A Demographic Profile of Major League Soccer Metropolitan Communities

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by

Andre S. Howard
Bachelor of Science
George Mason University, 2013
Previously Earned Degree

Director: Jacqueline McDowell, Associate Professor
Sport and Recreation Studies

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Fairfax, VA

DEDICATION

I dedicate this to anyone who needs motivation to get things done. It is hard to make changes for yourself. It is very hard to make changes that will be beneficial to you. So do not worry if you are stuck in a rut. Keep moving and thinking ahead because every day of some improvement, even if it is minimal, is still improvement. Have a group of individuals you can count on for support. Motivate each other and your group will continue to grow and prosper.

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ABSTRACT

A DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF MAJOR LEAGUE SOCCER METROPOLITAN COMMUNITIES

Andre S. Howard, M.S.

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Thesis Director: Dr. Jacqueline McDowell

Major League Soccer is in the midst of a growing movement as a professional Soccer League in North America. With its growth in the sport, Major League Soccer has gone through the process of expanding the league from 10 cities back in the inaugural season of 1996 to 32 teams in North America, with the most recent expansion selection and approval by the league committee happening in late 2019. Using a collective case study approach, this study sought to gain a better understanding of the demographic factors that characterize the metropolitan areas surrounding Major League Soccer (MLS) teams. An understanding of commonalities and differences in characteristics across each site can be used to identify key factors that should be considered when selecting expansion cities.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Major League Soccer is steadily gaining momentum within the North American consumer market. The league was a carryover idea from the success of the United States hosting the 1994 World Cup. At inception in 1996, Major League Soccer initially began with 10 teams; and as of 2020 has 26 teams competing in 24 cities across the United States and Canada (Standings, 2020). According to the Gallup poll article, "Football Still Americans' Favorite Sport to Watch, television viewership of soccer (7%) significantly trails the big three American sports of football (37%), basketball (11%) and baseball (9%) (Norman, 2018). However, an analysis of the different demographic subgroups reveals a significant age effect. For sport fans between 18 and 34-years of age, television viewership of soccer matches are consistent with that of basketball (11%), but trails viewership of football (Norman, 2018). This is an interesting finding with this age group as they represent the highest consumer power in the country (Norman, 2018). In short, soccer is steadily building a strong support base in the United States with the potential to grow and expand as the league does the same. With more viewership and support, cities across the United States and Canada are vying for the opportunity to house a Major League Soccer team.

In its attempts to become more than a secondary attraction to other sporting and entertainment events, domestically and around the world, Major League Soccer must find

a way to reach and retain more fans. Each club in Major League Soccer is competing to be the best in the league every season as well as trying to establish themselves as a prominent fixture in North American sports. Major League Soccer has sought to help increase its reach is by diversifying its organizational level through overall club expansion. As of the beginning of the 2022 regular season in Major League Soccer, there are 28 teams competing to be champion (Conference Standings, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

Major League Soccer has been steadfast in the domestic expansion of its league—with the league capacity now at 28 teams with 25 teams residing in the United States and 3 in Canada. Many of these teams reside in metropolitan areas with other professional sport teams; therefore, the competition between various professional sport teams for fan engagement from similar target markets can intertwine. In targeting similar groups within the metropolitan area, the competition for the same economic dollar and visibility is almost certain. History has provided accounts of teams that left one city population for another because the competition within the city limits have been challenging against well-known team brands that have been immersed in the community for generations. For example, the Brooklyn Dodgers, a Major League Baseball team, had the uphill challenge of competing in New York City against the New York Yankees—a team with a strong and successful franchise and community presence. The proximity to the Yankees posed a difficult obstacle to grow the fan base, which resulted in the team relocating to Los Angeles. Similarly, an MLS team moving to a geographic location with other established professional sport teams may find it challenging to engage fans in an already saturated

entertainment market. A market that will also include non-sport entertainment as further competition.

Not only does Major League Soccer have to compete with other professional sports leagues but they must factor in potential oversaturation of clubs within a metropolitan area or a geographical region. Major League Soccer has successfully become an integral commodity in the Northwestern and Pacific Northwest region of the United States and Canada. The teams in these regions include LA Galaxy (California), Los Angeles Football Club (California), San Jose Earthquake (California), the Portland Timbers (Oregon), Seattle Sounders (Washington), and Vancouver Whitecaps (Canada). These franchises have strong fan engagement within their respective cities and a history of success within the league. Portland and Seattle especially are notorious for their fan bases and community engagement as shown through their consistently high fan attendance for matches during the season (Yoesting, 2017). If Major League Soccer were considering placing a fourth team within these regions, in locations such as Takoma, Washington or Eugene, Oregon, it could pose a market oversaturation of teams that will hinder the new club's performance, even if both cities are fairly populated places in their own right. The expansion franchise could have a difficult time carving out a team community from the three prominent franchises already established in the vicinity.

Purpose of the Study

Research has established that cities with a rich soccer tradition, strong soccer interest, and desirable geographic location for sponsors will be great cities for MLS to expand into (Salazar, 2011). These factors are good predictors for fan engagement, along

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with demographic characteristics within a city that will have a significant impact as well. Hence, using Central Place Theory as a theoretical lens, the primary objective of this study was to gain a better understanding of key demographic characteristics of MLS metropolitan communities. A collective case study of ten current teams and 5 expansion teams was used to identify and determine future city suitability for expansion teams and set benchmark standards that cities should meet if Major League Soccer chooses to expand beyond their 30-club goal in the future.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study seek to discover common demographic metrics within established MLS communities and newly selected expansion cities. An analysis of these common metrics will look for potential patterns for success and growth of the sport of soccer in the United States. Accordingly, the proposed study seeks to answer:

1. Are there key demographic metrics that characterize current Major League Soccer metropolitan communities?

2. Is there a relationship between MLS team statistics and metropolitan area demographic characteristics?

3. How do the metropolitan communities that have established Major League Soccer teams compare to cities that have recently been selected for MLS expansion teams?

Significance of this Study

This study attempts to provide a better understanding into the leadership decision-making process for Major League Soccer as it continues to grow their clubs' brand and the league's national and global awareness. The knowledge obtained from the selection process would be beneficial in determining ideal locations for further expansion within the professional league. By evaluating the characteristics of a location, then comparing them with cities that have successfully obtained professional teams, Major League Soccer can identify locations that will be more likely to increase fan engagement and in turn their national and global presence. Moreover, the findings can be used to identify demographic characteristics that are correlated to club success. This study also highlights metrics, that are not commonly discussed in current literature, that could be unique factors that determine strong city prospects that will have overall greater success in Major League Soccer.

Organization of Thesis

This thesis is organized into 5 chapters. Chapter 1 identifies Major League Soccer's growth strategy as they moved to expand their league to 30 teams and introduces the problem, purpose, and significance of this study. Chapter 2 provides the theoretical framework for this study and a brief history of soccer in the United States and how it still thrives today. Moreover, in this chapter the significance in Major League Soccer's choice to establish a single entity business model is discussed and why the league continues to operate as such. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the selection process Major League Soccer uses in its expansion effort and the theoretical

framework that guides this investigation. Chapter 3 details the collective case study method and team cases used in this investigation. Details of the data collection and analysis process are also discussed. In Chapter 4, the demographic profiles of 10 MLS teams are presented along with analyses exploring relationships between metropolitan community characteristics and team characteristics. Finally, in Chapter 5, a discussion of commonalities and differences emanating from the collective case study are presented along with a comparison of the study's findings to characteristics of expansion teams, Central Place Theory and relevant literature pertaining to Major League Soccer.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The research literature review section will provide a discussion of the history of soccer in the United States with an emphasis on the North American Soccer League and Major League Soccer. After a brief historical review, the discussion will turn to the current state of Major League Soccer in the United States. This chapter highlights the significance of Major League Soccer's choice to establish a single entity business model and provides a brief overview of the selection process Major League Soccer uses in its expansion effort. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of Central Place Theory that was used to guide this investigation.

History of Soccer in the United States

The sport of soccer in the United States has had multiple renditions as the popularity of the sport increased and decreased historically. Multiple professional leagues have folded, and new ones are created to take their place. Major League Soccer was built on the foundation of its predecessor, the North American Soccer League (NASL). This league was, at the time of its existence, seen as soccer's hope to finally gain a foothold in the United States professional league environment. The NASL's importance in the United States Soccer landscape will be explained later in the chapter. Historically in the United States, soccer, like many other sports, began on the collegiate fields. At first between classmates and then it would grow to become intercollegiate events between rival colleges and universities. The earliest known organized soccer club in the United States was The Oneidas of Boston, created in 1862. As the sport gained traction across the

northeastern region of the United States, in 1884 the American Football Association was established to bring a stable presence and merging force to the different metropolitan areas. A decade later, the first two substantial efforts for a professional league were created and named the American Association of Professional Football Clubs (AAPFC) and the American League of Professional Football Clubs (ALPFC) (Allaway, 2015). The ALPFC had a stronger financial backing as the league owners also owned the professional baseball teams in their respective cities. The league was seen as a make weight to provide usage to city stadiums after the conclusion of the baseball season. Low attendance from poor game scheduling, immigration scandals and a significant challenge to the monopoly of the National Baseball League contributed to the demise of the ALPFC in the same year that it began (Allaway, 2015). It was not until 1921 that the "original" American Professional Soccer League (APSL) began in the Northeast of the United States. The APSL or ASL, like many of the other professional sports leagues during this time, was a merger of two smaller leagues. The Southern New England Football League and the National Association Football League combined their richer teams to form a premier division league in the United States. The APSL enjoyed a decade of success until financial setbacks from the Great Depression ended its existence in 1933 (Litterer, 2010).

While regional soccer leagues continued to go through the cycle of development and organization. A promoter by the name of Bill Cox envisioned a league consisting of American and foreign professional teams. This is where the International Soccer League came into existence. The International Soccer League during the 1960s was actually the second attempt in its establishment. The league brought clubs such as Red Star Belgrade,

Bayern Munich and Sporting Lisbon to compete against US clubs. However, the European sides tend to have their reserve players play due to it being the off-season in each of their respective domestic countries (Litterer, 2010). The increase in the level of competition between Americans and International Stars during the leagues six-season lifespan would bring fruition and a model for the foundation of the next big league in the United States, the North American Soccer League.

