
Leagues & Governing Bodies

Published January 12, 2007

Beckham In America: Signing Spurs Reax Across The Globe

After the signing of David Beckham, ESPNSOCCERNET.com's Steve Davis wrote under the header, "Beckham Signing Legitimizes MLS On The World Scene." The signing "will generate large-type headlines throughout the world. And it will expose the league to people and places that otherwise wouldn't know [MLS]" (*ESPNSOCCERNET.com*, 1/11). *SI*'s Grant Wahl wrote Beckham "gives MLS a credibility that it has never had with the American sports fan, who demands to see the world's biggest stars in the sports it cares about." There will be Galaxy jerseys with Beckham's name "in every corner of the world" (*SI.com*, 1/11). In Toronto, Stephen Brunt: "This is a necessary next step in [MLS]' evolution, and for the millions of casual soccer fans in North America ... this will be their first reason to give it a serious look" (*Toronto GLOBE & MAIL*, 1/12). IMG Consulting Senior VP David Abrutyn said Beckham "will bring even further legitimacy and credibility to MLS. I suspect that by the time this agreement ends in five years, MLS will have used his play on the field and personality off it to solidify their business model" (*THE DAILY*).



Many Feel Addition Of Beckham Legitimizes MLS In Int'l Soccer World

THE NEXT GREAT ONE? Horrow Sports Ventures CEO Rick Horrow said that it is a "gross understatement" to say the move enhances MLS' credibility internationally." Horrow: "It may be in some ways what Joe Namath did for the AFL, what Wayne Gretzky did for the WHA" (*PALM BEACH POST*, 1/12). L.A. Times columnist Bill Plaschke: "(Beckham) can save the sport in L.A. like Wayne Gretzky did for hockey in L.A." (*Around The Horn*, *ESPN*, 1/11).

CAN SOCCER NOW COMPETE? Beckham, appearing on ABC's "GMA" Friday morning, said of soccer challenging the major sports in America, "I'm not saying that soccer's going to be as big as those other sports, but I think there's a huge improvement to be made and if I can be part of that, then, you know, I want to be" (*ABC*, 1/12). YAHOO SPORTS' Dan Wetzel: "The odds that professional soccer ever goes big-time in the [U.S.] remain long, but not as long as they were before Beckham" (*SPORTS.YAHOO.com*, 1/11). Univ. of Oregon Warsaw Sports Marketing Center Managing Dir Paul Swangard said, "MLS may never become the NFL, but this certainly raises its profile a bit" (*Riverside PRESS-ENTERPRISE*, 1/12). CNBC sports business reporter Darren Rovell: "It could shoot the league past the NHL in terms of relevance. ... The question is, 'Will he be good enough to make the average fan come back again and again?'" (*THE DAILY*).



Former NASL Player Says Signing Just As Big An Addition As Pele In '70s

MAINSTREAM APPEAL: WMG agent Dan Segal, who reps MLS Real Salt Lake F Freddy Adu, said of Beckham's reported \$250M contract, "The fact that it is for a soccer player playing in the U.S. is going to grab a lot of people's attention. And the fact that Beckham has appeal way beyond sports fans — he seems to be in every lifestyle magazine — is going to put this deal and MLS in the news in a way even most American athletes do not" (*London TELEGRAPH*, 1/12). Former NASL player Rodney Marsh, who left Premier League team Manchester City for the Tampa Bay Rowdies in the '70s, said, "This will be as big as when Pele joined the [Cosmos] in the Seventies. ... Stadiums will be sold out wherever Beckham plays. It was the same when I joined Tampa Bay. They had crowds of 14,000, but within three years they were getting 35,000" (*LONDON TIMES*, 1/12). Galaxy coach Frank Yallop said soccer is "going mainstream now. This just fast-tracks it" (*L.A. DAILY NEWS*, 1/12).

WAIT AND SEE: 16W Marketing Senior Dir of Talent Marketing Bob Philp said of the Beckham signing, "The long term question is if the Beckham phenomenon will help grow the game of soccer in the USA." **Strategic President Peter Stern:** "Long term, the league must create a compelling story to follow Beckham and MLS — winning is always a good plot and putting your star in L.A. is the perfect setting" (*THE DAILY*). NBCSPORTS.com's Aaron Feigenbaum: "Whether he'll have any long-term impact on the league's popularity ... rests upon three different factors: MLS' marketing efforts, his play and the level of play league-wide" (*NBCSPORTS.com*, 1/11). FOXSPORTS.com's Jamie Trecker: "MLS must hope that Beckham can exceed [Pele] for a league that still is struggling to break into a very crowded American sports landscape. There is some cause for doubt given Beckham's recent performance on the field" (*FOXSPORTS.com*, 1/11). In London, David Bond: "There are concerns in MLS circles that he could actually set back the development of young American talent" (*BLOGS.TELEGRAPH.co.uk*, 1/11). 11 Sports Marketing's John McCluskey said the signing of Beckham is "a gamble, but the league has been stagnant and this is something that can energize things" (*BOSTON GLOBE*, 1/12).

THE SONG REMAINS THE SAME? In S.F., Bruce Jenkins: "Beckham's arrival will make no difference in America's approach to soccer. ... His play for the [Galaxy] won't create many new fans, if any, in Southern California or anywhere else in the U.S. ... We're too set in our ways, we prefer our own football, and we like sports that employ the use of hands" (*S.F. CHRONICLE*, 1/12). Chicago Sun-Times columnist Jay Mariotti: "Let me speak for mainstream America — we don't care about David Beckham. ... Soccer does not sell in mainstream America" (*"Around The Horn," ESPN*, 1/11). S.F. Chronicle columnist Ray Ratto said Beckham's sponsor adidas will "get the most mileage out of this, not MLS" (*"Jim Rome Is Burning," ESPN*, 1/11). NBC's Jay Leno: "I didn't even know L.A. had a soccer team" (*"The Tonight Show," NBC*, 1/11).

SURVEY SAYS: In an informal poll on SportsBusinessDaily.com, about 62% of respondents said the Beckham signing will cause them to pay closer attention to MLS. Here are the full results: