

Pro Soccer

Nashville wins expansion bid, becomes MLS' 24th franchise

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Major League Soccer is continuing its expansion into the southeast, awarding Nashville the first of its newest expansion franchises as MLS' 24th team.

Commissioner Don Garber made the announcement Wednesday at a news conference with Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam, Nashville Mayor Megan Barry and John R. Ingram, head of the group now bringing an MLS team to Nashville.

"Nashville is a rising city with a passionate soccer fan base, a dedicated ownership group and civic leaders that truly believe in this sport," Garber said in a statement. "Nashville continues its ascent as one of America's most dynamic communities, with its incredible energy and creativity. For us, that makes it a perfect place for MLS expansion."

Nashville and Sacramento, California, had been viewed as the favorites for the league's newest teams, with Cincinnati and Detroit



AP Photo/Mark Humphrey
Major League Soccer commissioner Don Garber, left, presents a scarf to John Ingram, chairman of Ingram Industries Inc., as Garber announces that Nashville, Tenn. has been awarded a Major League Soccer franchise Wednesday in Nashville, Tenn. Ingram is the head of the group seeking to bring the team to Nashville.

the other finalists. A decision on the second area picked is expected within a few weeks. Atlanta United joined Minnesota United this year as MLS' latest expansion teams.

Nashville Soccer Holdings, LLC includes Ingram, chairman of Ingram Industries Inc., and the Wilf family, owner of the NFL's Minnesota Vikings. Ingram said it was a landmark day both for Nashville and the area's loyal

soccer fans who made a strong case for why the league needs to be in Music City.

"We will have a team that everyone can be proud of, and we will take a leadership role in enhancing the growth of the sport in a region that already has a passionate soccer culture," Ingram said. "Nashville is going to be a very worthy addition to MLS."

The Metro Nashville City Council on Nov. 7 approved \$225 million in revenue bonds to construct a 27,500-seat soccer stadium and an additional \$50 million in bonds for renovations and improvements around the site at the current fairgrounds.

This announcement brings another league into Tennessee. Nashville has an NFL franchise in the Tennessee Titans, which arrived from Houston in 1997. The Predators began play in 1998 as an NHL expansion franchise and lost to Pittsburgh in this year's Stanley Cup Final.

Music City has been hosting soccer at the Titans' Nissan Stadium in recent years and impressed Garber this summer when the U.S. played Panama in its CONCACAF Gold Cup opener. The July 8 game drew 42,622 fans to Nissan Stadium, and 56,232 attended a preseason exhibition on July 29 between Manchester City and Tottenham. A U.S. women's national team match against France in March 2016 was attended by 25,363.

Nashville's stadium proposal also includes private development of 10 acres around the stadium and renovation of the fairgrounds. The stadium could open by March 2021 with bonds approved on the condition Nashville receive an expansion franchise from MLS.

Chancellor Ellen Hobbs Lyle on Monday dismissed a lawsuit filed in Tennessee Chancery Court's 20th Judicial District by a group called Save Our Fairgrounds and 11 individuals. They were attempting to obtain court orders blocking a stadium to preserve the site for the state fair, auto racing and regular flea markets.

Men's College Basketball

Gonzaga gets big boost from younger players

By NICHOLAS K. GERANIOS
Associated Press

SPOKANE, Wash. — When No. 12 Gonzaga lost four key players from a team that finished as the national runner up last season, many wondered if the Bulldogs would play up to their usual standard this year.

Wonder no more. Three freshmen and two sophomores have helped the Zags (10-2) pick up right where they left off.

Corey Kispert became the first true freshman to start his first Gonzaga game since Elias Harris in 2009. Redshirt freshmen Zach Norvell Jr. is a scoring machine, while freshman Jacob Larsen is contributing in the post. Sophomores Killian Tillie and Rui Hachimura are also bringing solid production in the front court.

"We're a lot better than I thought we were, initially," junior guard Josh Perkins said. "We haven't peaked yet."

Kispert played well in starting the first seven games but hurt his ankle against Incarnate Word and has been slowed the past few games. Norvell replaced him in the starting lineup and is scoring nearly 18 points per game over his past six games.

"He's a young guy who is getting more confident and more comfortable," Perkins said. "It's scary."

Norvell is the first Zags to record 20-point games in his first two starts since Josh Heytvelt in 2006.

"He plays with big, tough Chicago swagger," said Kispert, who expects to be fully recovered by the time conference play begins next week.

Norvell said he is "just



AP Photo/Young Kwak
Gonzaga guard Zach Norvell Jr. (23) shoots against IUPUI during a game on Dec. 18 in Spokane, Wash.

staying confident and sticking with it."

"The guys always having confidence in me is really big," Norvell said. "I keep taking my shots and have confidence they're going in."

Coach Mark Few is seeking more from Norvell.

"I've been looking for growth on the defensive end and growth in shot selection and kind of understanding what's good and what isn't so good," Few said.