North American Soccer League

The North American Soccer League began operation in 1968 as a new and exciting league introduced to the United States. This was an opportunity for the sport of soccer to expand into the mainstream sports industry of more English-speaking countries. Two years earlier, the 1966 rendition of the FIFA World Cup saw England come in first place, beating West Germany in the final match. As the popularity of the World Cup lingered in the United States, the North American Soccer League's creation was to build upon this and try to bring soccer into the mainstream sports industry. The North American Soccer League was a merger between two United States professional leagues that began in 1967. The FIFA sanctioned United Soccer Association and the unsanctioned National Professional Soccer League (NASL 1968-1984, 2020).

The North American Soccer League formed in December of 1967 and the inaugural season began in 1968. The league made significant changes in the rules and structure of Soccer that differed from their foreign rivals. From having the game clock countdown to zero instead of the tradition upwards 90-minute clock to the point system of awarding six points for winning, three points for a draw and point per goal scored for

up to an additional three points. These changes gave the chance of winning the league

without having the best record. In the inaugural season, the league consisted of 17 teams

that relied heavily on the talents of South American and European players. The talent of

the league was comparable to that of other leagues around the world. As seen in the

notable victories against a Pele-led Santos team of Brazil and the then English champions

of Manchester City. The North American Soccer League would really gain notoriety in

the seasons to come, especially in the 1971 season when the league added three more

teams.

Montreal Olympique, Toronto Metros and the one that would become the most

famous of all in the North American Soccer League, the New York Cosmos, expanded

into the North American Soccer League in the 1971 season ("NASL 1968-1984, 2020).

The arrival of the Cosmos and their legendary cohort of players in the 1970s brought the

NASL to its peak popularity. The New York Cosmos may not have won every title, but

they were a main attraction at home and away. The Cosmos were one of the top North

American Soccer League clubs at recruiting star players during the 1970. Amongst their

ranks was Franz Beckenbauer of West Germany, Giorgio Chinaglia of Italy, and the

greatest player of all time, Pele of Brazil. This is only a sample of the world-renowned

talents that came to play for Cosmos and other teams in the North American Soccer

League. A lack of centralized control would contribute to the downfall of the league as

financial disparities between individuals club halted operations (MacMillan, 2018, p.

505).

Major League Soccer

Major League Soccer is the most recent installment in the attempt to establish a top division professional soccer league in the United States, coming off the back of the 1994 World Cup hosted by the United States. With record audiences at the time for a soccer match, the United States Soccer Federation wanted to continue with the success in the formation of Major League Soccer in 1996. This was a contingent formality for hosting the World Cup between FIFA and the United States Soccer Federation (MacMillan, 2018, p. 505). It became a grand experiment in the measuring of the level of popularity soccer has in a country whose sporting landscape is dominated by men's basketball (e.g., NBA, NCAA Division I) and football (e.g., NFL, NCAA Division I FBS). The experiment had help from the previous trial and error of soccer leagues that have attempted to establish themselves within the saturated United States sports and entertainment landscape.

Originally starting with 10 teams in its inaugural season in 1996, Major League Soccer grew and expanded across the continental United States and Canada. The league's initial 10-team format increased to 28 as of the 2022 domestic season (See Figure 1). While most teams have had continuous tenure within Major League Soccer, some teams have become inactive and active during the time of Major League Soccer's establishment (See Figure 2). This helps to highlight the growth in popularity of soccer in the United States. Average stadium attendance for games in the MLS (20,183) has risen to a point where it has become comparable to the average attendance of France's top football

division Ligue 1 (20,836) and Italy's top football division Seria A (18,171) but continues

to lag against other international domestic leagues (Major Soccer Leagues 2022).
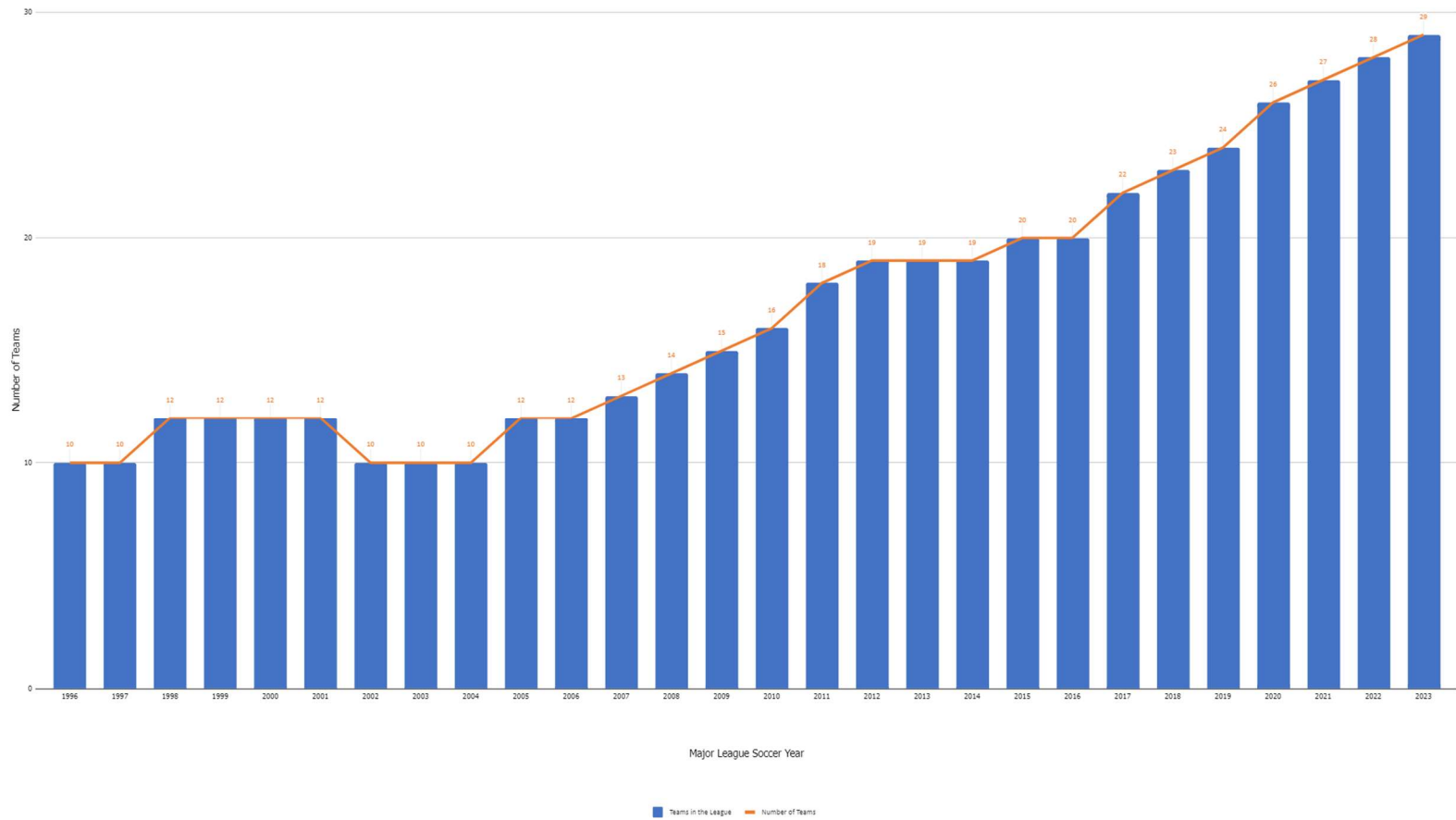
Figure 1. MLS Team Active Status By Year Note. Major League Soccer Wikipedia (Brener, n.d.)

Table 1

MLS Season Active Status by Team

Teams	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Colorado Rapids	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Columbus Crew	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
D.C. United	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Dallas Burn/FC Dallas	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Kansas City Wizards/ Sporting Kansas City	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Los Angeles Galaxy	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
New England Revolution	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
New York MetroStars/ New York Red Bulls	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
San Jose Clash/ Earthquake	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Tampa Bay Mutiny	X	X	X	X	X	X																						
Chicago Fire			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Miami Fusion/Inter Miami			X	X	X	X																			X	X	X	X
Chivas USA										X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X									
Real Salt Lake										X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Houston Dynamo											X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Toronto FC												X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Seattle Sounders														X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Philadelphia Union															X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Vancouver Whitecapes																X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Portland Timbers																X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Montreal Impact/ CF Montreal																	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Orlando City SC																				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
New York City FC																				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Minnesota United																						X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Atlanta United																						X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Los Angeles FC																							X	X	X	X	X	X
FC Cincinnati																								X	X	X	X	X
Nashville SC																									X	X	X	X
Austin FC																										X	X	X
Charlotte FC																											X	X
St. Louis City SC																												X
Sacrament Republic FC																												
X - Active Inactive	10	10	12	12	12	12	10	10	10	12	12	13	14	15	16	18	19	19	19	20	20	22	23	24	26	27	28	29

Note. Major League Soccer Wikipedia (Brener, n.d.)

During the early days of the young league, Major League Soccer had to figure out the direction it was going to take regarding how the league was going to be represented in the national professional sports scene and the global professional football landscape. Though Major League Soccer experimented with the strategy, ultimately it did not want to take on the persona of its predecessor, the North American Soccer League which was seen as a retirement league for former European and other foreign players who were past their prime but looking for a quick payday because of their past accomplishments (Curtis & Peres, 2019). These players rarely lived up to their footballing prestige from the European leagues. Major League Soccer instead took a more mixed approach by recruiting younger players from North, Central and South America while also trying to attract players of more notoriety from the renowned professional leagues in Europe. These known players have issued statements that have been at times supportive and other times discouraging to the overall level of play in Major League Soccer. Former European player, Zlatan Ibrahimovic, speaks on the playing level of Major League Soccer in comparison to the level of domestic leagues over in Europe:

MLS is not the level of Europe, to be honest. Before, I played with players either on my level or close to it. Which makes the game connect easier. ... Here, I am like a Ferrari among Fiats. And it can happen that the Ferrari can become the Fiat, or the Fiat can become the Ferrari. I had the same issue with the national [Swedish] team, though not as much. I said, 'I don't accept it. I don't accept when the ball doesn't arrive, or arrives too late. I want them to come up to my level.' All of this makes me slow down a bit. The game here [in America] could be so

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much faster, so much more tactical, so much more rhythmic (Corsello, 2019,

para. 76).

To continue to grow the standard level of competition within Major League

Soccer, player retention is coming more into focus, especially when it comes to young

talent. There are the likes of Christian Pulisic, Timothy Weah and others of the current

generation of players that are moving over to Europe to pursue more lucrative

professional careers with teams across Europe. These teams are financially able to

provide world-class coaching and facilities, elite talent from all across the globe which to

compete against and wages that are on par with professional wages for players of similar

caliber in other elite sport leagues (Smith, 2021)

Current State of Major League Soccer

Major League Soccer is the latest and so far, most stable attempt to establish a

top-tier professional soccer league in the American sports entertainment industry. While

there have been many renditions that have brought great talents on and off the field of

play, none have had the longevity of Major League Soccer. Through a shrewd Single

Entity business strategy for professional sports organizational structuring, Major League

Soccer has fostered an environment for sustaining growth in market share and awareness.

