

Meet the Deltas: San Francisco's soccer startup

By [Al Saracevic](#) and [Juan Reyes](#) Updated 2:35 am PDT, Saturday, March 25, 2017



Photo: [Natasha Dangond / The Chronicle](#)



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Members of the new professional soccer team, the S.F. Deltas, practice at the Beach Chalet soccer fields in Golden Gate Park last week.

The Bay Area's newest pro sports franchise debuts at Kezar Stadium on Saturday night, and it looks as if it will fit right in.

The San Francisco Deltas are the ultimate soccer startup, fueled by tech money, innovation and a dream. The team will kick off its existence against the Indy Eleven of the **North American Soccer League**, a fledgling pro league in the States that hopes to recapture the glory of the **New York Cosmos** of the 1970s.

It'll be a challenge for the Deltas to wedge their way into the crowded world of Bay Area sports and entertainment, not to mention the splintered world of U.S. soccer, but they are taking an innovator's approach, leveraging local partnerships and appealing to the tech set.

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Fans will be able to buy tickets using their Eventbrite app instead of Ticketmaster. They can get to the game via Uber instead of a cab. And, once there, they'll be drinking Lagunitas beer and eating from an international lineup of food trucks. No **Budweiser** or McDonald's to be found.

Did we mention the **Grateful Dead** used to play at Kezar?

You get the picture. The Deltas are bootstrapping their way into the San Francisco sports world, leaning heavily on local culture, and it's kind of hard to root against them. CEO **Brian Andres Helmick**, who sold his own tech startup four years ago, comes across with an enthusiasm that would make **Jim Harbaugh** blush. And the team poured in \$1 million to refurbish old Kezar Stadium, even bringing in a few thousand Candlestick Park seats that they found languishing in a Midwest warehouse. The team will practice in Balboa Park and at the Beach Chalet fields in Golden Gate Park, giving locals a chance to watch.

"This soccer startup adventure was just an idea in March 2015, and now two years later the dream has become a reality," said Helmick, whose expansion franchise is the latest entry in a league that took its name from the original American pro soccer major league. "I'm truly humbled by the amount of support that we've gotten from so many people at all levels to make this happen. ... The home opener this Saturday will be a historic event for sports, but also a way to bring the diverse community of San Francisco together to cheer, laugh, eat good food and have lots of fun."

It even looks as though the Deltas put together a decent roster. In a friendly match with the established **San Jose Earthquakes** of MLS, in February, the San Francisco side came out ahead 1-0.

Team captain **Nana Attakora** is high on the team's chances.

"It's an experienced group. We've got a lot of players who played at good levels, a committed group and a hard-working group," he said. "We know the league will be tough, every game will be tough, and that's what we need."

It's also an eclectic roster, a conscious move by head coach **Marc Dos Santos**, who says he wants the Deltas to represent San Francisco's rich diversity.

First, he signed Attakora from Canada, who spent six seasons in **Major League Soccer**, including a stint with the San Jose Earthquakes in 2011. He came to the 7-year-old NASL in 2015, playing for the San Antonio Scorpions and then the **Fort Lauderdale Strikers** the following year.

Dos Santos added Jackson, a speedy winger from Brazil who also played six seasons in the MLS with FC Dallas and **Toronto FC**. He also helped São Paulo to a league title in Brazil in 2007.

The Deltas signed 2015 NASL Golden Glove winner **Romuald Peiser** of France. The goalie recorded a league-record 648-minute shutout streak last season.

More international names include defender Kenny Teijsse of the Netherlands, midfielder Cristian Portilla of Spain, winger Pablo Dyego of Brazil and defender **Reiner Ferreira**, also of Brazil.

Dos Santos also signed midfielder Kyle **Bekker** and defender **Karl Ouimette**, both of Canada.

Attakora grew up and played soccer with Bekker in Toronto. He mentioned how it's good to have people around who are comfortable to play with.

"I've been around (soccer) long enough, where we come into work and it's not what we did 10 years ago. We focus on today. What do we have to focus on to make this team better?" he said.

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doesn't feel as though the team plays like one.

"There's a ton of experience in the locker room, and I know the guys haven't necessarily all played together for too long, but that's why the coach brought in people that he trusts to start this project and get us off the ground running," he said.

Mangels said he's looking forward to hosting games in his own backyard.

"We've always had the Earthquakes down in the South Bay. But to have a team in San Francisco, the main city in the Bay Area, is pretty special," he said.

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