Asked if Norvell would remain in the starting five after Kispert is healthy, Few gave a stock answer.

"We'll see how it all plays out," Few said. "I never have been really concerned with starting. I know my kids are, other people are. It's not that big

a deal to me."

Among the other young Zags, Tillie is averaging nearly 12 points and 6.5 rebounds per game. Hachimura, who is from Japan, is averaging almost 10 per game. Larsen, a 6-foot-11 center, scored 10 points and grabbed five rebounds against No. 1 Villanova.

The young Zags are augmented by seniors Silas Melson and Johnathan Williams and Perkins.

"We've got a lot of new faces here," Melson said. "We've handled it well."

Through 12 games, the young Zags have led the team in scoring seven times and in rebounding nine times.

Tillie led them in both categories when he scored

27 points and grabbed 10 rebounds against IUPUI on Monday.

Kispert said the young Zags are seeing more playing time because of the early departures after last season of Nigel Williams-Goss and Zack Collins, who helped lead Gonzaga to the national title game, where the Bulldogs fell to North Carolina.

"It was kind of out of necessity that we filled in and stepped in," Kispert said. "We feel like we were ready."

Few noted that young players making big contributions are nothing new for the Zags. Collins was a freshman who came off the bench last season and was still an NBA lottery pick.

"That's the nature of the beast right now in college basketball," Few said. "Guys have got to come in and they've got to be ready."

At Gonzaga, the expectations come even earlier than at other perennial Top 25 programs.

That's because the Bulldogs typically play a brutal non-conference schedule to make up for the fact that the West Coast Conference is lightly regarded.

This season, Gonzaga has already played Ohio State, Florida and Texas in the PK80 Invitational in Portland, Oregon, followed by games against No. 25 Creighton at home, against No. 1 Villanova in New York City and at Washington.

"In those games we are playing against the top of the heap as far as athleticism and talent," Few said. "That's why we schedule those games."

"It's like an early March Madness for us," Perkins added.

BRIEFLY

Wofford stuns No. 5 North Carolina at in Chapel Hill

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. (AP) — Fletcher Magee scored 27 points to help Wofford stun No. 5 North Carolina 79-75 on Wednesday night, snapping the reigning national champion's 23-game home winning streak.

The Terriers (8-4) led the entire second half and by as many as 14 points before holding off UNC's late-game run for a huge road win and their first win over a ranked team in 24 games.

The Tar Heels (10-2) got within a point twice and missed four 3-pointers for the tie in the final 6 minutes. But they never could overtake the Terriers, who played confidently and kept counter-punching every time UNC made a run.

The Terriers closed it out with four straight free throws in the final 15.2 seconds to seal it, then mobbed each other at midcourt as the horn sounded and the Tar Heels headed to the locker room.

Joel Berry II scored 23 points to lead UNC, which suffered its first loss to an unranked team while ranked in the top five since falling to Boston College in January 2009.

BIG PICTURE
UNC: This wasn't the way the Tar Heels wanted to follow a tough weekend road win at No. 21 Tennessee. They were often sloppy with the ball, spent much of the game missing shots and struggling to get consistent defensive stops.

UP NEXT
UNC: The Tar Heels face Ohio State on Saturday in New Orleans for the CBS Sports Classic.

Rays trade 3B Evan Longoria to Giants

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The San Francisco Giants found the offense-producing

third baseman they sought this offseason, acquiring Evan Longoria and cash from the Tampa Bay Rays on Wednesday for outfielder Denard Span, infielder Christian Arroyo and two minor league pitchers.

The 32-year-old Longoria leaves Tampa Bay as the longest-tenured player in franchise history, after spending nearly 10 seasons in a Rays uniform. He is the club's all-time leader with 1,435 games played, 261 home runs and 892 RBIs. Of the 30 postseason games in Rays history, all 30 have featured Longoria starting at third base.

Longoria batted .261 with 20 homers and 86 RBIs last season. He is expected to fill a significant void for San Francisco at third, where the Giants mixed and matched during a surprising last-place season in 2017. Longoria has played at least 156 games in each of the past five seasons. He was the AL Rookie of the Year in 2008 and won three Gold Gloves.

In November 2012, Longoria received a \$136.6 million, 10-year contract with Tampa Bay that added six guaranteed seasons and \$100 million to his previous deal. It includes a team option for 2023 that could make the agreement worth \$144.6 million over 11 years.

The 33-year-old Span has hit .283 with 60 homers and 432 RBIs over 10 years in the majors, but San Francisco was looking for more athleticism and steady defense in the outfield.

Arroyo, a first-round draft pick out of high school in 2013, was one of the Giants' top prospects but didn't play in the majors after June 2 because of a broken left hand. He batted .192 with three homers and 14 RBIs in 34 games. The Giants also are sending right-hander Stephen Woods and left-hander Matt Krook to the Rays.

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