However, there is a growing sense that Major League Soccer is finally becoming a

permanent fixture alongside the likes of the NFL, NBA, MLB and NHL in the North

American sports entertainment industry.

It has been revealed that the next steps for Major League Soccer's expansion plan is to increase the number of clubs from the original 28 team benchmark set in 2015 to 30 (MLSsoccer staff, 2019). The current number of teams and cities selected is currently at 27 with Cincinnati FC (Cincinnati, Ohio) being the latest club to join their ranks in the top flight division. Joining already announced selections of Inter Miami CF (Miami, Florida), Nashville SC (Nashville, Tennessee) and Austin FC (Austin, Texas). The MLS announced the 28th (Charlotte FC) of North Carolina and 29th (St. Louis FC) of Missouri during the 2019 All-star game held in July.

Single Entity Business Model of Major League Soccer

Major League Soccer, since inception, has been able to function as a Single Entity organization. Every team collectively owns Major League Soccer; each team has a member on the Major League Soccer board of governors (MacMillan, 2018). As a private entity, Major League Soccer works almost exclusively for its shareholders. These shareholders are the Investor/Operators, who are the owner/chairman of each club franchise that make up Major League Soccer. Each investor/operator have distributed some sort of financial investment into Major League Soccer, LLC and they all receive a Share of any profit or loss generated in any given season. Being an LLC or Limited Liability Company has helped the MLS secure financial stability during its infancy while giving it the advantage in retaining higher caliber players from around the world at a more affordable price.

This business model differs from other professional sports leagues in the United States, such as the NFL, NBA, MLB and NHL. The aforementioned leagues operate with

economic autonomy with the teams within their respective associations. Major League Soccer teams do not abide by this organizational operation. This economic autonomy bodes the same in rival Football Associations around the world. Clubs have the freedom to negotiate deals with players and their current employers to whom they are under contract for their services. The clubs negotiate a fee compensation to buy out the player's contract. The club either pre, during or post fee acceptance, negotiates a personal deal.

However, this status has come into contention in the *Fraser v. Major League Soccer* court case in 2002. Fraser was one of the plaintiffs who argued against the Single Entity status of Major League Soccer. The discussion is based upon the interpretation of section one of the Sherman Antitrust Act that states, "every contract, combination or conspiracy that restrains trade is to be declared illegal" (MacMillan, 2018, p. 510). There is a single entity immunity, as an entity cannot conspire with itself and according to the decision brought down by the United States Supreme Court in *Copperweld Corporation v. Independence Tube Corporation 1984* that a formal corporate legal distinction between a parent company and its wholly owned subsidiary are immune to section one of the Sherman Antitrust Act. The Copperweld decision spurred various professional sports leagues to attempt to claim the single entity status when brought up with antitrust litigation. With professional sports leagues being such unique entities where it is a collection of teams or entities that are covered under a single-entity system, it becomes complicated on how to interpret the parent company and wholly owned subsidiaries relationship (MacMillan, 2018).

Using a centralized organizational structure, Major League Soccer was very intuitive when setting up this entity. In part to doing whatever it takes to preserve the organization during its infancy. Major League Soccer has done its best to ensure minimal inflation amongst player salaries and transfer fees between clubs within. With all transactions going through Major League Soccer's front office, the MLS has effectively controlled business operations internally between teams and externally between other actors such as opposition leagues abroad and powerful agents.

Selection Process

The Major League Soccer selection committee uses the criteria below in assessing the viability of success for the locations in consideration of expansion:

1. A committed local ownership group that has a passion for the sport, a deep belief in Major League Soccer and the resources to invest in the infrastructure to build the sport in their respective market.

2. A market that has a history of strong fan support for soccer matches and other sporting events is located in a desirable geographic location and is attractive to corporate sponsors and television partners.

3. A comprehensive stadium plan that ensures that the club will have a proper home for their fans and players while also serving as a destination for the sport in the community.

The cost for expansion clubs does not come cheap, with current fees to enter into the league starting at $150 million USD, for selected teams 25 and 26, with a forecasted fee increase for teams 27 and 28 as the league continues to grow. In addition to the

expansion fees, certain stadium capacity and attendance requirements make sure there is strong or growing demand for soccer in the area market (Sattler et al., 2017, 61). The necessity for a training facility is also a requirement. For cities who have a significant interest or investment to bring top level professional soccer to their locale face a huge uphill battle that can impact the communities. A winning multi-million-dollar submission would bring economic growth in terms of increases in jobs, income, and population in the cities.

Theoretical Framework

Central Place Theory was introduced in 1933 by Walter Christaller. The theory explains the economic relationships of cities with smaller settlements and how cities were geographically located to service the surrounding area with specialty goods and services (Altaweel, 2020). Christaller's theory was developed assuming a range of centralized goods was capable of servicing a minimum of central places, such as hamlets, townships and cities (DuBreck, 2014). Compared to hamlets (neighborhoods) and townships, cities are the centralized place with the most services and goods available to the masses in the surrounding area. Central Place Theory has been used to identify how cities developed and grew in response to more people congregating to these locations to provide and obtain goods and services that are less common in their township or hamlet. A hamlet may be the size of an individual's neighborhood or residential area and is typically smaller than a town or village. This area is limited in services and goods that are only provided in this area. The threshold is the minimum limit of a good or service a business

can reach within a market. Whereas the range looks at the consumer's view as the maximum distance willing to travel for a good or service (Kuby et al., 2013, p. 261).

Cities can have an order function ranging from high to low (Altaweel, 2020). High order central places offer the full range of services seen in medium and low order central places, but they add other more specialized goods and services, such as specialized physicians and a multitude of colleges and universities, that cannot be obtained in the smaller communities. In regard to frequency, low order central place consumers are willing to travel for these goods and services on a regular basis so businesses with low order thresholds do not need a huge market to be profitable.

Researchers have used Central Place Theory to explain the impact of sporting events. Daniels (2007) found that successful sporting events or activities can boost the surrounding economy's destination attractions, resources, and services. Daniels investigated the economic impact of the National Softball Tournament that was located in the Charlotte metropolitan area. The tournament used two primary sites located in the County of York in South Carolina and the County of Mecklenburg in North Carolina. (The city of Charlotte resides in Mecklenburg.) While York County hosted four official tournament sites compared to Mecklenburg County's one official site, the economic impact was greater in Mecklenburg County by nearly double that of York County (Daniels, 2007). Daniels describes this as "reverse false excursionists" (p. 341). Typically, tourists would choose peripheral sites outside of their main destination for lower cost and higher expected capacity of central facilities, giving them the increased benefit while the central facilities bear the costs. In this case, it was the opposite

occurrence. Looking at this through the lens of Central Place Theory, the spectators deemed the greater amount of lodging and dining facilities located in the bigger Mecklenburg area was the more viable option compared to the limited amount in the York area. The distance between the two counties, along with the amount of goods and services provided in Mecklenburg, which houses the city of Charlotte was sufficient for spectators to justify the travel back and forth.

DuBreck (2014) used Central Place Theory to discuss the National Hockey League's performance and attendance based on ice hockey geography. DuBreck mixed multiple theories to discuss whether team performance and fan attendance was correlated to the team's geographical location. Ice hockey is a sport founded in lower temperature climates around the northern hemisphere of the world including Canada, Eastern Europe, Russia, and Northern United States. DuBreck's article concluded that team performance and fan attendance had a significant correlation. However, the location of teams had an impact on fan attendance. Teams located in colder climates had higher fan attendance than teams in warmer climates though the team performance from teams in warmer climates was better (DuBreck, 2014). This is due to the geographical relationship the fan base has towards the sport of ice hockey and the team they support. Using Central Place Theory along with the geographical relationship between fans in colder climates and ice sports ensures that smaller cities can support a professional team when the fandom to the sport is high.

Summary

The United States and the sport of soccer has had a relationship that at times was very fruitful and at other times barren. The many leagues that have tried to establish themselves within the sporting landscape through various forms of entertainment but to limited longevity. Major League Soccer through a savvy business structure and an extensive knowledge of their predecessors helped the organization last as long as it has. These studies provide a guide to how Major League Soccer wants to operate and the strategy for expansion to cover as much market in the United States as they can.

Central Place Theory can be a very helpful tool in understanding the selection of the potential new franchise locations. Sports events are major events that can have significant economic impact in the metropolitan areas where they occur. Cities, having a high order central function with the various goods and services that can be attained, are a preferred choice for these franchises. Lower order central areas can still benefit through being in proximity of the event as consumers look for more affordable options to the goods and services they need or want. For Major League Soccer, the usage of Central Place Theory along with the selection criteria established by the committee for league expansion can provide a combination for the most viable location to consider. The metropolitan areas must meet similar criteria or show a uniqueness to other metropolitan areas where Major League Soccer organizations are already established.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Using Central Place Theory as a theoretical lens, the purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of key demographic characteristics of current MLS metropolitan communities with the intent of identifying key metrics that can be used to identify and determine future cities suitability for expansion teams.

Research Design

To fulfill the purpose of this investigation, a case study of 10 MLS teams—5 in the Western Conference and 5 in the Eastern Conference was conducted. Stake (1995) identified three types of case studies–intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. The intrinsic case study approach is a particular case that one is interested in for the purpose of curiosity. The case can stem from a singular question but does not necessarily lead to other cases or cause one to learn about some general problem. The only interest is in one exclusive case (Stake, 1995). There are times when a research question or something that requires a general understanding by studying a particular case is necessary. Stake identifies this as the instrumental case study approach. Cases involving this scenario do not focus on a singular question of interest rather a more generalized question that can bring about a better understanding of something else (Stake, 1995). The last type of case study Stake conceptualized is the collective case study approach. With this approach a collection of multiple instrumental case studies is analyzed. The collective case study is more concerned with the trends within each case that could be acknowledged as a general understanding of something else (Stake, 1995).

This study is seeking to gain a better understanding of what trends can be found between the MLS franchises in their respective metropolitan areas and other metropolitan areas that may fit the criteria and capacity for a MLS franchise. Therefore, to address the purpose of this investigation, a collective case study was deemed the best approach because an analysis of multiple cases is needed to provide insight into characteristics of MLS metropolitan area opportunities.

