



Chicago Fire will hire Georg Heitz as sporting director to oversee the team's rebuild

Georg Heitz will be the Chicago Fire's new sporting director.

A source confirmed Heitz, the former sporting director of Swiss club FC Basel, will oversee soccer operations for the

Fire and be tasked with hiring a new coach and building out the roster. An official announcement is expected Friday. The news was first reported by the Athletic.

As a corresponding move, Nelson Rodriguez — who oversaw both the soccer and business sides of the club — will focus exclusively on business operations. Rodriguez will retain the team president



title but no longer will be the general manager, the source said.

The Fire declined to comment.

Heitz, a Switzerland native, comes with an impressive track record from his time at Basel from 2008 to 2017. The club won eight league titles during his tenure and served as a launching pad for Ivan Rakitic (Barcelona), Granit Xhaka (Arsenal), and Mohamed Salah and Xherdan Shaqiri (Liverpool), among others.

Heitz, however, will have his work cut out for him rebuilding the Fire, who have reached the Major League Soccer playoffs just once since 2012.

Coach Veljko Paunovic and his entire staff were fired in November, and the team has just 17 players on its roster, including several academy products. All three designated player spots are open after the departures of Bastian Schweinsteiger, Nemanja Nikolic and Aleksandar Katai.

Heitz is Joe Mansueto's first major hire since the Morningstar founder became majority owner in September. In October, Rodriguez told reporters the Fire were looking to hire someone to oversee the playing and coaching staff.

"I'm not sure if this is a technical director, a sporting director, the general manager — I think the qualities of the individual will dictate that," Rodriguez said at the time. "This person, though, will have as a primary — and at least initially a solitary — focus, the first team. That's where our focus needs to be on improving."

That search led the Fire to Heitz, with their interest in him leaking on Twitter last week. The Fire begin preseason training Jan. 18.

CREDIT: JEREMY MIKULA

MLS teams may soon meet the likes of Liverpool at expanded 2021 Club World Cup

If you watched reigning Concacaf Champions League winners CF Monterrey put a scare into Liverpool Wednesday during their FIFA Club World Cup semifinal on Wednesday, you may have found yourself wondering how an MLS side would've fared against the famed European giants.

We may soon find out.

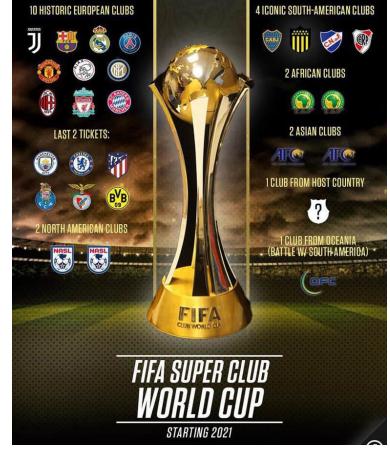
Beginning in the summer of 2021, the Club World Cup is set to become a 24-team, quadrennial tournament, replacing the current six-team annual version that is being contested in Qatar.

Concacaf will be allotted 3 berths in the tournament, with the requirement that no more than two go to the same country, leaving the likelihood that Liga MX and MLS teams will represent the federation together.

The tournament will be held from June 17 to July 4 of 2021 in China, with teams split into eight groups of three for round-robin play. The eight group winners will advance to the knockout phase of the competition.

The current format of the tournament will still be played in 2020, with the winner of the upcoming 2020 Concacaf Champions League to represent the federation. That means there's still a chance for Atlanta United, LAFC, the Montreal Impact, New York City FC

and the Seattle Sounders to become the first MLS clubs to reach the Club World Cup before the field expands.



CREDIT: Ian Quillen Contributor

MLS teams may soon meet the likes of Liverpool at expanded 2021 Club World Cup

Dave Kasper is one of the longest-tenured executives around MLS and according to a new repo

Steven Goff of The Washington Post reported on Friday that Kasper is being re-signed on a multi-year contract extension and with a new title.

Kasper joined D.C. United in 2002 as technical director and in 2007 became the club's general manager. A former pro player, US youth international and college coach, he has helped D.C. to five trophies in his tenure there: the 2004 MLS Cup, two Supporters' Shields (2006, 2007) and two U.S. Open Cup titles (2008, 2013).

D.C. United will officially kick off the 2020 MLS regular season on Feb. 29 when they take on the Colorado Rapids at Audi Field.



Atlanta United export Miguel Almiron's first goal for Newcastle United is a big one

Former Atlanta United playmaker Miguel Almiron has already had plenty of highs and lows during a trying first year for Newcastle United.

