

Saint Louis Athletica is the Name of Women's Professional Soccer in St. Louis

Saint Louis Athletica is now the name for the Women's Professional Soccer (WPS) St. Louis franchise. Team owner Jeff Cooper, alongside U.S. gold medalist Lori Chalupny and head coach Jorge Barcellos, unveiled Athletica's name and logo on Tuesday afternoon at the Missouri Athletic Club in downtown St. Louis.

"St. Louis has a rich, undisputed soccer history for both the men and women's game. It's only fitting that the metro area host a WPS team in the league's inaugural season, which will give the rest of the country a chance to see what the rest of us already know – that St. Louis is the best soccer city in America," said Bill McDermott, Major League Soccer (MLS) play-by-play announcer who served as emcee of Tuesday's press conference.

Saint Louis Athletica will play in the inaugural WPS season that kicks off in April 2009. The team's home field will be Ralph Korte Stadium which is located just twenty minutes from downtown St. Louis on Southern Illinois University – Edwardsville's campus.

Women's Professional Soccer will be the highest level of women's soccer in North America. Formed in September 2007 as the result of the efforts of the Women's Soccer Initiative, Inc., WPS, consists of seven teams across the country.

The markets for the 2009 season are Bay Area, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New Jersey/New York, St. Louis, and Washington, D.C. WPS will expand to Atlanta and Philadelphia in 2010 and continues to explore additional potential franchises for 2010 and beyond. More markets will be announced as they are added to the League.

"For years now, many people have worked tirelessly to put women's pro soccer back on the map, during which time a number of milestones have been accomplished – securing ownership groups, determining a name and logo of the league, allocating the U.S. Women's National Team members and more," said Jeff Cooper, St. Louis Athletica owner. "But here in St. Louis, having a team name and logo makes it that more real, giving us a tangible identity as we continue working behind-the-scenes to create an organization and league that is a legitimate, long-term success."

Resembling a medieval coat of arms and inspired by that of St. Joan of Arc, the Athletica crest features the silhouette of a woman atop her horse, proudly hoisting an "STL" flag overhead. Below the crest, a SAINT LOUIS ATHLETICA banner is flanked by two fleurs-de-lis – a nod to St. Louis as an 18th Century French settlement. The word "Athletica," while not found in the English dictionary, is derived from the adjective "athletic," with the "a" denoting the newly-created noun as feminine, a common practice in many foreign languages.

"The word 'Athletica' denotes strength and power – characteristics of this organization that are epitomized by the crest, which also pays homage to St. Louis' roots," said Cooper. "Naming a professional sports franchise is no easy task, to say the least. With Athletica, we feel we have perfectly captured the essence of our team's identity in a name and crest that transcends cultures."

Saint Louis Athletica will be coached by Jorge Barcellos, who brings an extensive resume, having served as head coach of the Brazilian Women's National Team since September 2006. In addition to guiding Brazil to second-place finishes at the 2008 Olympic Games and 2007 FIFA Women's World Cup – the highest placements ever for Brazil in world championship events – Barcellos led Brazil to a first-place finish at the 2007 Pan American Games and second-place finish at the 2006 South American Women's Championship.

The club has been allocated three members of the U.S. Women's National Team that captured the gold medal at the 2008 Beijing Olympics Games – wing back and St. Louis resident Lori Chalupny, extremely athletic defender/ forward Tina Ellertson and world renown goalie Hope Solo.

"I am really looking forward to making my home in St. Louis and helping Athletica to the first-ever WPS championship title," said Hope Solo, U.S. Olympic gold medalist and Athletica goalkeeper. "I'm so honored to be a part of this team and community and can't wait to begin training for the season."

"Words can't express how excited and proud I am to wear the Athletica name, logo, and colors, representing my hometown in WPS," said Chalupny, U.S. Olympic gold medalist. "I have been looking forward to the return of a women's league for years and to see everything come together so seamlessly is simply a dream come true."