Selection of the Cases

Creswell (2013) recommends multiple sources of information be used for case studies to provide a detailed picture of the case. Therefore, to address the purpose of this study and answer the research questions, cluster sampling based primarily on conference affiliation–Eastern and Western–and geographic location was used to identify ten current Major League Soccer teams and five expansion soccer teams. Ten cases, representing 36% of the total organizations within the Major League Soccer organization, were conducted of current MLS metropolitan areas to gain an understanding of commonalities and differences in demographic characteristics across each site. To have equal representation from both conferences, five teams were strategically selected from each conference. Teams were selected based upon proximity to major metropolitan areas around the United States. If two or more teams represented two or more major metropolitan areas in the same state then the team representing the metropolitan area with the greater population was chosen. If certain metropolitan areas had multiple teams that could have been represented, the inaugural year, in relation to other teams, was the deciding factor. This was done to provide a balance between newer and older teams.

Teams also range from all over the United States where each geographical region has at least one representative. See Table 2 for a list of all MLS sites and metropolitan areas explored in this research.

Table 2

Established Major League Soccer Teams

MLS Team	Conference	Metropolitan Area
D.C. United	Eastern	Washington-Arlington-Alexandria-DC-VA-MD-WV-metro-area
New England Revolution	Eastern	Boston-Cambridge-Newton-MA-NH-metro-area
Seattle Sounders	Western	Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue-WA-metro-area
New York Red Bulls	Eastern	New-York-Newark-Jersey-City-NY-NJ-PA-metro-area
Portland Timbers	Western	Portland-Vancouver-Hillsboro, OR-WA metro area
Atlanta United	Eastern	Atlanta-Sandy-Springs-Alpharetta-GA-metro-area
Los Angeles FC	Western	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA metro-area
Houston Dynamo	Western	Houston-the-Woodlands-Sugar-land-TX-metro-area
Sporting Kansas City	Western	Kansas-City-MO-KS-metro-area
FC Cincinnati	Eastern	Cincinnati-OH-KY-IN-metro-area

Data Collection

Given the outreach of professional sport teams beyond their host city, an analysis of the metropolitan statistical area (MSA) surrounding the 15 total teams was deemed to provide a more accurate understanding of the location of each team. Accordingly, data was collected from the Statistical Atlas website (https://statisticalatlas.com/United-States/Overview) for each team's corresponding metropolitan area. As the primary source of data collection, Statistical Atlas provided all of the demographic data for each metropolitan area collected in this study.

Metropolitan Area Demographic Data

The following demographic datasets were collected for each metropolitan area: city population, sex, race, median resident age, median household income, 2019 per capita income, and percentage of residents in poverty, and number of spectator sports, density, and education, marital status. See Table 3 for a description of each demographic variable. In order to provide a better understanding of gender and racial diversity in the area, diversity indexes were calculated. Gender diversity was calculated by subtracting the male population from the total population then dividing this number from the total population. (Total Population - Male Population) / Total Population). The racial diversity was calculated by subtracting the White population from the total population then dividing this number from the total population. (Total Population - White Population) / Total Population).

Table 3

Metropolitan Area Demographic Variable Descriptions

Variables	Description
Population	Total number of people in the given area
# of Profession Sports Team	Total number of professional teams
# of Male Professional Teams	Total number of male professional teams
# of Female Profession Teams	Total number of female professional teams
# of MLS Teams	Total number of MLS teams in the given area
2019 per capita Income	the amount of money earned per person in a given area
Black Pop	Number of Black people in the given area
Hispanic Pop	Number of Hispanic people in the given area
White Pop	Number of White people in the given area
Racial Diversity	The percentage of racial diversity in the given area
Sex - Male	Number of males in the given area
Sex - Female	Number of females in the given area
Gender Diversity	The percentage of sex diversity in the given area
Median Age	Middle age of the people in the given area
Poverty Rate	Percentage of people under the poverty line
Median Household Income	Middle income per household

Number of Housing Units	Total of habitable unit vacant or not
Units Occupied	Total number habitable non vacant units
Density	Compactness of people in the given area
Education Rank*	rank based on educational attainment and quality of education and attainment gap
Single - Male	Number of Single males over 15 in the given area
Single - Female	Number of Single females over 15 in the given area
Married - Male	Number of Married males over 15 in the given area
Married - Female	Number of Married females over 15 in the given area

Notes. The data was collected for each metropolitan area in the area's respective Statistical Atlas webpage profile. To obtain Marital Status and Sex, Statistical Atlas embedded data and tables were used.
*Educational ranking obtained from McCann (2022)

MLS Team Variables

The team variables illustrated in Table 4 represent the data collected for the current MLS teams to analyze success within the metropolitan area. Team data, including winning percentage, year of establishment and length of service, was found on the Major League Soccer's official website for the 2021 season. Statista (https://www.statista.com/) was also a primary data source for a variety of team data including revenue, team values and average secondary ticket price. Social media data including Instagram followers and Combined Social Media followers was also found through statista.com. The winning percentage was calculated by signing a point coefficient for wins, draws and losses. Wins were assigned 3 points per each number in the win column. Draws were assigned 1 point

per each number in the draw column. Finally, losses were assigned 0 points per each number in the loss column. The number of wins and draws times their respective point assignments were added together and then divided by the total number of games times a point assignment of 3 for the maximum number of points that could have been accumulated during the season by winning every game. Multiplied by 1 hundredth provided the winning percentage per for each team. Winning percentage $=((\text{wins}* 3) + (\text{draws}*1))/(((\text{number of games})*3))*.01$.

Table 4

Team Variable Descriptions

Variables	Description
Average Secondary Ticket Price	General cost for a ticket sold indirectly from the Organization
Combined Social Media Follower	Total social media following
Number of Instagram Followers	Total of Instagram following
# of Years in Existence	Years Team has been continuously in Major League Soccer
Revenue (2019)	Revenue Generated as of 2019
Winning Percentage (2021)	Percentage of Win as compared to Draws and Losses
Team Value Ranking (2021)	Valuation of Team's Net Worth
Attendance Ranking (2021)	Number of spectators attending games

Data Analysis

  Descriptive statistics were run for all current and expansion team variables and their corresponding metropolitan area variables. Given the small sample size and non-normal distribution of data, a Kendall tau correlation analysis was conducted to explore relationships between the team variables and the characteristics of the metropolitan area surrounding each MLS team. Finally, given the small sample size, a Mann-Whitney U test and independent -samples median test was conducted to explore differences between the characteristics of current teams' metropolitan areas and expansion team sites.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of key demographic characteristics of current MLS metropolitan communities with the intent of identifying key metrics that can be used to identify and determine future cities suitable for expansion teams. This study specifically sought to (a) identify key demographic metrics that characterize current Major League Soccer metropolitan communities, (b) investigate relationships between MLS team statistics and metropolitan area demographic characteristics, and (c) evaluate how the metropolitan communities that have established Major League Soccer teams compare to cities that have recently been selected for MLS expansion teams. To answer the research questions, the following teams, with their corresponding metropolitan areas, were analyzed: DC United, New England Revolution, New York Red Bulls, Atlanta United, FC Cincinnati, Seattle Sounders, Portland Timbers, Los Angeles FC, Houston Dynamo and Sporting Kansas City.

Team Profiles

A collective case study brings these profiles together to create a picture of city characteristics that may have been considered when determining what cities will host MLS teams. As shown in Table 5, the current teams, in the sample, have been in existence between 3 and 26 years, with a median of 14.5 years. Social Media influence for the combined social handles of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram was between 291.5 thousand and 1.7 million followers with a median of 873.8 thousand. Revenue as of 2019 ranged from 23 million to 78 million with a median of 43 million. Team Value for the

organizations ranged from first to twenty first with a median of ninth. The winning

percentage ranged from 20% to 72% with a median of 49%. A profile of each franchise

and metropolitan area is provided below.

Table 5

Team Variables for Established Major League Soccer Teams

Team Variables	Min	Max	Mean (Average)	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
# of Years in Existence	3	26	15.6	14.5	26	9.81
Combined Social Media Follower	291.49	1714.88	959.591	873.865	-	483.15
Number of Instagram Followers	81.11	429.11	201.14	144.13	-	123.88
Revenue (2019)	23	78	43.78	43	47	15.61
Winning Percentage (2021)	0.20%	0.72%	0.48%	0.49%	-	0.15%
Team Value ranking (2021)	1	21	10.7	9	-	7.48
Attendance Ranking (2021)	1	21	9.1	7	-	7.55
Average Secondary Ticket Price	$34.00	$111.00	$68.20	$60.50	-	$28.85

Eastern Conference

The Eastern Conference of Major League Soccer consists of 14 organizations that spans from Southeastern Canada, south to Florida and then expands western to southwest Ohio. The organizations selected within the Eastern conference represented each major geographical and metropolitan area for data collection. The teams selected for data collected through a strategic process with a couple of random allotments. At least one team represents a major geographical and metropolitan area within the Eastern conference. For metropolitan areas that carried multiple teams only one team was selected to represent that area. The five organizations to represent the Eastern Conference are: DC United (Washington D.C), Atlanta FC (Atlanta, GA), FC Cincinnati (Cincinnati, OH), New England Revolution (Boston, MA) and New York Red Bulls (New York, NY).

DC United. DC United is one of the original clubs of Major League Soccer with its inaugural season occurring in 1996. In the 2021 season, DC United earned 47 points on a record of 14 wins, 15 losses and 5 draws (Conference Standings, 2022). Unfortunately, this record did not qualify them for the Major League Soccer Cup Playoffs. DC United was in the bottom half in stadium attendance with a ranking of 20th in 2021. They had an average secondary ticket price of $50 dollars (USD) (TicketIQ, 2020). Based on Statista rankings, DC United is the 8th most valuable MLS franchise at an estimated evaluation of $630 million dollars (USD) (Lange, 2022b). In 2019, DC United generated $41 million dollars (USD) in revenue (Lange, 2022a). Their social media consists of an estimated 585,410 combined social media followers on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook with 141,350 followers coming from Instagram (Combined

Social Media, 2019). The DC United player development pathway consist of the DC United Academy and Lower Tier Club affiliate Loudon United (D.C. United, 2022). The pre-academy youth system consists of local club affiliates such as Loudon Soccer, Arlington Soccer, Player Progression Academy, Virginia Development Academy and Pipeline Soccer Club (D.C. United, 2022).

