

MULTI-USE



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Left: New Jersey MetroStars Stadium.

Frisco Soccer & Entertainment Center.

IMAGE COURTESY: HKS, INC.

STADIA

PanStadia feature-writer, Simon Waterman, reports on the growing trend towards MOS/multi-purpose stadia, particularly in the US.



In the not too distant past, Major League Soccer (MLS) struggled to gain a strong foothold in the sports-saturated American market. The average American sports fan is usually besieged by television coverage, with particular attention being given to four major sports: Baseball, Basketball, Ice Hockey and NFL Football (or grid-iron). Since the 1970s, when soccer originally tried to break into the American market, MLS has taken something of a back seat and has struggled to become accepted as a 'major' sport here ever since.

Three key ingredients are necessary in order to operate a Major League club: a strong fan base, financial investment and, even more crucial in this day and age, an appropriate stadium. Without a fan base in the local community, a stadium is unlikely to be filled to capacity very often, something that Florida found out to its cost when its two local MLS teams struggled during the 1990s. Eventually, both the Tampa Bay Mutiny and the Miami Fusion teams were forced to close down due to poor attendances. Consequently, Florida currently has no representative in MLS.

The stadium facility it occupies is always of major concern to soccer club owners and many MLS clubs are forced to play the leasing game. A classic example is the New Jersey MetroStars, who lease the Meadowlands Stadium from the NFL's New York Giants. The problem is the stadium can hold 80,000 die-hard Giants' fans, but when the MetroStars play soccer, only 18,000 to 20,000 spectators usually file into the stadium, resulting in sparsely filled terraces, which are of course totally devoid of any atmosphere. In addition, scheduling match fixtures creates further problems, as the Giants, like similar NFL teams, have control of the schedule and the stadium for part of the MLS season. Soccer clubs in this invidious position therefore have to take some schedule changes on the chin.

Soccer Propelled to New Heights

However, things are now changing for the better and soccer is increasing in popularity. In the past, clubs found it financially difficult to survive, whilst investors were put off by the concept of throwing money at a sport without much pulling power. Yet, the formation of the MLS has helped matters considerably, ever since its inauguration back in 1996. Now, with both the USA men's and women's international teams enjoying considerable success at the highest levels, the sport has been propelled to new levels with both fans and investors alike.

On top of all this, team owners are still finding new ways of increasing their efficiency, both on and off the field of play. A relatively new concept that is helping immensely is the multi-purpose stadium. Clubs are now finding that building stadiums with capacities of between 20,000 and 30,000 makes good business sense, as well as creating a better atmosphere for the fans and players. Drastically reducing stadium capacities is something that all MLS clubs are currently looking at.

MOS/Multi-Purpose Stadia

Architect, Andrew Leeson, of the Rossetti architectural company, was asked for his views on the development of the MOS/multi-purpose stadium. Rossetti is responsible for not only the new MetroStars and Chicago 'Fire' stadiums, but also for the Home Depot Center in California.

Simon Waterman (SW): From a personal point of view, how do you see the development of multi-purpose stadia in the future — do you see any potential for NFL and baseball teams merging into one multi-purpose stadium?

Andrew Leeson (AL): "The stadium sharing concept isn't new — most of the early sports facilities in the country were considered 'multi-purpose'. Single-purpose

stadiums first started showing up in the 1970s. Certain different activities can be compatible with a specific venue design without compromise and those are what we are working with. Baseball and football were never able to effectively share a facility — both parties had to compromise. Specifically, they are not compatible activities due to the geometry of the playing surface, unless tremendous costs are incurred to make the venue change physical shape."

So, the multi-purpose stadium that can be used for not just soccer, but for various sports and also concerts and other events, has rapidly established itself. However, bringing all this together, under one roof, poses certain other problems and choices for those involved. One of these, arguably the most important, is the choice of the actual playing surface.

Hunt Sports Group

Obviously, multi-sports stadia require multi-sports surfaces, so John Wagner, of the Hunt Sports Group, which owns the new Frisco Soccer & Entertainment Center (FSEC) in Texas, was asked about his views on the new Terraflor™ system that is to be utilised at their stadium.

