

# SF Deltas room together in Nob Hill apartment complex

By Juan Reyes Updated 11:06 am PDT, Friday, August 4, 2017



Photo: Scott Strazzante, The Chronicle

San Francisco Deltas' Karl W. Ouimette (left) and Nana Attakora relax in Ouimette's aptment in San Francisco, Calif., on Wednesday, June 28, 2017.

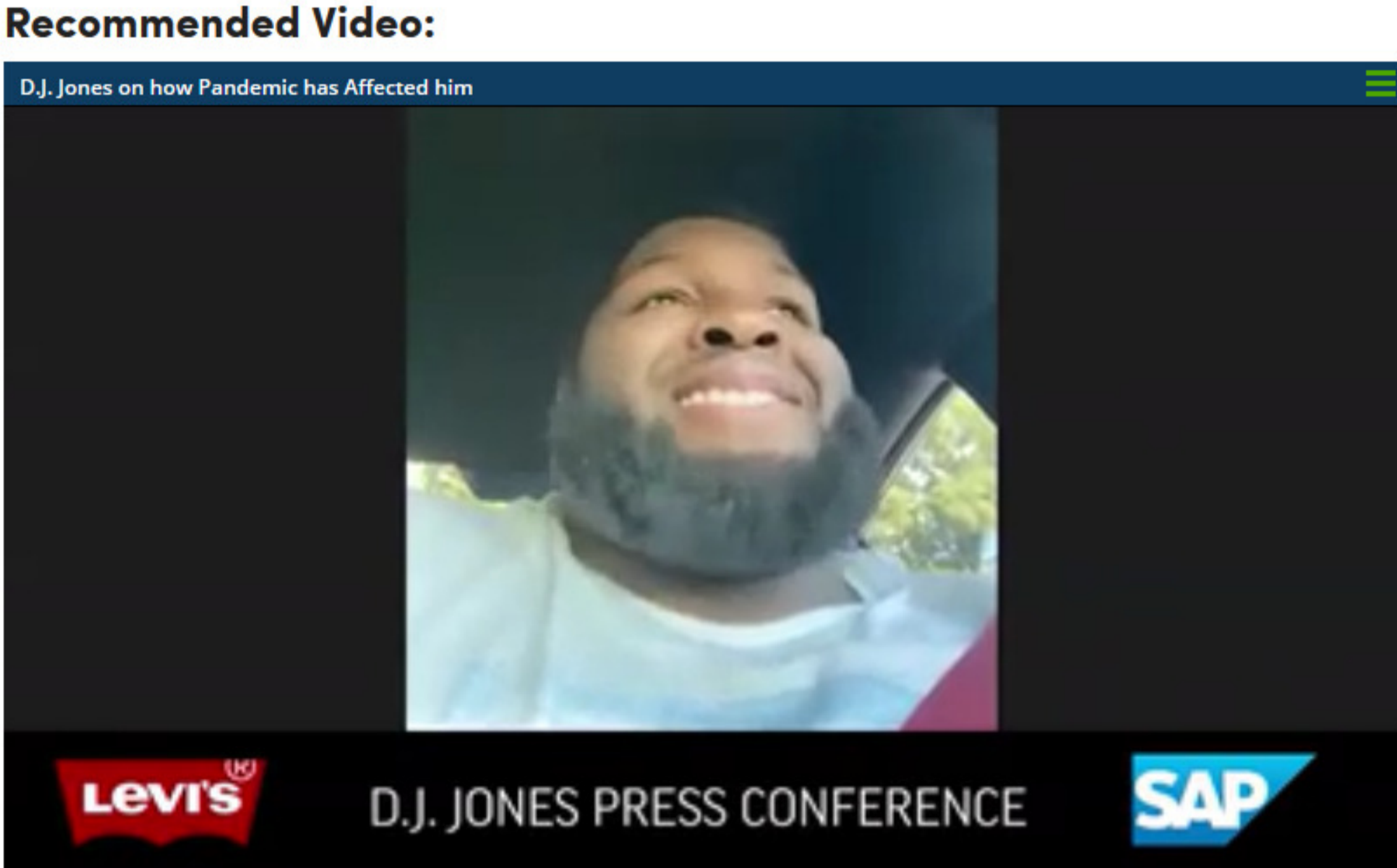
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It's Wednesday afternoon and some pro soccer players are sitting around a small kitchen table, immersed in an intense card game similar to poker. San Francisco Deltas team captain **Nana Attakora** shuffles his cards with his thumbs, patiently waiting for his teammates to make a move.

**Bryan Burke** throws down his hand and says he's out of the game, followed quickly by **Danny Cruz**, as a song from **Kanye West's** "Life of Pablo" album blares in the background.