DC United represents the Washington DC metropolitan area which consists of the District of Columbia, Northern Virginia, Southern Maryland, and Eastern West Virginia. The area was among one of the host cities for the 1994 Men's World Cup, 1999 Women's World Cup, and 2003 Women's World Cup (VOA, 2009). This area is the ninth largest media market according to Nielsen DMA Rankings of 2021 (2021 Nielsen DMA Rankings, 2022). It has a population estimated at 6,280,697 people making up an estimated 2,251,002 households in the surrounding area. The metropolitan area has a Racial Diversity index measurement of 55% non-White to White population and a Gender diversity index of 51% women to men population. The median age is 37.4 years with median household income of $105,659.00(USD), a 2019 per capita income of $51,437.00 and a poverty rate of 7.60%. The top 5 major industries within the metropolitan area consist of Professional Services, Government, Healthcare, Education and Retail (Statistical Atlas, 2022). The area's population education rate of individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher is at 51.4% which is 3rd out of the 150 most educated cities in the United States (McCann, 2022). The current marriage rate is 49.9% for the population aged 15 and older (Statistical Atlas, 2022). The Washington metropolitan area hosts an array of entertainment avenues for professional sports with 7 professional

teams, 2 of which are female professional teams. One of the female professional teams is the Washington Spirit, who is a representative of the National Women's Soccer League but are not affiliated with DC United (NWSL, 2022). The Washington Metropolitan area has multiple high-ranking intercollegiate soccer programs with the University of Maryland representing the men's side (DI Men's Soccer, 2022) and Georgetown University representing both the men's and women's side (DI Women's Soccer, 2022).

   New England Revolution. New England Revolution are one of the original clubs of Major League Soccer with its inaugural season occurring in 1996. In the 2021 season, New England Revolution earned 73 points on a record of 22 wins, 5 losses and 7 draws (Conference Standings, 2022). This record did qualify them for the Major League Soccer Cup Playoffs making it to the Major League Soccer Cup Conference Semifinals. The New England Revolution were in the top half in stadium attendance with a ranking of 8th in 2021. They had an average secondary ticket price of $34 dollars (USD) (TicketIQ, 2020). Based on Statista rankings, New England Revolution is the 19th most valuable MLS franchise at an estimated evaluation of $480 million dollars (USD) (Lange, 2022b). In 2019, the New England Revolution generated $29 million dollars (USD) in revenue (Lange, 2022a). Their social media consists of an estimated 405,850 combined social media followers on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook with 81,110 followers coming from Instagram (Combined Social Media, 2019). The New England Revolution player development pathway consist of the New England Revolution Academy and Lower Tier Club Affiliate New England Revolution II (New England Revolution, 2022).

The New England Revolution represents the Boston metropolitan area which consists of Boston, Cambridge, Newton, and New Hampshire. The area was among one the host cities for the 1994 Men's World Cup, 1999 Women's World Cup, 2003 Women's World Cup and the 2026 Men's World Cup (Edwards, 2022). This area is the 10th largest media market according to Nielsen DMA Rankings of 2021 (2021 Nielsen DMA Rankings, 2022). It has a population estimated at 4,873,019 people making up an estimated 1,855,763 households in the surrounding area. The metropolitan area has a Racial Diversity index measurement of 31% non-White to White population and a Gender diversity index of 51% women to men population. The median age is 38.8 years with median household income of $94,430.00(USD), a 2019 per capita income of $50,421.00 and a poverty rate of 8.60%. The top 5 major industries within the metropolitan area consist of Healthcare, Education, Professional Services, Retail and Manufacturing (Statistical Atlas, 2022).   The area's population education rate of individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher is at 49.3% which is 6th out of the 150 most educated cities in the United States (McCann, 2022). The current marriage rate is 48.6% for the population aged 15 and older (Statistical Atlas, 2022). The Boston Metropolitan area hosts an array of entertainment avenues for professional sports with 5 professional teams, none of which are female professional teams. The Boston metropolitan area has a high-ranking intercollegiate soccer program with the University of New Hampshire representing the Men's side (DI Men's Soccer, 2022).

New York Red Bulls. New York Red Bulls are one of the original clubs of Major League Soccer with its inaugural season occurring in 1996. In the 2021 season, New

York Red Bulls earned 48 points on a record of 13 wins, 12 losses and 9 draws (Conference Standings, 2022). This record did qualify them for the Major League Soccer Cup Playoffs making it to the Major League Soccer Cup Conference Quarterfinals. The New York Red Bulls were in the bottom half in stadium attendance with a ranking of 17th in 2021. They had an average secondary ticket price of $41 dollars (USD) (TicketIQ, 2020). Based on Statista rankings, New York Red Bulls is the 17th most valuable MLS franchise at an estimated evaluation of $505 million dollars (USD) (Lange, 2022b). In 2019, the New York Red Bulls generated $36 million dollars (USD) in revenue (Lange, 2022a). Their social media consists of an estimated 1,371,130 combined social media followers on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook with 166,160 followers coming from Instagram (Combined Social Media, 2019). The New York Red Bulls player development pathway consist of the New York Red Bulls and Lower Tier Club affiliate New York Red Bulls II (New York Red Bulls, 2022). The pre-academy youth system consists of local club affiliates such as BW Gottschee, Ironbound SC, SALA, TSF Academy and Brooklyn Italians SC (New York Red Bulls, 2022).

The New York Red Bulls represents the New York metropolitan area which consists of New York, Newark, New Jersey, Jersey City, New Jersey, Northern New Jersey, Southern New York, and Northeastern Pennsylvania. The area was among one of the host cities for the 1994 Men's World Cup, 1999 Women's World Cup and the 2026 Men's World Cup (Edwards, 2022). This area is the largest media market according to Nielsen DMA Rankings of 2021 (2021 Nielsen DMA Rankings, 2022). It has a population estimated at 19,216,182 people making up an estimated 7,102,817 households

in the surrounding area. The metropolitan area has a Racial Diversity index measurement of 55% non-White to White population and a Gender diversity index of 51.6% women to men population. The median age is 39.1 years with median household income of $83,160.00 (USD), a 2019 per capita income of $46,241.00 and a poverty rate of 11.60%. The top 5 major industries within the metropolitan area consist of Healthcare, Retail, Education, Professional Services, and Hospitality (Statistical Atlas, 2022). The area's population education rate of individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher is at 41.8% which is 25th out of the 150 most educated cities in the United States (McCann, 2022). The current marriage rate is 48.4% for the population aged 15 and older (Statistical Atlas, 2022). The New York metropolitan area hosts an array of entertainment avenues for professional sports with 13 professional teams, 2 of which are female professional teams. 1 of the female professional teams is NJ/NY Gotham FC, who is a representative of the National Women's Soccer League but are not affiliated with the New York Red Bulls (NWSL, 2022). The New York metropolitan area has multiple high-ranking intercollegiate soccer programs with Hofstra University representing the men's side (DI Men's Soccer, 2022) and Rutgers University representing the women's side (DI Women's Soccer, 2022).

Atlanta United. Atlanta United is one of the newest clubs of Major League Soccer with its inaugural season occurring in 2017. In the 2021 season, Atlanta United earned 51 points on a record of 13 wins, 9 losses and 12 draws (Conference Standings, 2022). This record did qualify them for the Major League Soccer Cup Playoffs making it to the Major League Soccer Cup Eastern Conference Quarterfinals. The Atlanta United

were the top in stadium attendance with a ranking of 1st in 2021. They had an average secondary ticket price of $87 dollars (USD) (TicketIQ, 2020). Based on Statista rankings, Atlanta United is the 2nd most valuable MLS franchise at an estimated evaluation of $845 million dollars (USD) (Lange, 2022b). In 2019, the Atlanta United generated $78 million dollars (USD) in revenue (Lange, 2022a). Their social media consists of an estimated 1,714,880 combined social media followers on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook with 429,110 followers coming from Instagram (Combined Social Media, 2019). The Atlanta United player development pathway consist of the Atlanta United Academy and Lower Tier Club affiliate Atlanta United II (Seven MLS-Affiliated Clubs, 2022).

Atlanta United represents the Atlanta metropolitan area which consists of Atlanta, Sandy Springs, and the Alpharetta Georgia area. The area was among one of the host cities for the 2026 Men's World Cup (Edwards, 2022). This area is the 7th largest media market according to Nielsen DMA Rankings of 2021 (2021 Nielsen DMA Rankings, 2022). It has a population estimated at 6,018,744 people making up an estimated 2,189,294 households in the surrounding area. The metropolitan area has a Racial Diversity index measurement of 54% non-White to White population and a Gender diversity index of 51.6% women to men population. The median age is 36.8 years with median household income of $71,742.00(USD), a 2019 per capita income of $37,331.00 and a poverty rate of 10.50%. The top 5 major industries within the metropolitan area consist of Retail, Healthcare, Professional Services, Education, and Manufacturing (Statistical Atlas, 2022).   The area's population education rate of individuals with a

bachelor's degree or higher is at 39.9% which is 26th out of the 150 Most Educated

Cities in the United States (McCann, 2022). The current marriage rate is 49.8% for the

population aged 15 and older (Statistical Atlas, 2022). The Atlanta metropolitan area

hosts an array of entertainment avenues for professional sports with 5 professional teams,

1 of which are female professional teams. The Atlanta metropolitan area has no high-

ranking intercollegiate soccer programs

      FC Cincinnati. FC Cincinnati is one of the newest clubs of Major League Soccer

with its inaugural season occurring in 2019. In the 2021 season, FC Cincinnati earned 20

points on a record of 4 wins, 22 losses and 8 draws (Conference Standings, 2022). This

record unfortunately did not qualify them for the Major League Soccer Cup Playoffs.

The FC Cincinnati were in the top half in stadium attendance with a ranking of 4th in

2021. They had an average secondary ticket price of $44 dollars (USD) (TicketIQ, 2020).

Based on Statista rankings, FC Cincinnati is the 18th most valuable MLS franchise at an

estimated evaluation of $500 million dollars (USD) (Lange, 2022b). In 2019, FC

Cincinnati was a new club, so the revenue generated data has not been collected. Their

social media consists of an estimated 291,490 combined social media followers on

Twitter, Instagram and Facebook with 93,270 followers coming from Instagram

(Combined Social Media Followers, 2019). The FC Cincinnati player development

pathway consist of the FC Cincinnati Academy and Lower Tier Club affiliate FC

Cincinnati II (FC Cincinnati, 2022). The pre-academy youth system consists of local club

affiliates such as Javanon FC, Georgetown Football Club, Lakota FC, Hoosier FC and

WVFC (FC Cincinnati, 2022).