SW: How will the Terraflor system operate with regard to the soccer ground/concert venue change of usage?

John Wagner: "The purpose of the Terraflor is to protect the grass surface during concerts. The Terraflor system we purchased will be approximately 16,000 ▶



John Wagner, Hunt Sports Group.

Images of the 20,000-seat, multi-purpose, Frisco Soccer & Entertainment Center.

IMAGES COURTESY: HKS, INC.

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“durable polymer tiles (96,000sqft) that will be laid on the grass surface in about twelve hours. We will be able to place up to 10,000 folding chairs on top of the Terraflor surface. It protects the grass, because it has limited touch points on the grass surface. FSEC was designed for speed and efficiency in changing over between events, with the permanent stage in the north end zone. This will allow us to play a soccer game on a Saturday night and have 27,000 people for a concert on a Sunday afternoon! The Terraflor will assist in keeping the natural grass healthy between events.”

The Frisco Soccer & Entertainment Center in Frisco, just north of Dallas, is one of the most exciting multi-purpose stadium construction projects so far undertaken in the USA. It is partially funded by American sports entrepreneur Lamar Hunt.

In this first of a two-part PanStadia feature on multi-purpose stadia, we take a look at two new projects: the Frisco Soccer & Entertainment Center, which will eventually host the newly named FC Dallas MLS team, and the New Jersey MetroStars stadium, which is currently under construction in Harrison County.

In the second part, which will run in the May'05 edition, we will look at the new home being constructed for the Chicago Fire MLS team, MLS Detroit and the Home Depot Center in California, which plays host to the Los Angeles Galaxy MLS team. This latter facility is already complete, has a full Terraflor system, and is living proof that the multi-purpose stadium exists and is alive and well.

Frisco Soccer & Entertainment Center — FC Dallas

This multi-purpose facility was designed by architects HKS Incorporated and features a 20,000-seat stadium, coupled with seventeen regulation-size soccer fields. It is scheduled to open in April this year. It is to be found in Frisco, North Texas, and is located a few hundred yards east of the Dallas North Toll way and Main Street intersection, just to the north of the new Frisco Town Square. Its opening will



undoubtedly prove to be of great significance for the Dallas/Fort Worth area, as well as for the entire sport of soccer.

Incidentally, Frisco Town Square is a mixed-usage development that is also currently under construction. It will consist of commercial, residential, retail and public buildings, including the new Frisco City Hall.

Seventeen regulation-size, tournament-grade, soccer fields are to be situated adjacent to the new stadium. They will be utilised on a year-round basis, making the facility the focal point for youth and adult soccer in North Texas, as well as a future destination for the most prestigious local, regional, national and international competition matches. An estimated 1.4 million spectators and participants are expected to visit the facility annually.

FC Dallas will serve as the primary tenant of the stadium, which will be run by the Hunt Sports Group, the facility having a reported price tag of US\$65million. It is anticipated the venue will host a whole multitude of events every year, some of which may include:

- ◆ FC Dallas soccer
- ◆ High school football
- ◆ Concerts
- ◆ Major international soccer matches
- ◆ USA men's and women's national soccer team matches
- ◆ FIFA World Cup qualifying matches
- ◆ Major League Soccer All-Star Games and MLS Cup
- ◆ Other major professional and amateur tournaments and events

