NEW MLS TEAM:
NEW YORK CITY FC

Major League Soccer Announces New York Expansion Team: New York City Football Club

NEW YORK (May 21, 2013) – Major League Soccer Commissioner Don Garber announced today that a partnership of global sports powers, Manchester City Football Club and the New York Yankees, has acquired the League’s 20th expansion club. The new team will be named New York City Football Club (NYCFC) and expects to begin play in 2015.

“We proudly welcome two of the most prestigious professional global sports organizations to Major League Soccer,” said MLS Commissioner Don Garber. “This is a transformational development that will elevate the league to new heights in this country. The New York area is home to more than 19 million people, and we look forward to an intense crosstown rivalry between New York City Football Club and the New York Red Bulls that will captivate this great city.”

“New York is a legendary sports town, as well as a thriving global city with a rapidly expanding soccer fan-base,” said Ferran Soriano, CEO of Manchester City Football Club, who will oversee the process of filling top New York City FC leadership positions in the weeks to come. “We are thrilled to contribute to the energy and growth of New York City Soccer. In the Yankees, we have found the absolute best partner for developing a world-class sports organization and a winning team that will carry the New York City Football Club name with pride.”

Manchester City will be the majority owner of the new Club. As an investor, the Yankees will be an active member of the ownership group. The New York Yankees and Manchester City Football Club have an existing commercial relationship through Legends Hospitality, LLC, an international entertainment, hospitality and marketing organization. Yankee Stadium is pleased to be hosting Manchester City on Saturday, May 25 for a “friendly” match against Chelsea FC, giving New York area fans a rare opportunity to see two outstanding English Premier League clubs up close.

“We are pleased to be associated with this major move by MLS to increase its presence in the New York market and to enhance the opportunity for New York soccer fans to enjoy high-level play in their own city. We look forward to the opportunity to work with Manchester City to create something very special for the soccer fans of New York -- and to bringing another terrific team to this city for all sports fans to enjoy,” said Hal Steinbrenner, managing general partner of the New York Yankees. “Randy Levine, president of the New York Yankees, will be the point person in leading the effort to launch and establish the team on behalf of the organization,” Mr. Steinbrenner added.

With millions of residents watching soccer every week and nearly two million people actively playing the game, the New York/New Jersey area is one of North America’s most vibrant and proud soccer communities. The region has filled stadiums for countless marquee soccer events including the 1994 FIFA Men’s World Cup, the 1999 FIFA Women’s World Cup, three MLS All-Star Games and numerous international exhibition matches. NYCFC becomes the first MLS club whose home will be located within the five boroughs, joining the Red Bulls as the second MLS club in the metropolitan area.

“Soccer is one of the world’s most exciting and popular sports, and it should be played on the world’s biggest stage -- in New York City,” said Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg. “New Yorkers are the greatest sports fans in the world, and they will welcome a Major League Soccer franchise with the full-throated and loyal support they are famous for. Manchester City has a great reputation for both winning teams and serious community investment, and that will help them fit in well with the excellent leadership of New York City’s other professional sports teams. Increasingly, sports events and activities -- from the NHL playoffs to the MLB All-Star game to
the SuperBowl -- are spurring economic growth, as our investments in new arenas and infrastructure are paying off."

**Future: A Home Field for NYC’s Newest Team**

New York City FC is committed to seeking a new permanent stadium in New York. Until that time, the new team is arranging to play in an interim home beginning in its inaugural MLS season in 2015. Over the past year, MLS began discussions with the City of New York and other stakeholders about the possibility of constructing a new stadium in Flushing Meadows Corona Park (FMCP) in Queens. The Club’s new management will continue these discussions with local government officials, community residents and businesses, soccer leagues, and MLS. The Club will continue to review other potential sites as well.

“New York City FC will have a permanent home in the City in the great traditions of New York sports and world soccer -- a home that must be a sports, commercial and civic success,” Soriano said. “But in considering any stadium site, we will listen first. This is what we have always done in Manchester and what we will do in New York. Only in this way, can the Club truly represent the City whose name it will carry.”

