur head injuries requiring off-field treatment will return to the game at the same time, once both medical evaluations have been completed and the players are cleared to return to play.

In-Stadium VAR Announcements

The International Football Association Board (IFAB) approved the announcement of Video Assistant Referee (VAR) decisions by the referee to fans in-stadium and viewers at home, beginning with the 2024 season.

Stoppage Time Clock

Scoreboard, video boards, and/or stadium clocks will run until the completion of each half, including any additional time at the end of either the first or second half (ex: 95:04).



2024 PRO/Competition Points of Emphasis
Deliberate Delay of a Restart
Stopping a Promising Attack (SPA)
Persistent Offenses
Dissent



John Tolkin,
New York Red Bulls

MLS SEASON PASS ON APPLE TV

MLS Season Pass on Apple TV is transforming the fan experience. Available in more than 100 countries and regions and offering the most expansive and accessible programming lineup ever, MLS Season Pass is the first global streaming service to offer every match across a major league in one dedicated destination.

Everything involved in the MLS and Apple partnership is focused on super serving our global and diverse fanbase. Apple is the best in the world at innovating and creating world class experiences, and MLS fans are experiencing that now with MLS Season Pass.

With an MLS Season Pass subscription, fans have access to every MLS game with no blackouts, in-depth coverage and analysis, an array of exclusive content, and more. MLS Season Pass features every live MLS regular-season match, the entire Audi MLS Cup Playoffs, Leagues Cup, MLS All-Star, Campeones Cup, and select MLS NEXT and MLS NEXT Pro matches and tournaments all in one place.

Subscribers get exclusive on-demand content and the most expansive and accessible programming lineup ever, including **MLS Countdown and MLS Wrap-Up** in English, and **MLS La Previa and MLS El Resumen** in Spanish. New for the 2024 season, **MLS 360** — the popular live whip-around show providing live look-ins from every match alongside expert analysis and discussion — will now also be available in Spanish for the first time, hosted by returning MLS Season Pass broadcaster **Tony Cherchi**, a veteran multilingual commentator and analyst. Cherchi will be joined by former professional player **Miguel Gallardo** and **Giovanni Savarese**, also a former player as well as an MLS Cup finalist head coach. New additions to the Spanish-language MLS La Previa and MLS El Resumen studio shows include **Antonella Gonzalez** taking on a new role from her previous sideline reporter position.

Fans have the ability to join matches live or watch the entire match from the start anytime on demand, with condensed match recaps available for all games. With the Multiview feature, fans can enjoy up to four simultaneous matches at once on Apple TV 4K devices and on iPad.

Fans can select their favorite club on MLS Season Pass for a more personalized experience. Once a fan selects a favorite club, their matches will automatically appear in the Up Next watchlist on the Apple TV app, so they'll never miss a moment. Fans can also opt in to receive a notification on iPhone and iPad whenever their match is about to start. Each club page will offer fans a single destination to explore everything there is to watch on their club, including live matches, match previews, interviews and replays, and more. Fans will also find a schedule of all matches for their club, and enjoy featured stories and highlights that are updated regularly.



MLS SEASON PASS ON APPLE TV

New in 2024, MLS will team up with the acclaimed and Emmy award-winning production company, Box to Box Films, to develop an unprecedented, all-access docuseries for soccer fans and new audiences. The panoramic docuseries will be available on Apple TV+ and it will spotlight the most compelling storylines, adrenaline-pumping moments and matches, and captivating personalities of the 2024 MLS Season.

Production

To elevate the gameday experience, MLS Season is utilizing the highest quality production in the league's history creating more immersive viewing experiences and strengthening fan engagement.

The incredible 1080P picture quality enables the best views from every angle and new vantage points. Through advanced data integration, compelling commentary is being delivered through live broadcasts and programming to forecast and analyze attacking zones, expected goals, shot charts, etc. MLS has assembled a decorated team that has covered the biggest events in the world. To serve multiple languages and provide expert analysis, the largest collection of on-air talent by a single network or service covering a major sports league.

The broadcast partners with two industry leaders, IMG and NEP, to put together a team that matches the ambition of Apple and MLS to produce a best-in-class production for fans all over the world.

Subscribing to MLS Season Pass

Fans can subscribe to MLS Season Pass on the Apple TV app for \$14.99 per month during the season or \$99 per season, and Apple TV+ subscribers can sign up at a special price of \$12.99 per month or \$79 per season.

A subscription to MLS Season Pass will be included with each full-season ticket account. Through Family Sharing, up to six family members can share the subscription using their own Apple ID and password.

MLS Season Pass is available on billions of devices through the Apple TV app on Apple devices, smart TVs, streaming devices, set-top boxes, and game consoles, as well as on the web at tv.apple.com. To learn more about how to subscribe to MLS Season Pass, visit apple.co/_MLS_.

