MLS Expansion Teams and Their Impact on the League



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Throughout its history, the MLS has acquired more and more teams from around the U.S. to build the American Soccer League with 29 different club teams based out of major cities. It wasn't always this way though, as it took almost two decades to acquire 21 new teams from the most populated cities in the U.S.

For the most part, each year the MLS has inducted a new team into the league to grow and expand operations throughout the country. We see throughout this process that the MLS expansion teams and their impact on the league are vital to the league's continuous growth. Now, let's get into the various MLS expansion teams throughout history, including all the teams that were introduced to the MLS and how it affected that year of American-based pro soccer.

The history of MLS expansion teams

Chivas USA & Real Salt Lake City FC - 2005

Due to the United States' performance in the 2002 World Cup, American attendance at soccer games began to rise. The first addition to the original ten teams would be Los Angeles's Chivas USA (now known as LAFC) and Real Salt Lake City. The expansion fee for each team was $7.5 million, so assuming this was the start of a smart practice for the MLS, Real Salt Lake and Chivas USA would make their mark in the league.

Houston Dynamo FC - 2006

Not long after, the already established San Jose Earthquakes were put on a hiatus in 2006, with their team moving locations to Houston, effectively creating an entirely new team known as the Houston Dynamo.

Toronto FC - 2007

By 2005, an expansion deal for $10 million was already in place for its first non-American-based team, Toronto FC. The creation of this club would be the first of three non-American teams (Canada-based) to join the MLS.

San Jose Earthquakes - 2008

Once their two-year hiatus ended, another $20 million deal was signed to reignite the San Jose Earthquakes, showcasing that new teams need a soccer-designated stadium to participate as a new club in the MLS, so scheduling issues with other major sports leagues doesn't happen.

Seattle Sounders - 2009

The expansion fee for including the Seattle Sounders in the MLS was around $20 million, and it was around this time that the potential of making revenue in the MLS started to show.

Philadelphia Union - 2010

The next team to be announced as an expansion to the MLS was the Philadelphia Union, erected in 2008 before experiencing their first season in 2010. Before this, Philadelphia was the largest metro area without a current MLS franchise. It took

a $30 million expansion fee to incorporate this addition, but the Union was virtually the final addition to all Pennsylvania pro sports franchises.

Vancouver Whitecaps FC and Portland Timbers - 2011

The year 2011 was big for the MLS, as two diverse new clubs were being added to the mix with one of them being another Canadian team, and the other being based out of Portland, Oregon. With $35 million expansion fees each, it's clear that not only team budgets were growing rapidly, but interest in the MLS was as well.

CF Montreal - 2012

As the 19th club in the MLS and the third Canadian-based team to join, Montreal Impact, now CF Montreal, was allowed an expansion clause of $40 million in 2012.

New York City FC and Orlando City SC - 2015

Almost three years had passed before the announcement of two new MLS teams joining, effectively leading to a second expansion phase in MLS history. By this time, not only were soccer-designated stadiums being built in both New York City and Orlando, but the rights of teams such as New York City FC were owned by the English Premier League's Manchester City and New York Yankees, giving them a $100 million expansion fee. Orlando City SC, on the other hand, made plans to build a multi-purpose soccer stadium with $70 million given for their expansion fee.

Atlanta United FC and Minnesota United FC - 2017

Another franchise, the Atlanta Falcons, spent $70 million on expansion fees for a new Atlanta United FC club in 2017 and the Minnesota Vikings helped to create Minnesota United FC with approximately $100 million in fees.

Los Angeles FC - 2018

The city of LA was granted another $110 million fee for the inclusion of Los Angeles FC in their new California-located soccer-designated stadium.

FC Cincinnati - 2019

In 2019, Cincinnati was awarded the newest MLS expansion deal, with an expansion fee of $150 million. Expansion fees by the 2020s are now more than 20 times the amount they were at at the start of the expansion phases.

Inter Miami CF and Nashville SC - 2020

Both these teams were confirmed as new MLS inductees back in 2013. David Beckham, the famous player for the LA Galaxy, opted for a $25 million expansion fee to help set up the new Miami-based club as part of the contract he signed with the Galaxy. Nashville, on the other hand, was granted $150 million for expansion fees, leading to their debut season in 2020.

Austin FC - 2021

The MLS announced the inclusion of Austin FC off a $150 million expansion fee, a city that wasn't entirely known in Texas for its sports culture.

Charlotte FC - 2022

As part of a joint operation with the Carolina Panthers, Charlotte FC was given an expansion fee of $325 million, a record high to date.

St. Louis City SC - 2023

St. Louis City SC is the most recent addition to the MLS and was allowed another extremely high expansion fee of $200 million. For the coming years, we expect expansion teams to receive similar fees, as each MLS expansion team has grown considerably in the last couple of decades.