“**City Soccer in the Community**: NYC FC’s Commitment to Youth Soccer in NYC**

Manchester City is a leader among sports organizations in its charitable efforts, with one-sixth of its staff fully dedicated full-time to community outreach. Building on this tradition of community outreach, New York City FC will expand and enhance the grassroots youth soccer program “City Soccer in the Community,” which it has been running in New York since 2010. The program, now headquartered at PS 72 (Lexington Academy) in East Harlem, which boasts New York City's only rooftop soccer field, provides quality soccer instruction and programming to thousands of children in 20 NYC public schools each year. New York City FC looks forward to expanding its community outreach to bring soccer to thousands of more kids throughout the five boroughs.

Manchester City has funded the construction of soccer facilities for youth in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami and Washington D.C. For more on City Soccer, click here. In addition, the “City in the Community,” foundation focuses on similar initiatives worldwide.

**About Manchester City** Since new ownership took over five years ago, Manchester City has gained its place as one of England’s most successful football clubs and one of the fastest growing clubs in the world, on and off the field. Last spring, Manchester City won the 2012 Barclay’s Premier League Championship. This year it finished second in the League and was the FA Cup runner up. Manchester City FC is wholly owned by the Abu Dhabi United Group.

**New York Yankees** Established in 1903, the New York Yankees are Major League Baseball’s most storied franchise with 27 World Championships and 40 American League pennants.

**About Major League Soccer** Headquartered in New York City, Major League Soccer is the top-flight professional soccer league in the United States and Canada. MLS features many stars from the U.S., Canada, and around the world. Major League Soccer’s 18th season features 19 clubs each playing 34 regular-season matches. Those clubs include the Chicago Fire; Chivas USA; Colorado Rapids; Columbus Crew; D.C. United; FC Dallas; Houston Dynamo; 2012 MLS Cup champion LA Galaxy; Montreal Impact; New York Red Bulls; New England Revolution; Philadelphia Union; Portland Timbers; Real Salt Lake; San Jose Earthquakes; Seattle Sounders FC; Sporting Kansas City; Toronto FC and Vancouver Whitecaps FC. New York City FC, was unveiled May 21, 2013. For more information about MLS, log on to the league’s official website at www.MLSsoccer.com.
May 21, 2013

A Team Is Born, but Not All Cheer

By CHARLES V. BAGLI and KEN BELSON

A few days before Thanksgiving, as the city still reeled from Hurricane Sandy, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg convened a meeting at Gracie Mansion to jump-start talks for a project he considered part of his legacy to the city, a new soccer stadium in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park in Queens.

Executives from Major League Soccer were joined by investors from the United Arab Emirates, the owners of the Manchester City Football Club, who were willing to build the stadium for a new American soccer team they hoped to buy. They were at odds with another group in the room: Jeff Wilpon and his cousin Scott, who represented the Mets and who were demanding more than $40 million from the Abu Dhabi investors as compensation for allowing soccer fans to park at nearby Citi Field.

The mayor entered the room and, to break the tension, joked that he would visit the park if there were a golf course there rather than a soccer stadium. Then he cut to the chase: The stadium “would be good for the city,” he said, according to people at the meeting.

“Reasonable people can work this out,” Bloomberg added before leaving the room minutes after arriving.

Almost six months later, the Mets and soccer officials have still not come to terms, and the stadium issue remains intensely disputed among elected officials, youth soccer leaders and parks advocates. But the Manchester City owners — an investment group led by Sheik Mansour bin Zayed al-Nahyan, a member of the royal family of Abu Dhabi — forged ahead anyway, announcing Tuesday that it would buy an M.L.S. team for an estimated $100 million with an unexpected partner, the Mets’ crosstown rivals.

Those rivals, the Yankees, will be a part-owner of the New York City Football Club, a new team that is expected to begin competing in M.L.S. in 2015 but has no home to move into.