FC Cincinnati represents the Cincinnati metropolitan area which consists of the Cincinnati, Southwestern Ohio, and Northern Kentucky area. This area is the 36th largest media market according to Nielsen DMA Rankings of 2021 (2021 Nielsen DMA Rankings, 2022). It has a population estimated at 2,219,750 people making up an estimated 878,645 households in the surrounding area. The metropolitan area has a Racial Diversity index measurement of 21% non-White to White population and a Gender diversity index of 50.9% women to men population. The median age is 38 years with median household income of $66,825.00(USD), a 2019 per capita income of $36,878.00 and a poverty rate of 11.30%. The top 5 major industries within the metropolitan area consist of Healthcare, Manufacturing, Retail, Education and Hospitality (Statistical Atlas, 2022). The area's population education rate of individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher is at 35.4% which is 56th out of the 150 most educated cities in the United States (McCann, 2022). The current marriage rate is 49.8% for the population aged 15 and Older (Statistical Atlas, 2022). The Cincinnati metropolitan area hosts an array of entertainment avenues for professional sports with 3 professional teams, none of which are female professional teams. The Cincinnati metropolitan area has a high-ranking intercollegiate soccer program with Xavier University representing the women's side (DI Women's Soccer, 2022).

Western Conference

The Western Conference of Major League Soccer consists of 14 organizations that spans from Southwestern Canada, south to Texas and then expands eastern to southwest Tennessee. The organizations selected within the Western Conference

represented each major geographical and metropolitan area for data collection. The teams selected for data collected through a strategic process with a couple of random allotments. At least one team represents a major geographical and metropolitan area within the Western conference. For metropolitan areas that carried multiple teams, only one team was selected to represent that area. The five organizations to represent the Western Conference are: Seattle Sounders (Seattle, WA), Portland Timbers (Portland, OR), Los Angeles FC (Los Angeles, CA), Houston Dynamo (Houston, TX) and Sporting Kansas City (Kansas City, MO).

Seattle Sounders. Seattle Sounders is a newer club of Major League Soccer with its inaugural season occurring in 2009. In the 2021 season, Seattle Sounders earned 60 points on a record of 17 wins, 8 losses and 9 draws (Conference Standings, 2022). This record did qualify them for the Major League Soccer Cup Playoffs making it to the Major League Soccer Cup Western Conference Quarterfinals. The Seattle Sounders were in the top half in stadium attendance with a ranking of 2nd in 2021. They had an average secondary ticket price of $86 dollars (USD) (TicketIQ, 2020). Based on Statista rankings, Seattle Sounders is the 4th most valuable MLS franchise at an estimated evaluation of $705 million dollars (USD) (Lange, 2022b). In 2019, the Seattle Sounders generated $47 million dollars (USD) in revenue (Lange, 2022a). Their social media consists of an estimated 1,605,560 combined social media followers on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook with 298,980 followers coming from Instagram (Combined Social Media, 2019). The Seattle Sounders player development pathway consist of the Sounders Academy and Lower Tier Club affiliate Tacoma Defiance (Seattle Sounders FC, 2022).

The Seattle Sounders represent the Seattle metropolitan area which consists of Seattle, Tacoma, and Bellevue Washington Area. The area is among one of the host cities for the 2026 Men's World Cup (Edwards, 2022). This area is the 12th largest media market according to Nielsen DMA Rankings of 2021 (2021 Nielsen DMA Rankings, 2022). It has a population estimated at 3,979,845 people making up an estimated 1,541,245 households in the surrounding area. The metropolitan area has a racial diversity index measurement of 38% non-White to White population and a Gender diversity index of 49.9% women to men population. The median age is 37.1 years with median household income of $94,027.00(USD), a 2019 per capita income of $49,184.00 and a poverty rate of 7.80%. The top 5 major industries within the metropolitan area consist of Healthcare, Retail, Manufacturing, Professional Services, and Education (Statistical Atlas, 2022). The area's population education rate of individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher is at 44.1% which is 9th out of the 150 most educated cities in the United States (McCann, 2022). The current marriage rate is 51.5% for the population aged 15 and older (Statistical Atlas, 2022). The Seattle metropolitan area hosts an array of entertainment avenues for professional sports with 6 professional teams, 2 of which are female professional teams. One of the female professional teams is the OL Reign, who is a representative of the National Women's Soccer League and is affiliated with Seattle Sounders (NWSL, 2022). The Seattle metropolitan area has multiple high-ranking intercollegiate soccer programs with the University of Washington representing the men's side (DI Men's Soccer, 2022) and Washington State University representing the women's side (DI Women's Soccer, 2022).

Portland Timbers. Portland Timbers is a newer club of Major League Soccer with its inaugural season occurring in 2011. In the 2021 season, Portland Timbers earned 55 points on a record of 17 wins, 13 losses and 4 draws (Conference Standings,2022). This record did qualify them for the Major League Soccer Cup Playoffs making it to the Major League Soccer Cup Final. The Portland Timbers were in the top half in stadium attendance with a ranking of 3rd in 2021. They had an average secondary ticket price of $110 dollars (USD) (TicketIQ, 2020). Based on Statista rankings, Portland Timbers is the 7th most valuable MLS franchise at an estimated evaluation of $635 million dollars (USD) (Lange, 2022b). In 2019, the Portland Timbers generated $47 million dollars (USD) in revenue (Lange, 2022a). Their social media consists of an estimated 804,570 combined social media followers on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook with 141,340 followers coming from Instagram (Combined Social Media, 2019). The Portland Timbers player development pathway consist of the Portland Timbers Academy and Lower Tier Club affiliate Portland Timbers II (Portland Timbers, 2022). The pre-academy youth system consists of local club affiliates such as Oregon Youth Soccer Association and the Adidas Portland Timbers Alliance Clubs (Portland Timbers, 2022).

The Portland Timbers represent the Portland metropolitan area which consists of Portland, Vancouver-Hillsboro, and the Oregon and Washington Area. The area was among one of the host cities for the 1999 Women's World Cup and the 2003 Women's World Cup (VOA, 2009). This area is the 21st largest media market according to Nielsen DMA Rankings of 2021 (2021 Nielsen DMA Rankings, 2022). It has a population estimated at 2,493,221 people making up an estimated 964,554 households in the

surrounding area. The metropolitan area has a Racial Diversity index measurement of 28% non-White to White population and a Gender diversity index of 50.5% women to men population. The median age is 38.4 years with median household income of $78,439.00(USD), a 2019 per capita income of $40,526.00 and a poverty rate of 9.60%. The top 5 major industries within the metropolitan area consist of Healthcare, Manufacturing, Retail, Professional Services, and Education (Statistical Atlas, 2022). The area's population education rate of individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher is at 40.3% which is 17th out of the 150 most educated cities in the United States (McCann, 2022). The current marriage rate is 50.0% for the population aged 15 and older (Statistical Atlas, 2022). The Portland metropolitan area hosts an array of entertainment avenues for professional sports with 3 professional teams, 1 of which are female professional teams. The 1 female professional team is the Portland Thorns FC, who is a representative of the National Women's Soccer League and is affiliated with the Portland Timbers (NWSL, 2022). The Portland Metropolitan area has one high-ranking intercollegiate soccer program with Oregon State University representing the men's side (DI Men's Soccer, 2022).

Los Angeles FC. Los Angeles FC is one of the newest clubs of Major League Soccer with its inaugural season occurring in 2018. In the 2021 season, Los Angeles FC earned 45 points on a record of 12 wins, 13 losses and 9 draws (Conference Standings, 2022). This record unfortunately did not qualify them for the Major League Soccer Cup Playoffs. The Los Angeles FC were in the top half in stadium attendance with a ranking of 6th in 2021. They had an average secondary ticket price of $111 dollars (USD)

(TicketIQ, 2020). Based on Statista rankings, Los Angeles FC is the most valuable MLS franchise at an estimated evaluation of $860 million dollars (USD) (Lange, 2022b). In 2019, the Los Angeles FC generated $50 million dollars (USD) in revenue (Lange, 2022a). Their social media consists of an estimated 1,069,290 combined social media followers on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook with 385,170 followers coming from Instagram (Combined Social Media, 2019). The Los Angeles FC player development pathway consist of the Los Angeles FC Academy and Lower Tier Club affiliate Los Angeles FC II (Seven MLS-Affiliated Clubs, 2022). The pre-academy youth system consists of local club affiliates such as Real So Cal and West Valley Soccer League (So Cal Youth, 2022).

The Los Angeles FC represents the Los Angeles metropolitan area which consists of Los Angeles, Long Beach, and the Anaheim California area. The area was among one of the host cities for the 1994 Men's World Cup, 1999 Women's World Cup, 2003 Women's World Cup and the 2026 Men's World Cup (Edwards, 2022). This area is the 2nd largest media market according to Nielsen DMA Rankings of 2021 (2021 Nielsen DMA Rankings, 2022). It has a population estimated at 13,214,799 people making up an estimated 4,372,678 households in the surrounding area. The metropolitan area has a Racial Diversity index measurement of 71% non-White to White population and a Gender diversity index of 50.6% women to men population. The median age is 37.4 years with median household income of $77,774.00(USD), a 2019 per capita income of $37,764.00 and a poverty rate of 12.40%. The top 5 major industries within the metropolitan area consist of Healthcare, Manufacturing, Retail, Education and

Professional Services (Statistical Atlas, 2022). The area's population education rate of individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher is at 35.5% which is 89th out of the 150 most educated cities in the United States (McCann, 2022). The current marriage rate is 46.4% for the population aged 15 and older (Statistical Atlas, 2022). The Los Angeles metropolitan area hosts an array of entertainment avenues for professional sports with 12 professional teams, 2 of which are female professional teams. One of the women's professional teams is Angel City FC, who is a representative of the National Women's Soccer League and is affiliated with Los Angeles FC (NWSL, 2022). The Los Angeles metropolitan area has multiple high-ranking intercollegiate soccer programs with the University of California Los Angeles representing both men's (DI Men's Soccer, 2022) and women's side, University of Southern California and Pepperdine University representing the women's side (DI Women's Soccer, 2022).

