

Meet the tech entrepreneurs who want to give Bay Area soccer a kick

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San Francisco Deltas CEO Brian Andrés Helmick: "As a Colombian boy, there are two important things: futbol and dancing."



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Professional soccer is returning to San Francisco with a game plan that looks a lot like the new franchise's tech-heavy ownership lineup.

The San Francisco Deltas will begin play in February 2017 as part of the second-division North American Soccer League. But Deltas CEO [Brian Andrés Helmick](#) said the franchise plans to deliver a first-rate experience for the Bay Area's soccer-hungry fans.

"Our approach is one fan at a time," said Helmick, who in 2006 founded the human resources software and services company Algentis LLC before selling in September 2014 to Hub International Ltd. (NYSE: HBG) for an undisclosed amount.

It hasn't been easy. After the franchise picked Kezar Stadium for their home, a group of nearby residents and business owners asked the city's Recreation and Parks Commission not to approve a use permit for city-owned Kezar. Some complained of traffic and alcohol sales.

Kezar – the onetime home of the San Francisco 49ers and (for their first four home games in 1960) the Oakland Raiders – now hold about 10,000 people.

The commission approved the permit earlier this month.

The Deltas will pay the city \$30,000 a year to play at Kezar and, [according to the Examiner](#), will spend close to a half-million dollars on new lighting, locker room upgrades and more.

"We're not taking over that stadium but using it for 15-20 games a season," Helmick said, "and we want to be respectful of all the other users."

The team officially emerged from stealth mode Tuesday, but its hopes (and some of its plans) have circulated around the Bay Area for months.

Helmick's team of 18 investors was one of two Bay Area groups the NASL considered to receive a franchise.

The NASL currently is without a West Coast team, and San Francisco has fielded a handful of unsuccessful pro soccer teams despite a soccer-crazed population.

"I don't think there's been more interest in our league than right now," Commissioner Bill Peterson said earlier this month. "It's an exciting time for us."

The NASL's admission fee is \$3.5 million, [Peterson told me last year](#). Team operating expenses can run \$2.5 million to \$4 million a year.

The Deltas will have spent "10s of millions" of dollars in the two years leading up to next February's launch, Helmick estimated, due to stadium improvements, marketing and hiring staff, coaches and players.

The next step for the franchise, which has six people on staff, is to hire a head coach, Helmick said.

The son of a Colombian mother and American father who grew up around the globe, Helmick came to the United States for college, then to the Stanford Graduate School of Business after chucking a budding Wall Street career. He was immediately bit by the entrepreneurial bug, started Algentis and kept ties with his Stanford classmates as his company grew.

Five months after selling Algentis, Helmick discovered the NASL was interested in placing a team in the Bay Area. It seemed a natural fit.

"As a Colombian boy, there are two important things: futbol and dancing," Helmick said.

He took a dispassionate view of sports franchise ownership and reached out to many of the people he met at Stanford and elsewhere. The Deltas' ownership group leans heavy toward tech entrepreneurs: Franchise investors have been involved in Google Inc., Facebook Inc. (NASDAQ: FB), Twitter Inc. (NASDAQ: TWTR), Yahoo Inc. (NASDAQ: YHOO), Yelp Inc. and PayPal, for example, and have built and sold tech companies.

The tech experience is one reason why the Deltas are planning some things one normally wouldn't see from a minor-league sports franchise. The Deltas also will use artificial intelligence ticketing to allow fans of similar interests to sit together – perhaps next to team fans one game and single fans the next game, for example. It also will offer virtual reality technology to give fans on-field experiences.

"We want to take risks on and off the field," Helmick said, noting that "delta" in physics often is the measurement of change.

"The goal is to be an incubator for technology and offer it to other clubs in the U.S. and other countries," he said.

MEET THE DELTAS OWNERSHIP GROUP

Here's a quick look at the backgrounds of the ownership group in the San Francisco Deltas:

Natalia Carvajal: Director of M&A integration and partner management at Groupon has held M&A- and partnership-related posts at Adobe and Deloitte Consulting;

Lewis Cheng: CEO of Shenzhen, China-based Polygroup, which makes artificial Christmas trees, Christmas lighting, air mattresses and above-ground swimming pools;

John Dukellis: The man in charge of PayPal's next-gen wallet and senior director of a consumer product portfolio that includes prepaid and debit card products;

Paulo Malzoni Filho: Career history in Brazilian shopping mall and real estate development;

Jonathan Gheller: Cofounder of Mixtent, a company that ranked job skills and talents based on recommendations from peers in the same fields, joined Facebook after its purchase of Mixtent in March 2013; worked at Facebook until November;

Mac Harman: Onetime commercialization officer for the Cleveland Clinic Foundation is co-founder of ProService Boise, a third-party customer care center, and Redwood City-based home décor products company Balsam Brands;

Charles Hudson: Venture partner with SoftTech VC while managing partner at Precursor Ventures, an early-stage venture capital firm in business-to-business and business-to-consumer software applications companies in the Bay Area, New York and Toronto;

Bobby Jaros: The cofounder and former CEO of artificial intelligence company LookFlow joined Yahoo after the Internet giant bought his company in October 2013; has been involved in "deep learning" in Yahoo Labs;

Danny Khatib: Cofounder, president and COO of Livingly Media, which focuses on entertainment news, fashion and beauty, and home décor and design for women;

Josh McFarland: Senior director of product at Twitter was CEO of TellApart, a predictive marketing company bought by Twitter in April 2015 for more than \$500 million;

Sonia Survanshi McFarland: Global head of recruiting at Dropbox also was vice president of user operations and head of business development for Yelp and head of business development in India for Google;

Emily Melton: Draper Fisher Jurvetson partner interested in mobile technology, social media and other consumer-related technologies;

Jonathan Peachey: Former senior member of Sir Richard Branson's leadership team at Virgin Group, now is CEO of New York-based Filip Technologies, a wearable phone and locator for kids;

Renata Quintini: General partner at Felicis Ventures, VC firm backing companies such as Class Dogo, Dollar Shave Club and Planet Labs;

Adam Requarth: Fourteen years of sales and marketing experience includes stint with San Jose Sharks; most recently was general manager of Learfield Sports' Cardinal Sports LLC, the marketing and multimedia partner of Stanford athletics;

Brian Requarth: Brazil resident is CEO and co-founder of VivaReal, an online real estate marketplace;

Phelipe Spielmann: Partner in Katue Participacoes in Brazil; and,

Ymanol Valdes: Worldwide supply demand manager at Apple.

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