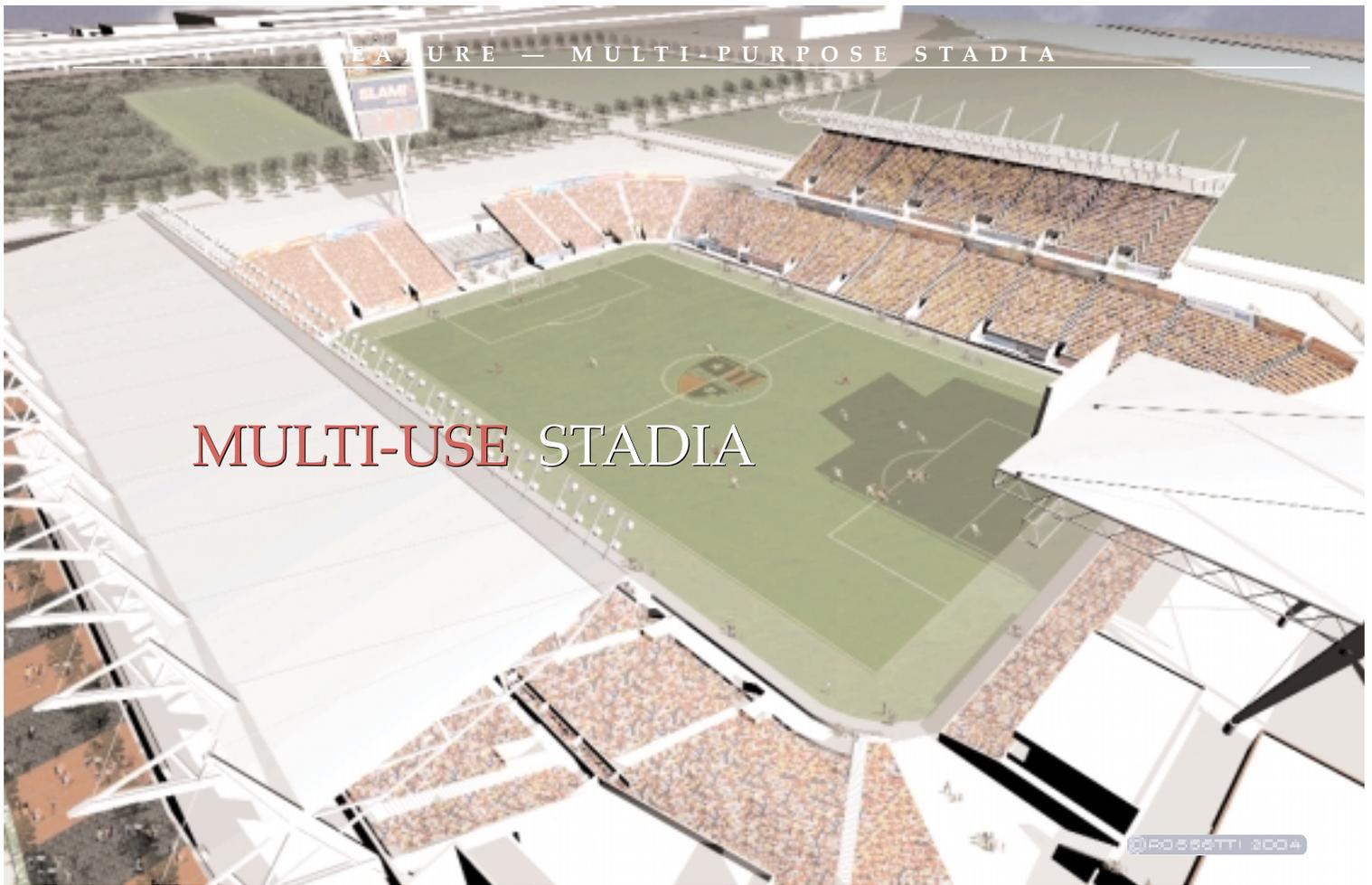
Notable amenities at the stadium include:

- ◆ Video display screens planned for both corners of the north side of the field
- ◆ Permanent stage infrastructure on the north side, ideal for major concert events
- ◆ Open-view concession stands to keep fans close to the action when purchasing
- ◆ Gate entrances on all four sides of the stadium for ease of access
- ◆ A private 6,000sqft Stadium Club
- ◆ 18 luxury hospitality suites

The two closest pitches to the stadium will be used exclusively for partners of the facility:

- ◆ The FC Dallas training field will feature a natural-grass training surface
- ◆ Dr Pink Field will be used exclusively for various Frisco ISD athletics and will feature an artificial turf surface, press box and bleacher seating for 600 spectators