Attakora stares down **Kyle Bekker**, who's taking his sweet time, but like his teammates before him, Bekker folds as well.

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This is just one of the many "chill days" inside Attakora's two-bedroom, one-bathroom apartment. And if Attakora isn't immersed in a game of cards, he's playing FIFA on the Xbox or watching an all-day Netflix fest at someone else's place.

Which happens to be not that far at all — Attakora lives in the same apartment building on Nob Hill with 11 of his teammates.

"It's like being in a dorm, but a much nicer dorm and without the school," said Deltas midfielder **Tyler Gibson**, who is Attakora's roommate.

Such is life for a dozen players on San Francisco's newest pro-sports start-up. Most pro athletes have to bunk up in the same room at one point during their career, especially in the minor leagues. But these guys actually live together.

"You never get bored, really. There's always something to do," Attakora said. "We all like the same things, which is very important. It's helped us grow as a team."

The Deltas are playing their inaugural season in the **North American Soccer League**, and host the two-time defending champion New York Cosmos at Kezar Stadium on Saturday to begin their fall home schedule. San Francisco finished its spring slate with the league's second-best record (7-4-5), and sits tied for second with the Cosmos in the combined standings with 7 wins, 4 losses and 6 draws.

The idea of players living together came from coach **Marc Dos Santos**, who had a similar setup with the **Montreal Impact of Major League Soccer**. "We saw a lot of good and positive things in that," Santos said of teammates' bunking together.



Photo: Scott Strazzante, The Chronicle



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San Francisco Deltas' Bryan Burke and Karl W. Ouimette chat with team Director of Communications Matthew Berson at their apartment in San Francisco, Calif., on Wednesday, June 28, 2017.

So Deltas CEO **Brian Helmick**, a tech entrepreneur who sold his start-up four years ago, went looking for an apartment complex to house 12 professional soccer players. Helmick enlisted his brother-in-law, **Phil Boersma**, for help.

There's a common San Francisco story with an uncommon ending: Boersma, an executive managing director at ARA Newmark, which helps investors find residential properties to buy, told Helmick it would be next to impossible to find an empty building because of San Francisco's high occupancy rate.

The two kept looking for places near Kezar Stadium and the Deltas' practice facilities at Balboa Park and the Beach Chalet. "Then one day, Phil (Boersma) called me out of the blue and says 'I found it,'" Helmick said.

Boersma found a four-story building with 11 empty apartments. There was just one catch: Helmick had to figure out a way to *buy* a building in San Francisco in less than a week.

"How am I going to find somebody to spend \$8 million dollars to purchase the building?" Helmick recalled.

But as the deadline approached, Helmick put on his entrepreneurial cap, convincing two investors to bid on the building. They won the bid for \$7.6 million the following day and Helmick struck a deal to lease six apartments for three years.

The players had a choice: either live rent-free with a teammate or look for their own spots. The choice was easy — according to the Rent Jungle website, the average price for rent in tony Nob Hill is \$3,218 for a one-bedroom apartment.

"The main thing was I didn't want to come in and focus on finding a place," Attakora said. "With it being a new team, all I wanted to focus on was the soccer side of it. I didn't want to come in and spend my afternoons looking for apartments."

Dos Santos said it makes sense financially to put two players to an apartment. Plus, having nearly half of the team living under the same roof has been a factor in the team's chemistry on and off the field.

"It's a very good thing for us as a club," he said.

The group is split into six apartments, two players to each apartment. Don't think it's some luxurious deluxe apartment in the sky. There's no formal living room and the kitchen is connected to a tiny dining room, which can be a tight squeeze if you try to fit too many people at once.

Attakora said he has learned quite a lot about his teammates, especially **Kenny Teijsse**, who flew from the Netherlands to play for the Deltas.

"Within two weeks, he was my best friend," Attakora said. "He's taught me a lot from his culture back home that I'm not used to. I spent a lot of time with him learning new things, so that's been really interesting."

He learned about Dutch cuisine and the type of music to which Teijsse listens. But ever since Day 1, the thing that stood out to Attakora was Teijsse's style of fashion.

"He's got that European style," Attakora said. "It's real interesting if you get to know what he likes."

As for Gibson and Attakora, they already had the chance to connect two years ago playing for the San Antonio Scorpions, but they hadn't shared an apartment. And unlike **MTV's** show "The **Real World**," both players said there haven't been any problems between them or with the other teammates.

Gibson said he likes the vibe in the building, and being around his teammates on a daily basis doesn't bother him. He has lived with teammates in the past, but in a much larger apartment complex, where the players weren't as closely bunched.

"Here, everything is on top of each other," he said. "We have people right across the hall, below us, next door. Like, if Nana's not here, I'll go there. Sometimes you just want to hang out with different people, and you go just downstairs to see what everybody is up to."

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