

Don't consider MLS in Austin a done deal just yet

*Despite passing a stadium deal,
Austin FC must overcome challenges*



A rendering of what Austin FC's McKalla Place stadium would look like hosting a soccer game. The Austin City Council voted to allow Austin FC owner Anthony Precourt to build a stadium on the government-owned land on Aug. 15. The stadium is expected to be built and host Austin FC's games starting in the 2021 MLS season. Photo courtesy of mls2atx.com. Reprinted with permission.

Getting Austin a Major League Soccer team has been a dream of many Austin sports fans like me for a long time. It's been a long history of excitement when we got a hint of Austin getting a team, followed by a period of hope, but in the end



TIBBETTS' TIDBITS

we always ended up disappointed. Every time the MLS looked to expand, we thought that this would be the time we would get a team.

Then Columbus Crew owner Anthony Precourt said that he was considering Austin as a potential city to relocate his team. This excited us and gave us hope, but almost a year passed before we heard any new news of significance. Then, the biggest breakthrough for Austin getting a MLS team came on Aug. 15, as the Austin City Council voted to allow Precourt to build a stadium at McKalla Place.

The hope for Austin getting a MLS team is now the highest it has ever been. Precourt has already revealed that the name of the potential team, Austin FC, and he has also released the team's logo featuring two green trees in the center. Now it seems that Austin is just a temporary stadium, a training facility and an announcement from the MLS away from officially being home to a team in the biggest soccer league in the United States. Because the stadium deal has been passed, it seems like the hope might end in celebration this time, not disappointment.

The stadium deal was a huge win for Austin, and not just because we are finally getting a

team in the fastest growing sports league in the United States. Not only will Precourt Sports Ventures be building a \$200 million stadium to be owned by the city of Austin that can be used in a variety of ways, but Austin FC will be responsible, according to the term sheet, to provide a multitude of community benefits to Austin, including a donation of almost \$5 million to affordable housing and more than \$50 million toward developing youth soccer in Austin. Not only will Austin FC be bringing high-level professional soccer to Austin, but they will also be helping to grow soccer's roots in Austin's youth.

Just how well will Austin FC do at filling up its new stadium for games? It's a legitimate question, especially considering Austin has never been home to a MLS team, or any major professional sports team, for that matter. But I don't believe it should be too hard to fill out a majority of the 20,000-seat stadium; almost 100,000 people go to each Longhorn football game despite the team hovering around .500 for most of the past decade.

The biggest reason to have doubt in the MLS coming to Austin is the fact that they have no place to play right now. For the first two years of the Austin FC, from when the team is supposed to enter the MLS in 2019 to when the McKalla Place Stadium is supposed to be finished in 2021, the team will have to play at a temporary stadium. Finding a temporary stadium to host the team for their first two seasons is the biggest obstacle that the Austin FC will have to overcome, as not finding a place to play by the 2019 MLS season would completely derail Austin's chances of securing the team. Right now, it looks like the Dell Diamond, home of the Round Rock Express,



The Austin FC badge features two green trees. The branches hold 11 leaves, which represents fans supporting the 11 players on the field, while the two intertwining trunks represent the joining of Austin FC and the city of Austin. Photo courtesy of mls2atx.com. Reposted with permission.

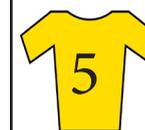
is the best bet for where Austin FC will play during the 2019 and 2020 seasons, but it is far from being a done deal.

Another obstacle for the Columbus Crew moving to Austin is a lawsuit that the city of Columbus has filed against Precourt over his attempt to relocate the team. So until Precourt can get past those two obstacles, don't consider the Austin FC a done deal just yet.

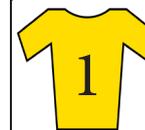
Columbus Crew by the numbers



seasons the Columbus Crew has played in the MLS



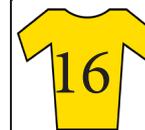
seasons that Precourt Sports Ventures has owned the Crew



MLS championship won by the Crew, in 2008



games the Crew has won this seasons along with 9 losses and 8 ties



goals scored by Crew forward Gyasi Zardes this season