John Wagner told PanStadia that the stadium will officially open on June 11th 2005 with a game against the Chicago Fire, but even before the stadium has opened its doors for the first time, it has already attracted a lot of attention. MLS Commissioner, Don Garber, announced late last year that the venue would host next season's edition of the league's championship game, the MLS Cup 2005. The match is scheduled to be held on Sunday, November 13, and will be a 'first' for Texas, as the nine previous finals have been held in California, Massachusetts, Washington DC and Ohio. ▶



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Above, top and far right: The new, multi-use, 20,000-seat MetroStars stadium in Harrison, New Jersey, will be operated by the Anschutz Entertainment Group.



Lamar Hunt, the prolific sports entrepreneur, heads The Hunt Sports Group and is responsible for a host of construction projects, including the new Frisco Soccer & Entertainment Center.

The Hunt Sports Group also recently announced that the US Youth Soccer Association has voted to move their headquarters from Richardson to the new Frisco Soccer & Entertainment Center. A twenty-year agreement with US Youth Soccer, coupled with a fifteen-year marketing agreement between the Dallas Burn and the North Texas State Soccer Association, now makes the new stadium a real focal point for soccer in America.

The Hunt Sports Group, headed by prolific sports entrepreneur, Lamar Hunt, is responsible for a host of construction projects including the new Frisco Soccer & Entertainment Center.

The All-American Sports Entrepreneur: Lamar Hunt

Responsible for the formation of leagues, the construction of sports stadia and facilities, and also as an owner of sports franchises, Lamar Hunt is a prolific, all-American sports entrepreneur. Although famous for his involvement with other professional sports, he became one of the original instigators of Major League Soccer and, since it was inaugurated in 1996, his vision, organisational skills and financial investment, have helped it to grow into the highly successful venture that it is today.

In addition, Lamar Hunt was responsible for the formation of the North American Soccer League and he operated the Dallas Tornados from 1967. For his efforts in building up the sport of soccer in the United States in the modern era, Hunt was

inducted into the US Soccer Hall of Fame as long ago as 1992. Also in his honour, the United States Soccer Federation changed the name of its oldest and most prestigious competition, the US Open Cup, to the Lamar Hunt US Open Cup back in 1999.

Further, Lamar Hunt was partly responsible for the formation of the National Football League, when in 1959 he formed the American Football League. So it was that he became the very first AFL personage to be inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1972 and the trophy presented to the American Football Conference Champions every year is named the Lamar Hunt Trophy.

Guiding Force

In 1967 Lamar Hunt took the time to co-found the World Championship Tennis circuit, a move that ultimately dragged the game into the modern era, as we know it today. Once more he was honoured for his services to sport and was duly made a member of the International Tennis Hall of Fame in 1993!

With his continued interest in MLS, Hunt now owns two league clubs: the Kansas City Wizards and the Columbus Crew. He financed a new soccer-specific stadium for the latter team back in 1999.

Then, in 2003, Hunt was once more back at the helm of a North Texas team after he brought the Dallas Burn club, which will be known from this season on as FC Dallas. Of course, he also announced that he would partially finance the future

construction of the club's own soccer-specific stadium.

PanStadia asked Lamar Hunt if he ever considered the prospect of owning a soccer club or constructing a stadium in the United Kingdom, with so many English soccer clubs in financial difficulty, did he see the potential of breaking into the English market?

Lamar Hunt: "I am generally aware of the soccer business in England and their stadia, and the status of the sport there, but I am not thinking about any involvement in that country. The sport is not without problems everywhere, but is fantastically successful in England and we need to concentrate on America, and on what will help it to grow and survive here."

Remarkable Portfolio

Not to leave the sport of basketball out of his remarkable portfolio, Lamar Hunt was even one of the founding investors in the Chicago Bulls National Basketball Association team. Recently though, he has put the MLS team, Kansas City Wizards up for sale, his being unable to move the team into a new stadium being suggested as a possible reason.