1. Multiview is supported on iPad (7th generation) or later.
2. My Sports is not available in all countries and regions.
3. Siri availability, features, and commands vary by language and country or region.
4. MLS Season Pass is available on the Apple TV app on iOS 16.2 or later, iPadOS 16.2 or later, Apple TV 4K or Apple TV HD with tvOS 16.2 or later, macOS Ventura 13.1 or later, on eligible smart TVs and streaming devices, or at tv.apple.com. Fans around the world can enjoy MLS Season Pass in English, Spanish, or French where available, including closed captions.

Dénis Bouanga,
LAFC





Roman Bürki,
St. Louis CITY SC

HOME IS WHERE THE SOCCER IS: MLS STADIUMS IN 2024

Major League Soccer introduced its 23rd soccer-specific stadium in **Snapdragon Stadium**, which will be home to the league's 30th club, **San Diego FC**, when it kicks off play in 2025.

Snapdragon adds another dot to the map of soccer cathedrals MLS has helped bring into soccer across the United States and Canada over the last 30 years. **Since 2017, 10 brand new soccer-specific stadiums have made their MLS debuts**, including CITYPARK (2022, St. Louis CITY SC), GEODIS Park (2022, Nashville SC), and TQL Stadium (2021, FC Cincinnati).

Lower.com Field, home of reigning MLS Cup champion Columbus Crew, will bring this year's MLS All-Star Game and MLS's annual week-long celebration of soccer back to Columbus for the first time since 2005. Since opening in 2021, Lower.com Field has hosted the 2021 Campeones Cup, the 2022 and 2023 MLS NEXT Pro Cups, and the 2023 MLS Cup.

MLS stadiums will continue to be the premiere host venues for international tournaments in 2024 with Atlanta United's Mercedes-Benz Stadium, Austin FC's Q2 Stadium, Sporting Kansas City's Children's Mercy Park, and Orlando City SC's newly named Inter&Co Stadium set to host at least one game each during the 2024 Copa América.

MLS will also welcome Inter Miami CF's **Miami Freedom Park**, which will provide 58 acres of communal spaces, a tech hub, restaurants and shops, public soccer fields, and a 25,000-capacity stadium, in 2025 and **New York City FC's soccer-specific stadium in Willets Point**, which will be the first-ever fully electric soccer stadium when it finishes construction in 2027.



A rendering of NYCFC's soccer-specific stadium in Willets Point, which is set to finish construction in 2027.



MLS ADVANCE

MLS is proud of its work to create opportunities for development and advancement of all talent. In November 2022, MLS launched **MLS ADVANCE** – a leading initiative in the league’s strategy to increase engagement and representation for individuals from a diversity of backgrounds and experiences in sporting positions across the MLS ecosystem and beyond.

The initiative was piloted with the MLS ADVANCE Program, an annual professional development and networking series for coaching and sporting/technical candidates who are ready to join or lead an MLS, MLS NEXT, or MLS NEXT Pro club. **The program has already had a tangible impact, with 66 percent of candidates participating in the inaugural pilot MLS ADVANCE cohort having received job offers in sporting positions.** Among others, they include Pa-Modou Ka, who was named assistant coach of the first team at Charlotte FC, and Leslie Fitzpatrick, who was named Head of Talent Identification and Player Recruitment for the New York Red Bulls.

The program is currently in year two with a new cohort of candidates.



(From L to R): Sola Winley (Executive Vice President, Chief Engagement & Inclusion Officer), Christina LaBrie (Vice President, Player Relations), Ali Curtis (Senior Vice President of Competition & Operations for MLS NEXT Pro), Dimitrios Efstathiou, Atlanta United (Vice President of Soccer Operations & Strategy)



MLS ADVANCE candidate Leslie “Tiger” Fitzpatrick during a mock interview with Christina King from NYCFC at the MLS ADVANCE workshop in Miami, FL (Dec. 2022)



MLS ADVANCE cohort group picture in Phoenix, AZ, during an MLS NEXT Fest visit (Dec. 2023)



MLS ADVANCE cohort in Phoenix, AZ, at a guided MLS NEXT Fest visit with MLS NEXT General Manager Justin Bokmeyer (Dec. 2023)





KEY 2024 DATES

Below is a look at some key dates in the MLS and international soccer landscape for the 2024 calendar year.

EVENT	DATES
Concacaf Champions Cup	February 6 - June 2
MLS is Back	February 21 - 25
FIFA International Window	March 18 - 26
Lamar Hunt U.S. Open Cup	March 19 - Sept. 25
Canadian Championship	Beginning April 2024
MLS Rivalry Week	May 11 - 18
FIFA International Window	June 3 - 11
UEFA Euro 2024	June 14 - July 14
Copa América	June 20 - July 14
2024 Summer Olympics	July 24 - August 10
MLS All-Star Game presented by Target	July 24
Leagues Cup	July 26 - August 25
FIFA International Window	September 2 - 10
FIFA International Window	October 7 - 15
MLS Decision Day	October 19
FIFA International Window	November 11 - 19
MLS Cup Presented by Audi	December 7

Cristian Espinoza,
San Jose Earthquakes



Vancouver Whitecaps FC standouts Brian White (left) and Ryan Gauld (right)



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