The Manchester City-Yankees partnership, which will no doubt antagonize the Mets, will deepen existing ties because the Yankees’ stadium concessions business, Legends Hospitality, already provides services at Manchester City’s home ground, Etihad Stadium.
Manchester City, the recently deposed champion of England’s Premier League, will play an exhibition match against another British powerhouse, Chelsea, on Saturday at Yankee Stadium, and city and M.L.S. officials were eager to announce a deal before that game.

“In the Yankees, we have found the absolute best partner for developing a world-class sports organization and a winning team that will carry the New York City Football Club name with pride,” said Ferran Soriano, the chief executive of Manchester City.

While initially willing to buy the team on its own, Manchester City decided in the last week to team with the Yankees. In doing so, it gained a wealthy local partner well acquainted with building a stadium and navigating New York’s often treacherous political and regulatory shoals. Manchester City’s owners are also hoping that a partnership with the Yankees will shield them from criticism that a stadium project in the park represents a sweetheart deal for Arab royalty, according to team executives.

By joining with one of the top teams in the Premier League, the Yankees — who are investing as much as $25 million in the new M.L.S. team — also hope to turn Yankee Stadium into a marquee destination for high-profile soccer matches.

“We’ve been doing business here a long time and we know how things work,” said Randy Levine, the president of the Yankees, who said the team’s cable network, YES, could broadcast New York City F.C.’s games. “We’ll have their back throughout all of this.”

Mets officials declined to comment on the deal.

The agreement represents the culmination of two years of negotiations involving conflicting interests that included the mayor, city agencies, the Abu Dhabi investment group, M.L.S., parks and community advocates, soccer fans, the Mets and the United States Tennis Association, among others. In addition to paying for the proposed stadium in Queens, the sheik’s investment group would spend about $90 million to replace lost parkland and soccer fields, and on other measures.

To build a home for the team, the city, the league, Manchester City and now the Yankees must win over half a dozen community boards, the city planning commission, the City Council, and potentially state and federal agencies — a process that will take months, if not years. Some of the constituents oppose ceding parkland to a foreign billionaire.

“We’re not even talking about an American businessman who made shrewd investments,” said Peter Vallone Jr., a city councilman from Astoria. “We’re talking about a sheik born with a silver spoon in his mouth, and we don’t need to hand him parkland on a silver platter.”

Getting big projects built in New York can take years, especially sports sites that often become fodder for critics of the use of public resources for wealthy team owners. The Mets
and the Yankees each spent nearly a decade lobbying for tax breaks and public subsidies before they poured a combined $2.3 billion into their new stadiums, which opened in 2009.

With opposition growing, the new owners indicated Tuesday that they recognized that building a stadium in Flushing Meadows would be problematic, and that other sites may have to be considered.

“Clearly, a lot of work has been done in Queens,” Levine said. “That’s where the focus is. I don’t know if there is an alternative. But we have some time now to take a step back and breathe.”

Levine added that New York City F.C. could play at least its first year in Yankee Stadium or Citi Field until a new home is built. M.L.S. began exploring sites for a stadium in 2011. The league hired high-level lobbyists, including HRA Advisors and Global Strategies, as well as CBRE, a real estate brokerage firm, and Icon Venue Group, a stadium architect.

M.L.S. initially wanted to build a stadium on Pier 40 along the Hudson River. The league offered to fix the pier and to give youth leagues that play there access to the field. Although some residents from the adjoining neighborhood liked the idea, advocates for Hudson River Park ultimately disapproved.

The league then explored about 20 other sites, including locations in Harlem, Staten Island, Randalls Island and Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx, as well as four sites in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. M.L.S. officials liked the park because it was close to the many soccer fans in Queens; was near subways, rail lines and highways; and was accessible to parking at Citi Field.

Meanwhile, about half a dozen investors were inquiring about buying the second New York City team (the Red Bulls, a founding member of M.L.S. as the MetroStars, have played in New Jersey since 1996). Only two were considered serious candidates: one from Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, and the sheik’s investment group from Abu Dhabi, which became seriously involved in negotiations in November.

The Mets have proved a thorny opponent for the Abu Dhabi investors. The team argued against the notion of someone’s not only gaining access to their parking lots, but also using the space for a competing purpose. The Mets demanded compensation, and they wanted to keep all the parking revenue from the lots (which are city owned) and restrict the right of the soccer team from playing games within hours of the start or finish of a baseball game.