In the WPS International draft, St. Louis selected Daniela (Brazil), Renata Costa (Brazil), and Melissa Tancredi (Canada). In the WPS post-draft discovery process St. Louis acquired the negotiating rights to Eniola Aluko (England), Francielle Alberto (Brazil), and Sara Larsson (Sweden). All of these players have represented their country on the International stage.

In addition, the team selected four players in the WPS General Draft, all of which have full U.S. Women's National Team or Youth National Team experience. The first round pick for St. Louis was defender India Trotter from Florida State University, the second pick was forward Angie Wozniak from the University of Portland, the third pick was midfielder Joanna Lohman from Penn State and the final pick was Notre Dame forward, Amanda Cinalli.

Selection in a WPS draft means that a player's rights within the league have been assigned to a specific team. That team then needs to negotiate and sign the player before they officially join a team's roster for the 2009 WPS Season.

Recently, the Federation of International Football Association (FIFA) announced its short list for the FIFA World Player of the Year Awards on Wednesday and three of the ten players listed are Saint Louis Athletica draftees (Hope Solo, Daniela and Ingvild Stensland). Eight of the ten players listed are WPS draftees, highlighting the mission of WPS to attract the world's best soccer players to play professionally in the United States.

WPS Franchises are individually owned and operated by a group of investors in each market. Saint Louis Athletica is owned by St. Louis Soccer United (SLSU), which is a professional soccer investment and development group dedicated to making professional soccer into a viable and successful sports entity in the St. Louis area. St. Louis Athletica will represent SLSU's first venture into the professional soccer business. The St. Louis group, under the leadership of the never-tiring Jeff Cooper, is also considered one of the front-runners for a 2011 MLS expansion team.

Along with securing the WPS team, St. Louis Soccer United has secured a 400-acre tract of land that will be used for the site of the soccer specific stadium complex and surrounding retail and community development. Saint Louis Athletica hopes to become a co-tenant in the new soccer stadium in Collinsville, should the St. Louis group be awarded a MLS team.

The project will integrate an 18,500 seat soccer-specific stadium which would be home to the St. Louis MLS professional soccer franchise, a state-of-the-art youth soccer complex with six FIFA approved artificial turf fields, six natural grass fields, and a mixed-use development including retail, office, educational, and residential uses.

Another portion of the St. Louis group's plan - a youth "super club" - has already taken shape with the merger last year of three of the nation's top youth soccer clubs including Scott Gallagher S.C.,

St. Louis Soccer Club (formerly Busch S.C.) and Metro United Soccer Club. The new club is known as St. Louis Scott Gallagher (SLSG) and has 250+ competitive teams.

Cooper remains "very" optimistic on their chances for MLS expansion, "With everything we have in place, the stadium agreement, the property development, the vertically integrated youth club, the area's long tradition in soccer, the WPS team synergy, our application will make St. Louis a difficult place to ignore." These initiatives comprise St. Louis Soccer United, the logo of which depicts King Louis IX in a crest to complement Athletica's brand.

Season tickets for the inaugural year of Saint Louis Athletica of the WPS at SIUE's Ralph Korte Stadium range from \$99 to \$1200 and are already on sale. The season kicks off in April and for more information or to purchase your tickets today, please call toll free at 1-888-STL-GOAL or go to www.saintlouisathletica.com or email tickets@STL-WPS.com.

About St. Louis Athletica

St. Louis Athletica begins play in April 2009 as one of seven founding teams participating in the inaugural season of Women's Professional Soccer (WPS). Led by head coach Jorge Barcellos and U.S. Women's National Team members Lori Chalupny, Tina Ellertson, and Hope Solo, Athletica home games in 2009 will be played at Southern Illinois University – Edwardsville's Korte Stadium. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit www.saintlouisathletica.com.

About Women's Professional Soccer (WPS)

The mission of Women's Professional Soccer (WPS) is to be the premier women's soccer league in the world and the global standard by which women's professional sports are measured. Play kicks off in the spring of 2009, with WPS teams based in the Bay Area, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New Jersey/New York, St. Louis, and Washington, D.C. The league expects to expand in 2010 with the addition of Atlanta and Philadelphia, while working to secure a facility for a Dallas team for the second WPS season. For more information, visit www.womensprosoccer.com.