Houston Dynamo. Houston Dynamo is one of the newer clubs of Major League Soccer with its inaugural season occurring in 2006. In the 2021 season, Houston Dynamo earned 30 points on a record of 6 wins, 16 losses and 12 draws. This record unfortunately did not qualify them for the Major League Soccer Cup Playoffs (Conference Standings, 2022). The Houston Dynamo were in the bottom half in stadium attendance with a ranking of 21st in 2021. They had an average secondary ticket price of $48 dollars (USD) (TicketIQ, 2020). Based on Statista rankings, Houston Dynamo is the 21st most valuable MLS franchise at an estimated evaluation of $425 million dollars (USD) (Lange, 2022b). In 2019, the Houston Dynamo generated $23 million dollars (USD) in revenue (Lange, 2022a). Their social media consists of an estimated 873,520 combined social media

followers on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook with 127,960 followers coming from

Instagram (Combined Social Media, 2019). The Houston Dynamo player development

pathway consist of the Houston Dynamo Academy and Lower Tier Club affiliate

Houston Dynamo 2 (Houston Dynamo FC, 2022). The pre-academy youth system

consists of local club affiliates such as Dynamo Dash Youth Club, Louisiana Dynamo,

Laredo Heat, Coastal Bend Dynamo, Baton Rouge Soccer Club, and Louisiana Fire SC

(Houston Dynamo FC, 2022).

The Houston Dynamo represents the Houston metropolitan area which consists of

Houston, Woodlands, and the Sugar Land Texas area. The area is among one of the host

cities for the 2026 Men's World Cup (Edwards, 2022). This area is the 8th largest media

market according to Nielsen DMA Rankings of 2021 (2021 Nielsen DMA Rankings,

2022). It has a population estimated at 7,066,140 people making up an estimated

2,436,438 households in the surrounding area. The metropolitan area has a Racial

Diversity index measurement of 65% non-White to White population and a Gender

diversity index of 50.5% women to men population. The median age is 34.9 years with

median household income of $69,193.00(USD), a 2019 per capita income of $35,190.00

and a poverty rate of 12.90%. The top 5 major industries within the metropolitan area

consist of Healthcare, Retail, Manufacturing, Construction and Education (Statistical

Atlas, 2022). The area's population education rate of individuals with a bachelor's degree

or higher is at 33.3% which is 88th out of the 150 most educated cities in the United

States (McCann, 2022). The current marriage rate is 51.8% for the population aged 15

and older (Statistical Atlas, 2022). The Houston metropolitan area hosts an array of

entertainment avenues for professional sports with 5 professional teams, 1 of which are female professional teams. The 1 female professional team is the Houston Dash, who is a representative of the National Women's Soccer League and are affiliated with the Houston Dynamo (NWSL, 2022).

  Sporting Kansas City. Sporting Kansas City is one of the original clubs of Major League Soccer with its inaugural season occurring in 1996. In the 2021 season, Sporting Kansas City earned 58 points on a record of 17 wins, 10 losses and 7 draws. This record did qualify them for the Major League Soccer Cup Playoffs making it to the Major League Cup Western Conference Semifinals (Conference Standings, 2022). Sporting Kansas City were in the top half in stadium attendance with a ranking of 9th in 2021. They had an average secondary ticket price of $71 dollars (USD) (TicketIQ, 2020). Based on Statista rankings, Sporting Kansas City is the 10th most valuable MLS franchise at an estimated evaluation of $550 million dollars (USD) (Lange, 2022b). In 2019, Sporting Kansas City generated $43 million dollars (USD) in revenue (Lange, 2022a). Their social media consists of an estimated 874,210 combined social media followers on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook with 146,910 followers coming from Instagram (Combined Social Media, 2019). The Sporting Kansas City player development pathway consist of the Sporting Kansas City Academy with a regional academy system in the surrounding area and Lower Tier Club Affiliate Sporting Kansas City II (Sporting Kansas City, 2022). The pre-academy youth system consists of local club affiliates such as 816 SFC, Kansas City Athletics, Sporting Recreation League, Metro United Soccer Club, and Emerald Soccer Club (Sporting Kansas City, 2022).

Sporting Kansas City represents the Kansas City metropolitan area which consists of Kansas City, Missouri, and Kansas City, Kansas. The area is among one of the host cities for the 2026 Men's World Cup (Edwards, 2022). This area is the 34th largest media market according to Nielsen DMA Rankings of 2021 (2021 Nielsen DMA Rankings, 2022). It has a population estimated at 2,155,068 people making up an estimated 844,310 households in the surrounding area. The metropolitan area has a racial diversity index measurement of 28% non-White to White population and a gender diversity index of 51.1% women to men population. The median age is 37.7 years with median household income of $70,215.00(USD), a 2019 per capita income of $36,358.00 and a poverty rate of 10.30%. The top 5 major industries within the metropolitan area consist of Healthcare, Retail, Manufacturing, Professional Services, and Education (Statistical Atlas, 2022). The area's population education rate of individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher is at 37.7% which is 40th out of the 150 most educated cities in the United States (McCann, 2022). The current marriage rate is 52.0% for the population aged 15 and older (Statistical Atlas, 2022). The Kansas City metropolitan area hosts an array of entertainment avenues for professional sports with 4 professional teams, 1 of which are female professional teams. The female professional team is the Kansas City Current, who is a representative of the National Women's Soccer League and are affiliated with Sporting Kansas City (NWSL, 2022).

Demographic Trends

As highlighted in table 6, the sample MLS teams reside in metropolitan areas with an average population of 6.7 million residents with an average of 2.4 million households.

The per capita income, as of 2019, averaged at $42,133 and the median household income has an average of $81,147 with an average poverty rate of 10.26%. The average median age in the metropolitan areas is 37.5 years. Being major metropolitan areas, the number of professional sports teams ranged from 3 to 13 with an average of 6.4. The racial diversity of the metropolitan areas ranges from 21% to 71% with an average of 45%.

Table 6

Overview of Current Demographics Variables

Variables	Min	Max	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
Population	2,155,068	19,216,182	6,751,747	5,445,882	5,467,152.05
Number of Households	844,310	7,102,817	2,443,675	2,022,529	1,940,379.35
# of Profession Sports Team	3	13	6.4	5.5	3.47
# of Male Professional Teams	2	11	5.1	4	3
# of Female Profession Teams	0	2	1.44	2	0.73
# of MLS Teams	1	2	1.2	1	0.42
2019 per capita Income	$35,190	$51,437	$42,133	$39,145	6,461.41

Black Pop.	69,496	3,016,880	986,872	603,457	971,157.62
Hispanic Pop.	75,803	5,963,061	1,670,255	614,395	2,110,591.80
White Pop.	1,552,217	8,674,519	3,151,409	2,621,882	2,070,779.40
Racial Diversity Index	0.21	0.71	0.45	0.46	0.17
Sex - Male	1,054,905	9,300,265	3,303,458	2,638,440	2,653,438.51
Sex - Female	1,100,163	9,915,917	3,448,288	2,807,442	2,814,302.60
Gender Diversity	0.50	0.52	0.51	0.51	0.01
Median Age	34.9	39.1	37.56	37.55	1.19
Poverty Rate	7.60%	12.90%	10.26%	10.40%	0.02
Median Household Income	$66,825	$105,659	$81,146	$78,107	13,003.90
Number of Housing Units	925,786	7,797,416	2,648,043	2,175,287	2,129,036.31
Units Occupied	844,130	7,102,817	2,443,657	2,022,529	1,940,395.84
Density	297	2,874.50	1,133.64	773.85	933.06
Educational Attainment	50.70	81.78	65.30	65.1	10.97
Single - Male	390,148	3,705,304	1,308,820	1,024,338	1,087,908.60
Single - Female	438,314	4,446,518	1,492,195	1,224,355	1,285,394.61
Married - Male	445,063	3,852,741	1,351,903	1,086,666	1,075,640.03

| Married - Female | 447,278 | 3,804,020 | 1,344,257 | 1,096,228 | 1,060,073.59 |

A review of the descriptive statistics for the metropolitan areas of the MLS teams, explored in this research, reveals a few notable trends. The teams reside in metropolitan areas with similar ages (median: 37.55, mean: 37.56) and gender diversity (mean: .51, median: .51) compared to each area and the average U.S population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). The teams also primarily reside in areas with a similar or lower poverty rate (median: 10.4, mean: 10.26) as the U.S. average (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Findings also suggest that MLS teams reside in metropolitan areas with higher household incomes ($78,106 median, mean: $81,146) and per capita income (median: $39,145, mean: $42,133) than the U.S. average.

This study further sought to further explore relationships between the metropolitan area demographics and team data (research question two). A Kendall's tau b correlation analysis was conducted to explore relationships between the team variables and the characteristics of the metropolitan area surrounding each MLS team. Only one significant relationship was found between the demographic and team variables. A negative correlation was found between the team's winning percentage and the metropolitan area poverty rate (r_t = -.511, p< .05). Teams residing in metropolitan areas with higher poverty rates had lower winning percentages. Although not formally explored, a significant positive correlation was also found between the number of

professional teams and the population ($r_t = .690$, p< .01) and racial diversity ($r_t = .706$, p< .01) in the metropolitan area.

Comparison of MLS Expansion Sites

Table 7 includes six metropolitan areas that are in consideration for the final slots in the current expansion plan for Major League Soccer. Each team has been in discussion for a Major League Soccer franchise. The locations are a mix of teams that would represent either the eastern or western conferences. A comparison of the expansion site metropolitan areas was done to ascertain how the metropolitan communities that have established Major League Soccer teams compare to cities that have recently been selected for MLS expansion teams. This analysis will help identify common characteristics that define ideal MLS team sites.

The sites in Table 7 are in contention for the final slots of the current expansion process because they meet the criteria of the selection process. Each area is seen to have strong soccer fan support, a local ownership that is committed, and a stadium suitable for the home matches. These team sites are Charlotte, Sacramento, St. Louis, Las Vegas, Phoenix and San Diego. Of the 6 expansion sites, 4 are in the West coast region and 1 each are in the Mid-West and Southeast regions. 2 sites reside in the state of California, 1 in Northern California and 1 in Southern California. The metropolitan areas' demographic data was collected via Statistical Atlas to be a consistent source along with the established franchises demographic information.

Table 7

Expansion Teams By Area

Team	Year Announced	Metropolitan Area
Charlotte	2017	Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia-NC-SC-metro-area
Sacramento Republic FC	2013	Sacramento-Roseville-Folsom, CA metro area
St. Louis	2013	St-Louis-MO-IL-metro-area
Las Vegas	2013	Las Vegas-Henderson-Paradise, NV metro area
Phoenix	2013	Phoenix-Mesa-Chandler-AZ-metro-area
San Diego	2013	San Diego-Chula Vista-Carlsbad, CA metro area

To address research question 3, a Mann-Whitney U test and independent -samples median test was conducted to explore differences between the characteristics of current teams' metropolitan areas and expansion team sites. No significant relationships were found. Results of Mann-Whitney U test revealed no statistically significant differences between the means of the metropolitan area demographics between current and expansion sites. Results of an independent-samples median test revealed one statistically significant difference between the medians of the metropolitan area demographics between current and expansion sites. The demographics of the expansion team sites are similar to the current team locations except for educational level.