Saturday may have been the biggest high yet. The talented Paraguayan finally hit the net for the first time in a NUFC shirt, hammering in an 83rd-minute volley to decide a 1-0 home victory over Crystal Palace.

Almiron was influential early on in his time on Tyneside under former manager Rafa Benitez, but failed to record a goal or an assist. And he struggled to find his role early this season with Steve Bruce taking the helm.



But he's beginning to show signs of becoming a more consistent producer in the final third, with Saturday's goal coming three weeks to the day after recoring his first assist in a 2-2 draw against Manchester City.

Perhaps even he could feel it coming, telling The Guardian recently he was "desperate" for his first tally.

After helping Atlanta win the 2018 MLS Cup, Almiron was sold to Newcastle for an MLS-record fee reported around \$27 million.

CREDIT: Ian Quillen Contributor

Minnesota United looking at Paraguayan forward Luis Amarilla

TRANSFER TRACKER STATUS: Report

There's a striker in South America coming off a career year and a report claims he could be bound for MLS.

Seattle-based reporter Niko Moreno reported on Twitter on Saturday that Minnesota United are the latest MLS team to take interest in Paraguayan forward Luis Amarilla.

Amarilla, 24, has bounced around South America but most recently featured for Ecuador's Universidad Catolica, when he scored an eye-popping 19 goals in 24 appearances to lead the league in the recently-concluded Serie A season.



Making his debut for Libertad in his native Paraguay in 2013, Amarilla has also featured for Paraguay's Sol de América and Argentine outfit Velez Sarsfield. A former Paraguay U-20 international, he hadn't racked up a prolific record prior to this year, but does have experience at multiple clubs in the Copa Sudamericana.

Minnesota could be in the market for a new forward, having lost both Darwin Quintero and Abu Danladi so far this off-season. The Loons will kick off the 2020 MLS regular season March 1 at the Portland Timbers.



The complete list of free agents for the 2020 MLS season

MLS Free Agency is officially open, and there's a host of players available to sign where they please. The process will be ongoing throughout the offseason, and if you need a handy place to keep track of all the moves as they happen, look no further.

That are currently 21 potential free agents still unsigned by MLS clubs.

Player	Previous Club	Status	
Alexander, Eric	DAL	Out of Contract	
Amarikwa, Quincy	DC	Out of Contract	
Anibaba, Jalil	NSH	Out of Contract	
Beasley, DaMarcus	HOU	Retired	
Beckerman, Kyle	RSL	Out of Contract	
Beitashour, Steven	LAFC	Out of Contract	
Beltran, Tony	RSL	Retired	
Bradley, Michael	TOR	Re-signed with Toronto on Dec. 12, 2019	
Carrasco, Servando	LA	Option Decline	
Clark, Ricardo	CLB	Out of Contract	
Collin, Aurelien	PHI	Out of Contract	
Cronin, Sam	MIN	Option Decline	
DeLaGarza, A.J.	HOU	Signed with Miami on Dec. 2, 2019	
Deric, Tyler	HOU	Option Decline	
Feilhaber, Benny	SKC	Option Decline	
Hamid, Bill	DC	Re-signed with D.C. on Dec. 9, 2019	
Harvey, Jordan	LAFC	Out of Contract	
Higuain, Federico	CLB	Out of Contract	
Howard, Tim	COL	Retired	
Johnson, Will	ORL	Out of Contract	
Juninho	LA	Option Decline	
Kljestan, Sacha	ORL	Signed with LA Galaxy on Dec. 11, 2019	
Lade, Connor	RBNY	Retired	
Lampson, Matt	LA	Signed with Columbus on Dec. 12, 2019	
Larentowicz, Jeff	ATL	Re-signed with Atlanta on Dec. 5, 2019	
Marshall, Chad	SEA	Retired	
Meram, Justin	ATL	Option Decline	
Moor, Drew	TOR	Signed with Colorado on Nov. 27, 2019	
Morgan, Ashtone	TOR	Out of Contract	
Olum, Lawrence	MIN	Option Decline	
Parkhurst, Michael	ATL	Retired	
Pontius, Chris	LA	Retired	
Rimando, Nick	RSL	Retired	
Robles, Luis	RBNY	Signed with Miami on Dec. 2, 2019	
Rowe, Kelyn	RSL	Signed with New England on Dec. 4, 2019	
Shea, Brek	ATL	Out of Contract	
Shuttleworth, Bobby	MIN	Out of Contract	
Sinovic, Seth	SKC	Signed with New England on Dec. 17, 2019	
,	SKC		

CREDIT: Charles Boehm

Columbus Crew SC announce transfer of attacking midfielder Lucas Zelarayan for club-record transfer fee

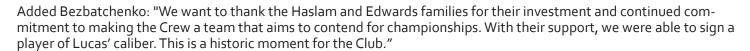
TRANSFER TRACKER STATUS: Signing

Columbus Crew SC has made a splashy move that gives head coach Caleb Porter a dynamic attacking weapon, announcing on Friday the club has acquired Argentine attacking midfielder Lucas Zelarayan from Tigres UANL of Liga MX for the largest transfer fee in club history, reportedly topping \$7 million.