The league and the mayor showed confidence in the proposal, but opposition in the community has mounted. When officials from M.L.S. held talks with Queens residents this
winter to promote their plan, some opponents were prevented from sitting in the main auditorium, which was filled with soccer boosters.

Many soccer fans in Queens say they favor a stadium, but they do not want to lose access to the public fields that they use. Alfonso Vargas, the president of Allfut, a soccer alliance that comprises 14 leagues, 400 teams and about 5,000 players who compete at the park, said he supported the proposal as long as the local soccer leagues would be accommodated.

“Not only are they going to allow us to use the new facilities, but they’re going to rebuild all the fields with world-class turf and let us use the bathrooms, which the park is lacking right now,” Vargas said. “Maybe the clientele is not so refined. Still, we are human beings. We don’t want to be squeezed out.”

Parks groups seemed more alarmed. Though the park is listed as having nearly 900 acres, the actual amount of land devoted to public recreation there is far smaller, when land used by the U.S.T.A., the Mets, the M.T.A. and the Queens Museum is subtracted.

M.L.S., which last year spent about $2 million on lobbyists largely to promote their plan, argued that the new stadium would take up no more than 13 acres, a footprint that includes the Fountain of the Planets, a fenced-in pond. Manchester City has pledged to improve drainage at the park and to build new soccer fields as well as buy replacement parkland at Flushing Airport, a decommissioned airfield in nearby College Point.

Those promises have not won over park advocates.

“This is the most heavily used park in Queens,” said Holly Leicht, the executive director of New Yorkers for Parks. “It already has so many private uses. This could be the straw that broke the camel’s back as the park tips too much toward the private side, privatization.”

Geoffrey Croft, the president of the watchdog group NYC Park Advocates, added, “We hope this new deal once and for all puts to rest any further attempts to seize even more public parkland in Flushing Meadows Park.”

David Waldstein, Nate Schweber and John Otis contributed reporting.
A Stadium in Queens Is No Walk in the Park

By GEORGE VECSEY

Inserting a soccer stadium into the green lungs of Queens County is not an incursion of the Yankees into Mets territory, nor is it an invasion of the dangerously *furrin* sport of soccer into sacred American territory.

For that matter, nobody should be horrified at the investment of overseas money into a New York sports team — in this case, from the royal family of Abu Dhabi. After all, in this global marketplace, Americans already own some of the great soccer teams of England.

However — and this is a gigantic however — the awarding of the *vital 20th team* of Major League Soccer to New York City touches off a search for a soft spot to land, potentially in the *shrinking acres of land* available to the working people of Queens.

Attribute this Señor Nimby riff to a Queens native who does not like to see big business interests squeeze La Gente. I was in that neighborhood on Sunday (for cannoli at Mama’s on 104th Street), and even in the chill drizzle there was hardly a parking space on the streets, and people were walking into the park pushing baby carriages, riding bikes or holding hands.

On any given day, Koreans, Colombians, Chinese, Ecuadoreans, you name it, are dribbling soccer balls into the park. And on many days white-clad bowlers and batsmen are playing cricket, as they would in Port of Spain or Karachi or Delhi. Last August, I saw Latin boys and girls practicing folk dancing in a parking lot near the Hall of Science.

Flushing Meadows-Corona Park already has been restricted at the north end by the National Tennis Center (named after that public-parks champion, Billie Jean King). Three weeks of the year are devoted to qualifying rounds and the United States Open, but at least the rest of the year the center is available for those who hack at a fuzzy yellow ball.

Up to now, M.L.S. has done just about everything right since its inception in 1996. But putting a stadium, concrete access, traffic jams, plus another set of users into the parkland could be the league’s first major unredeemable act.

There is a list of perhaps 20 potential sites for the New York team within the five boroughs, one in a desolate corner of Belmont racetrack in southwest Queens. But the company that owns the nostalgia-inducing brand name of Cosmos seems to have painted itself into a corner out there, in a lesser league.