Although there were no statistically significant differences, a few differences of practical significance were found. Current teams reside in areas with population sizes ranging from 2.1 to 19.2 million people and include some of the largest metropolitan areas in the United States (e.g., Los Angeles and New York City). In comparison, the sample expansion sites have areas with population sizes ranging from 2.2 to 4.9 million people. An analysis of the descriptive data also revealed that the expansion sites are in metropolitan areas with lower per capita income (mean: $36,447.83, median: $36,869.50), lower household incomes (mean: $70,585; median: 67,156.5) and higher poverty rates (mean: 11.13%; median: 11.10%) compared to the metropolitan areas of established teams.

Table 8

Overview of Expansion Demographic Variables

Variables	Min	Max	Mean (Average)	Median	Standard Deviation
Population	2,266,715	4,948,203	3,059,214	2,719,153	1,000,275.71
Number of Households	813,607	1,765,135	1,115,547	1,057,338	346,511.51
# of Profession Sports Team	1	5	2.67	2.5	1.37
# of Male Professional Teams	1	4	2	2	1.1

# of Female Profession Teams	1	1	1	1	0
# of MLS Teams	0	1	0.5	0.5	0.55
2019 per capita Income	$32,511	$40,389	$36,448	36,869.50	2,822.85
Black Pop	156,423	597,299	325,809.67	269,373.50	183,260.41
Hispanic Pop	88,038	1,551,131	715,902.00	618,596.50	547,903.11
White Pop Racial Diversity Index	935,092 0.27	2,696,587 0.59	1,662,767.5 0.46	1,537,683.5 0.47	631,107.72 0.12
Sex - Male	1,130,623	2,458,485	1,509,943.7	-	505,025.00
Sex - Female	1,136,092	2,489,718	1,549,270.3	-	496,151.09
Gender Diversity	0.50	0.52	0.51	0.51	0.01
Median Age	36.4	39.7	37.75	37.7	1.09
Poverty Rate Median	9.70%	12.80%	11.13%	11.10%	0.01
Household Income Number of	$62,107	$83,985	$70,585	67,156.5	8,136.69
Housing Units Units	918,822	1,970,654	1,233,248.7	1,159,024.5	390,216.04
Occupied	813,607	1,765,135	1,115,546.5	1,057,337.5	346,511.51

Density	287.2	792.9	451.85	410.1	182.02
Educational Attainment	41.25	67.13	56.37	58.32	8.53
Single - Male	448,570	998,822	625,602.17	506,357	225,276.08
Single - Female	498,438	1,049,035	655,104.83	589,426	206,117.74
Married - Male	421,285	971,784	611,960.50	552,551.50	198,417.12
Married - Female	425,718	970,856	612,420.83	563,467.50	194,704.47

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

As noted in chapter 4, a comparison of the metropolitan area demographics of each current team revealed the following trends. The metropolitan areas shared similar median ages and gender diversity when compared to the average U.S. population. The metropolitan areas also share lower poverty rates than the U.S. average while having higher than the U.S. average in household income and per capita income. These trends would have played significant factors during the establishment of Major League Soccer. After multiple attempts to establish a professional soccer league in the United States, many issues had to be resolved financially and strategically to create a sustainable business model to grow. Major League Soccer's single business entity model in which the organization is the umbrella for the overall business operation with each franchise acting as a stakeholder. This strategy along with the selection criteria for franchises to be considered for expansion creates the need for areas that have an economic capacity to sustain a Major League Soccer organization. This ties into Daniels's (2007) conclusion on Central Place Theory with regional economic development concepts. The metropolitans' areas with better infrastructure receives their equitable fair of the regional economic prosperity most of time. However, there are times where areas lacking infrastructure can receive a greater economic portion than it should. Central Place Theory is used to provide that a certain economical threshold is needed to support a new franchise. The franchise in turn adds another specialized product in the area. This could have a negative effect on smaller communities has the centralized area grows at the

expense of the surrounding area. This where the high economic threshold within Central Place Theory helps to determine which metropolitan areas can sustain the new franchises.

Only one significant relationship was found between the team variables and the demographic characteristics of the metropolitan area surrounding each MLS team. Teams residing in metropolitan areas with higher poverty rates had lower winning percentages. Given the very small sample size, the probability of a false positive effect exists. As recognized by most researchers, small sample sizes tend to have very limited statistical power for detecting relationships between variables. The non-significant findings could also suggest that other variables, such as psychographic data (e.g., culture, population interests, attitudes, values and activities) may play a more significant role in the decision-making process. Popularity of the sport of soccer has been a roller coaster historically. There has been the audience to establish a professional league in the United States, however that audience has waned multiple times causing the leagues to become defunct. For the United States to be considered to host the World Cup in 1996, a deal was struck to establish a professional league. By using the popularity and exposure of hosting a mega event provided a foundation of attention in the new league. Some franchises have progressed and grown in popularity; whereas others have ceased operations. While performance on the field could have been a factor, fan engagement would be the most significant factor contributing to success. Organizations with strong community fan engagement are financially stable regardless of performance.

A statistically significant relationship was found between the number of professional teams and the population in the metropolitan area. Given the small sample

size, it is possible that there are no statistically significant differences between these variables. However, these results do have practical significance. If MLS decision makers are evaluating different cities to host new teams, an area with a small population size and multiple current professional teams may not be the ideal site for a new team. The possibility of market oversaturation and the capacity for small market cities to support a professional was discussed in previous chapters. This ties back into the demand threshold of Central Place Theory. If the demand threshold is not reached to establish another professional sports team because the market is too saturated then there is a risk of the franchise failing (Altaweel, 2020). Oversaturation of a metropolitan market area was presented in Major League Soccer's discussion of having an additional team in Tacoma, Washington. The North Western region has 3 teams already established with Vancouver, Seattle and Portland. These teams have a history of strong fanbases. To add an additional team to this region, would create an obstacle of carving out an audience within.

Additionally, given that more professional teams are in metropolitan areas that are racially diverse, the racial demographics of the area—especially the Hispanic population—should be taken into consideration when selecting new MLS sites. A national poll conducted by Morning Consult (Level of Interest, 2022) found more Hispanics consider themselves avid and casual fans of MLS soccer (36%) compared to individuals that self-identified as White (23%) and Black (24%). The study also found higher fandom statistics for people residing in urban communities (33%) compared to those in suburban communities (24%) and rural communities (14%).

This study further explored similarities and differences between current teams and expansion sites. The metropolitan areas of current teams had greater averages in populations, median household income, per capita income and a lower average in poverty rate. Central Place Theory discusses how the hub of an area is usually where people can obtain the most goods and services that may not be obtained in smaller areas. The similarities within each metropolitan area reflect this notion. The main difference between the current metropolitan areas and expansion metropolitan areas is the size discrepancy of the population. Major League Soccer placed franchises in the largest market to begin. Once these markets were obtained, it was naturally the next step to go into smaller major metropolitan areas. Smaller in population but they provide all the centralized goods and services as their more populated metropolitan counterparts.

Future Research

This study found that more professional teams are in communities that have more racial diversity. What does this mean for the team? Does it really matter? Future research should look at the effects of racial diversity on team statistics. Is there a certain demographic that Major League Soccer is looking to obtain? With the sport of soccer being hugely popular in Latin America, is it the goal of Major League Soccer to tap into the Latin American market to increase its own awareness? Will they benefit from expanding the Major League Soccer brand into less industrialized countries or countries with a strong affinity for other United States based sports leagues (NBA, MLB, & NFL). Outreach of the market globally would help Major League Soccer compete with other prominent international leagues for fandom and player personnel. Will the growth of the

brand also help domestic players development by providing more funding to better establish and integrate a feeder club system that expands out of the metropolitan areas into the surrounding areas? Creating more lower tiered clubs to provide a consistent pipeline of talent generation leading into the Major League Soccer franchises.

This study looked at the metropolitan area profiles of Major League Soccer franchise to determine viability of the areas. Future research should include similar profiles concentrated toward the teams of the National Women's Soccer League. Women's soccer has maintained a high popularity in the United States. So as the league expands a similar study should be used to determine the next metropolitan areas for potential expansion.

Additionally, given the differences in fandom across urban, suburban and rural communities, Future research should explore soccer fandom and urban, suburban and rural communities. This will gain a better understanding to see if there is a discrepancy or lack of interest or viewership the further or closer you get to urban areas. Is this discrepancy similarly seen in the participation in the sport?

This study found more teams reside in areas with larger populations and suggested that small cities might not be ideal sites for future MLS teams. However, future research should explore the success of teams in small markets. For example, the Green Bay Packers have established a strong fan base in Green Bay, Wisconsin despite residing in the smallest market to host a major professional sports team. A better understanding of how the team thrives in this small market could provide valuable insights for other teams looking at small markets.

Limitations

This study had some limitations with respect to the sampling size and difficulties finding significant correlations among the data sets. With increased or different metropolitan data points, significant correlations could have been obtained. It can be only a speculative limitation at this moment.

Conclusions

To summarize this study, Major League Soccer's expansion to 30 teams is due to the significant growth in popularity of the sport of Soccer as well as the stable business model that has been successful so far. The selection criteria as stated in chapter 2 has provided a baseline for foundational startup success for expansion teams. Central Place Theory as discussed in chapter 3 provides the explanation for why Major League Soccer and other professional organizations choose larger metropolitan areas over smaller areas for economic purposes. The more resources available in one centralized area that cannot be found in the surrounding areas creates the metropolitan hub. This hub created has more general and specialized goods and services that can attained than in smaller areas. However, there is a threshold for all central areas has determined by the population and number of goods available. The larger the population, the higher the threshold. Major League Soccer wants to avoid market oversaturation or no market engagement at all. Afterwards it is the responsibility of the franchise to continue the fan engagement within the community. The metropolitan areas selected by Major League Soccer are the ideal areas with lower poverty rates and higher incomes and racial diversity than the United States national average. These factors provide an economic situation where fans have

more disposable income than other areas while also reaching more fans from different backgrounds. Franchises with strong fan engagement tend to be better performing financially. Racial Diversity and a strong economic situation within a metropolitan area can lead to the success of expansion teams.

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BIOGRAPHY

Andre S. Howard graduated from Bruton High School, Williamsburg, Virginia, in 2009. He received her Bachelor of Science from George Mason University in 2013. He has been employed in the Government Contracting Industry in Fairfax County for 7 years and is receiving his Master of Science in Sport and Recreation Studies from George Mason University in 2022.