Zelarayan, 27, will join Crew SC as a Designated Player coming off a four-season run with Tigres that saw him score 23 goals and bag 14 assists across all competitions and establish himself as a key contributor for one of North America's most successful clubs. Prior to joining Tigres, Zelarayan played for Argentine side Belgrano where he tallied 10 goals and dished out six assists in 77 appearances.

"We are excited to welcome Lucas Zelarayan to Columbus Crew SC," president and general manager Tim Bezbatchenko said in a club release. "Lucas is both an intelligent and skillful player whose ability to score and create goals makes him the type of playmaker we want on our team. He

has been a key member of one of the most dominant Liga MX teams in recent years, consistently winning national and international titles with Tigres UANL. We expect Lucas to be both a difference-maker and a leader in our squad."



Zelarayan will fill the hole on Crew SC's roster left by midfielder Federico Higuain, who missed most of last year's campaign with a torn ACL before departing the club after an eight-season run that saw him become a Crew icon.

It's the second new signing for Columbus this week following Wednesday's announced signing of free-agent center back Vito Wormgoor as they round out their roster ahead of the 2020 season.







Tu estacion orgullosamente latina !!!

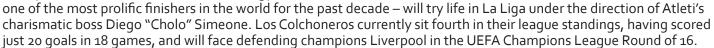
LA Galaxy, Inter Miami target Edinson Cavani headed for Atletico Madrid

TRANSFER TRACKER STATUS: Reports

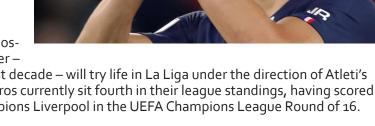
Paris Saint-Germain striker Edinson Cavani is set to move to Spain to join Atletico Madrid, according to European media reports, signaling that the reported Inter Miami and LA Galaxy target won't be joining MLS just yet.

The 32-year-old Uruguayan was said to be a top Designated Player candidate for Miami ahead of their 2020 expansion debut, while the Galaxy more recently waded into the mix, supposedly to replace Zlatan Ibrahimovic as the spearhead of their attack.

High wage demands reportedly stuck a wrench in that possibility, however. And now it seems the rangy frontrunner –



Cavani's current PSG contract expires in June, so he could leave for free at the end of the current European season, though there's a chance he could make the move in the January transfer window for a nominal fee. He's reportedly set to sign a three-year deal with Atleti.



CREDIT: Charles Boehm

Contributor

Patrick Vieira says he has "no intention" of leaving Nice as Miami rumors swirl

Amidst a continuing stream of rumors linking him to Inter Miami CF, Patrick Vieira says he has no plans for a departure

from his current post as head coach of Lique 1 side OGC Nice.

Vieira's name has emerged as the reported top target for Inter Miami in its ongoing coaching search, with ESPN FC reporting last week that club brass expressed confidence a deal would get done to bring the Frenchman stateside for the franchise's 2020 expansion season.

Vieira, however, says he's staying put at Nice, according to quotes reported by UK outlet Metro, The comments were actually addressing a question about a different departure rumor that linked him to Arsenal, to which Vieira responded by saying he hasn't been contacted by the Gunners and wasn't interested in a move there or anywhere else.

"Was I contacted? No. It's flattering (to be linked) but I know how lucky I am to be at Nice," Viera said. "I don't have intention or desire to go elsewhere."



Vieira wrote much of his legend on the pitch at Arsenal, where he played from 1996-2005. He's currently in the middle of Nice's Ligue 1 campaign, where the club is 10th on the table, but he has coached in MLS before in a successful run with New York City FC from 2016-18 — part of what fueled the speculation he might be inclined to return to the

Of course, these things can change quickly, so read into that what you will. For the moment, though, Miami's head coaching position remains vacant.

CREDIT: Ari Liljenwall

Contributor

US men's national team best XI of the decade

The book has closed on another decade of international soccer, a passing marker that has compelled us to cobble together the finest possible US men's national team side out of the pool of players from the last 10 years.

Let's set parameters for the exercise, with the idea that there's one monumental do-or-die game to be played against a worthy foe and we need a fully functional lineup for tackling the challenge. There is no minimum requirement for games played or any such statistical marker to meet for inclusion. Performance in high-pressure competitive matches tends to hold more weight in judging, but it's not the only consideration (as you'll see soon enough).