PanStadia asked Mr Hunt which of all his past sporting achievements he considered to be his most significant contribution to sport?

Lamar Hunt: "I would say that my most positive participation relates to the creation of a second league in American Pro Football — the American Football League, which started in 1960 — and the survival of all of its franchises and the resulting merger with the existing NFL, which has now resulted in the growth of the sport from twelve teams in 1959, to the current — and logical stopping point — of 32 teams. Along the way, the sport has become the model for Pro Sports in America, because of its overall financial success. I am particularly proud that the AFL was created with equal sharing of TV revenue, as a bedrock foundation concept. It made enough sense that the NFL copied it two years later, and it then survived the merger between the two leagues, and is today the most important reason for the success of Pro Football in America."

New Jersey MetroStars Stadium

The owners of the Meadowlands Sports Complex, which is located in East Rutherford, New Jersey, are currently bleeding the MetroStars dry. The team's existing contract ties them into a lease agreement that forces them to pay the New York Giants astronomical amounts every time they play at the stadium. Their answer, like so many other MLS teams today, is to construct their own stadium that can accommodate other sports and functions, and so bring in additional revenue for the club and investors alike. Unfortunately, the MetroStars will have to play one further season at the 80,000-seat Giants Stadium,



Fact File

New Jersey MetroStars Stadium

Capacity: 20,000-seats (Additional 10,000 modular seats)

Stadium Cost: US\$68,000,000

Architect: Rossetti

Operators: The Anschutz Entertainment Group (AEG)

Uses: Soccer - Football - Concerts

Opening: 2006

Frisco Soccer & Entertainment Center

Capacity: 20,000-seats

Stadium Cost: US\$65,000,000

Architect: HKS, Inc.

Operators: Hunt Sports Group

Uses: Soccer — Concerts

Opening: April 2005

before hopefully moving prior to the start of the 2006 season.

The MetroStars are one of the high-profile MLS teams that has previously drawn big name players to its line-up, including Lothar Matthäus, Germany's victorious 1990 World Cup captain, and Branco from Brazil, as well as top home favourites like Tony Meola and Tim Howard, the latter now plying his trade with Manchester United. Ever since joining the MLS in 1996, the club has usually attracted between 18,000 to 20,000 fans to games.

Their new stadium is in Harrison, New Jersey and will be operated by the Anschutz Entertainment Group (AEG). As well as MLS matches, it will host high school, college and youth soccer, and football games, as well as concerts. With a 20,000-seat capacity the facility will have cost some US\$68million. It is situated in an area of the city that has mainly soccer-friendly Portuguese and Hispanic residents, who make up over a third of the total population.

AEG will contribute US\$30million to the stadium project, while the Harrison Redevelopment Agency and the Advance Realty Group of Bedminster, New Jersey, are also involved in a US\$160million plan to redevelop a 135-acre area for office and retail space, 600 rental apartments and lofts, as well as a 4,000-car park block, which are included in the overall plan.

AEG Chose Rossetti for the MetroStars' Stadium

Architectural company Rossetti, with its offices in both California and Michigan, is responsible for the design. They have an ever increasing portfolio of soccer stadia to their credit, including the Home Depot Center — host to the LA Galaxy team, Ford Field — home of the Detroit Lions and Bridgeview — home to the Chicago Fire.

Andrew Leeson, the project architect for the new stadium, was asked for his views on its capacity. The MetroStars recently achieved an attendance figure of close to 32,000 against Washington DC, so did he think the MetroStars could soon outgrow their 20,000-capacity stadium? Would it be possible to add another 10,000 modular expansion seats?

AL: "The decision about the size of the stadiums is based on the business plan. When sell-outs at 20,000 seats can regularly be achieved, then the expansion of the stadium would be undertaken. All our MLS stadium designs are done with expansion planned for. We believe in the success of MLS and know that it will grow as a spectator sport in this country, so we are designing into the stadiums the ability to be expanded. The expansion must be for both a temporary — event based — and permanent expansion."

Part two of this exciting article can be found in our forthcoming May '05 issue of PanStadia. ■