Clearly, Flushing Meadows-Corona Park is the favorite of the Bloomberg administration, which has not blundered into a bad sporting land decision since, oh, 2005, when the city
pushed a big-box stadium for the West Side of Manhattan. Everybody has lived happily ever after since London was awarded the 2012 Olympics.

The looming land grab is one more sign that soccer is here to stay. On Saturday, two of the top teams in England, Manchester City and Chelsea, will play at The House That Ruth (Re)Built. That same day millions of Americans will watch on television as German powerhouses play the final of the Champions League in Wembley Stadium in London. Soon the men’s national team will be going through its quadrennial agony of trying to qualify for the next World Cup (in Brazil in 2014). Sponsors, network officials, pub operators, jersey manufacturers and major newspapers are beefing up their coverage of the sport.

M.L.S. has done a great job helping the sport grow in North America, first under Doug Logan and now under Don Garber. The league has kept costs down and built modest-sized stadiums in the United States and Canada. Garber, a Queens native, has wisely said the league needs a 20th team, a regional rival to the Red Bulls, who play in Harrison, N.J. Now he needs a home for that 20th team.

It would have made sense to downsize dumpy old Shea Stadium, easily reachable by the No. 7 train and the Long Island Rail Road, but since the Madoff scandal the Mets management cannot produce pitchers or hitters, much less ease into a natural soccer partnership that was sitting right there.

“The new soccer team could play in Citi Field — since the Mets don’t,” said Shaun Clancy, the proprietor of the Irish/baseball pub Foley’s in Manhattan, when he heard the latest real-estate news on Tuesday.

On Memorial Day, the Yankees will play an interleague game against the Mets in Flushing; Yankee fans, giddy over their team’s fine start, may outspend and outshout the Mets’ fans, as happened during the 2000 Subway Series. Ultimately, the Mets may be reduced to taking a parking payoff from the new Yankee-Manchester City ownership and watch the glow of a new soccer stadium in the people’s park.

M.L.S. and the city will surely say not a blade of grass will be lost by this proposed stadium. From covering the coal industry, I learned to be suspicious whenever government and business promise to leave land intact.

This Queens boy would hate to see a soccer stadium and all its infrastructure — plus the extra revenue-inducing events squeezed into the stadium — take away any more sweet little corners of that park.
New M.L.S. Team Introduces First Employee and Tackles First Hurdle

By KEN BELSON

With Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg looking on Wednesday, Major League Soccer formally announced that Manchester City and the Yankees would operate the league’s 20th team and call it New York City F.C.

The announcement, at P.S. 72 in East Harlem, where Manchester City donated a rooftop soccer field, was the culmination of a whirlwind negotiation that began barely a week ago. The 75-25 percent partnership is designed to smooth Manchester City’s entry into the New York metropolitan market and help bolster the Yankees’ soccer credentials.

Their first major decision was to introduce the new team’s first employee, Claudio Reyna, who will become the director of football operations. Reyna has an interesting résumé. He grew up in New Jersey, played for and was captain of the national team and represented the United States in four World Cups. He also played for Manchester City from 2003 to 2007.

“Having had the privilege of playing both for my country here in the U.S. and for Manchester City F.C. in England, I could not have hoped for a more tailor-made opportunity in soccer,” Reyna said. “With a large fan base through the New York area, prime television rights and distribution, sponsorship commitments and the Yankees as a U.S. partner, the New York City Football Club has everything in place to succeed.”

The next and far larger task will be to find a new home for the team, which expects to begin playing in 2015 at Yankee Stadium, Citi Field or another temporary home. M.L.S. and the mayor say that a roughly 10-acre area in the eastern end of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park is an ideal site for a stadium because it is near public transportation and a concentration of soccer fans, and would pour tens of millions of dollars into a heavily used but underfinanced park.

As compensation for receiving the land to build a stadium, Manchester City has pledged to spend about $90 million to buy replacement parkland, replace soccer fields and make other improvements to the park, which the mayor said is sorely needed.
The project, though, faces opposition from parks and community activists as well as skeptical community boards that see the stadium as an encroachment on public land and essentially a giveaway to a foreign billionaire. These increasingly vocal skeptics are a reason Manchester City partnered with the Yankees, who have political muscle and practical experience building stadiums in New York.