Finally, rather than use the totality of achievement metric, we're going to use the peak powers rule. That means we're taking each of these players in their prime form of the decade. And as such, we believe the team assembled would be capable of testing, if not besting, any opponent on its day.



Before we roll out the XI, let's introduce our very versatile, very useful bench. Brad Guzan is the capable back-up netminder. John Anthony Brooks offers modern center back play, while Geoff Cameron can ably cover three different positions. Maurice Edu is our designated relief gatekeeper, with Alejandro Bedoya and Jermaine Jones the all-action midfield options off the pine. Fabian Johnson can operate up or down either flank. To torment tiring defenses, we've brought along Jordan Morris and Bobby Wood.

And now, your starters...

Tim Howard

Of course, the USMNT shot-stopping legend will forever be remembered for his heroic, record-setting, meme flood-inspiring stand in the team's World Cup 2014 knockout loss to Belgium. His long lead throw to start the winning play against Algeria at the 2010 tourney should live on as long. In all, Howard posted 23 wins and 17 clean sheets in competitive matches during the decade.

Steve Cherundolo

This was a tough call, but in the end, Cherundolo's cool defensive presence and possession support took the spot. He was a solid performer at World Cup 2010, and I often wonder how the 2011 Gold Cup final might have turned out had he not departed early with an injury.

Omar Gonzalez

Oh, there will be some jeers about his nightmare in Couva, but that doesn't change the fact that no US center back put in more strong shifts than Gonzo over the past 10 years. The dedicated air marshal went the distance in 14 competitive shutouts (tops among all US back liners for the decade) and was excellent in slim losses to scary foes Germany and Belgium at World Cup 2014.

Matt Besler

The Sporting KC mainstay also enjoyed a solid World Cup 2014 (at least up until Romelu Lukaku steamrolled him wide in the round-of-16 extras). The calming, well-rounded Besler also was the only USMNT player to start both of the team's victorious Gold Cup finals, and finished second among center backs with 11 competitive clean-sheet participations.

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DaMarcus Beasley

Run DMB had already transitioned to left back for the Nats by the time the decade started, but he spent the first few years out on the edge of the frame. He rose from the near-dead in 2013 to help notch big World Cup qualifying shutouts against Costa Rica and at Mexico before captaining the team to Gold Cup glory that summer. Beasley then continued his surprising rebirth as a shut-down defender with a splendid World Cup 2014 showing.

Tyler Adams

This is the only guy in the lineup who didn't actually play a competitive match during the decade, so some might consider this a wild swing. I'll live with any such scrutiny, because at his fit best Adams is the perfect guy to man our No. 6 role. He breaks up rushes for breakfast and then morphs central park turnovers into offense.

Michael Bradley

I'm in the crowd that thinks Bradley spent far too much time over the last 10 years playing either too high or too deep in midfield. When properly used as a No. 8, he was a gut-busting, traffic-directing force to be reckoned with for several years. He topped all with six Futbol de Primera Award top-three finishes and shined at two World Cups. He even pitched in with a few of the biggest US goals of the decade.

Landon Donovan

Thanks to a certain infamous selection decision, the Nats' all-time joint top scorer actually played less than four years worth of US matches. Nevertheless, Donovan remained a vital play-driving cog until the end. He scored three goals at World Cup 2010, including the last-gasp shot heard 'round the world against Algeria, and added another half-dozen on his Golden Ball way to the 2013 Gold Cup crown.

Clint Dempsey

The first of three players in our side to take home two US Soccer Player of the Year prizes during the decade, Deuce brought a blend of fire and verve to attack on a scale we may not see for a while. Dempsey scored 40 goals during the decade, with 30 of those coming in competitive matches. While wearing the armband in 2014, he became the first US-MNT player to score in three World Cups.

Christian Pulisic

We're not going to run a conventional No. 10 with wingers setup in attacking midfield. I figured we'd just let the reigning US Soccer Player of the Year interchange at will with Dempsey and Donovan. It sure would be fun to see what the Chelsea attack engine could accomplish with running mates of this caliber to share the attention of defenders. His elusiveness on and off the ball would only multiply.

Jozy Altidore

The Toronto FC ace was the team's top scorer during the decade, with 24 of his 42 strikes coming in competitive matches. Altidore is also arguably the most complete striker the US has ever had. In particular, his passing game when facing goal is a highly underrated boost to the offense. It's just a shame that an untimely injury and the monster World Cup qualifying letdown of two years ago limited him to just 23 World Cup minutes during his prime years. CREDIT: MLSsoccer staff

CREDIT: Greg Seltzer Contributor



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