Randy Levine, the president of the Yankees, promised to have a new stadium built despite opposition. “As we embark for a new stadium here, all of us know that the usual suspects will be out there again,” he said. “But the Yankees, Manchester City, M.L.S. are committed.”

Levine said that the Yankees and Manchester City would assess the proposed site for the stadium in Queens, but look elsewhere if needed, including at locations not previously considered and at private property. Levine added that the Mets, who have demanded a hefty share of parking revenue for use of the lots at Citi Field, are not an impediment to reaching a deal for a stadium.

“They’re big boys, they have their own interests,” he said. “Like everything, it’s a negotiation.”

After saying that Flushing Meadows-Corona Park was an ideal location for a stadium, the mayor struck a more conciliatory tone, suggesting that the new soccer team could end up elsewhere in the city.

“Nobody should think they have got a lock on this,” he said. “There are lots of different places you can build a stadium. I just want to make sure it’s in New York City and we get it done.”
City Executive Always Had Eyes on the U.S.

By JACK BELL

Ferran Soriano, the Manchester City executive who was instrumental in the Premier League club’s decision to become part of Major League Soccer, has long viewed the United States as fertile ground for soccer.

He was the vice president of business operations at Barcelona before moving to England to work for Manchester City. And on a trip to Barcelona for a truly classic Clásico in March 2007, I was able to sit down with Soriano, who is fluent in English, for an interview at the club’s Camp Nou stadium.

Before the announcement on Tuesday that Manchester City and the Yankees would be partners in the 20th M.L.S. team, to launch in 2015, Soriano was one of the executives behind Barcelona’s aborted attempt to place a team in M.L.S. in Miami in 2008.

This time, Soriano was successful.

Back in 2007 in Barcelona he said: “I’m the one who was in charge of developing contact with [M.L.S. Commissioner] Don Garber in April 2005. We have since been developing that relationship. Why? You look at the football industry the last 10 years and there has been tremendous growth in Europe. But that growth will not continue. The next sources of growth will be outside Europe. We have to ask what are the relevant markets and what are the priorities.”

It is no secret that a host of the top European clubs have been searching for a formula to crack the United States market in big, sustainable ways. In the past decade that has meant annual summer tours to help boost recognition. Merchandising is a big part, and as Soriano has said all along, the notion of a top club owning a team in M.L.S. (and in other minor league) has also been a goal of some.

“Where can you find interesting soccer? On what level is the local competition? Is there money available to be spent? Are people ready to spend? In South America, there is high interest, local competition, but not a lot of money to be spend. Japan is a dream market, no local competition and money to spend. Then the U.S. People have money, local interest is not so strong, but there is a growing interest in soccer around the world. It is an important market because we think the interest will increase. Of course there are a number of challenges, starting with the competition from other big sports. But the factors helping soccer in the U.S. are the Hispanic population, the number of kids playing soccer who, at some point, their interest will move to the professional level, and in general globalization.”
Even in 2007, Soriano realized that annual summer tours could not sustain the presence of a European club, even one as popular, entertaining and proficient as Barcelona.

“The question is: what happens the week after we go home?” he said. “You could do schools, have kids play in our jersey. They will watch and buy our jersey. But if you want to be permanent in the U.S. you have to be there every week. And the only way to do that is to have a team. Young players, develop players. It will be very different from the original product.”

So six years ago Soriano had a vision of what a European club could do to succeed, long term, in the United States. He also had then, and now obviously, a positive view of M.L.S.

“I have good relationship with M.L.S.,” he said. “They seem very smart and professional; I like doing business with them. We speak the same language. They are the right people to try and make soccer significant in the U.S. Maybe it will take 10 years. We will be watching closely. At some point we will have a permanent presence, I just don’t know what form right now.”

And that permanent presence, announced in 2013 with a launch date of 2015, will be with Manchester City, not Barcelona.