





Rowdies to return to USL First Division in 2010

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A new ownership group announced Thursday the return of the Tampa Bay Rowdies soccer team to the USL First Division. Speaking for the group, which includes two other partners, local restaurateur David Laxer and Boston resident Hinds Howard, Rowdies President and CEO Andrew Nestor gave a synopsis of what soccer fans can expect.

"We will compete and take a serious approach to building a team that the community can be a part of and feel proud of," said Nestor to a crowd of supporters and former Rowdies from as far back as the 1975 team. "We believe the

Tampa Bay area has matured into a viable and enthusiastic market for professional sports. Our goal will be to honor the success and tradition of the Tampa Bay Rowdies, while creating a fun, exciting soccer atmosphere for a new generation of families, players and fans, both on the field and through our community and youth development initiatives."

The Tampa Bay Rowdies will field its first team in 2010 in the USL First Division, the top flight of United Soccer Leagues. Plans for 2009 include hosting exhibition matches, hiring staff and signing players and starting the Tampa Bay Rowdies Youth Academy. USL Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Tim Holt says the team will bring good things to the community, fans and youth who have grown up as the game has matured.

The club has named Perry Van Der Beck as its technical director and director of community development. Van Der Beck is a well-known former Rowdie with strong local youth soccer ties. He was the first Rowdie ever drafted out of high school and was captain of the 1980 US Olympic team. Van Der Beck later coached the Tampa Bay Mutiny and has coached numerous youth teams as a Tampa resident.

"The ownership group is serious about the game and have a wonderful respect for the traditions that were established here in the 70's. I am proud and happy to be a part of it all, especially with so much local support and expertise," said Van Der Beck.

The Rowdies will play in a stadium to be built in northwest Hillsborough County, with easy access from Pinellas and Pasco counties. Plans and renderings will be shared before the end of summer, according to Nestor. The familiar logo, which featured Ralph Rowdie, is currently being fine-tuned, although the team will retain the colors green and yellow. A Web site is also under construction, but fans can still log on to register for updates at www.tbrowdies.com.

After the North American Soccer League (NASL) disbanded in the mid-1980s, the Tampa Bay Rowdies were among the teams that helped give birth to what is now the USL First Division. The Rowdies were founding members of the eastern-based American Soccer League, formed in 1988.

The Rowdies will not be the only former NASL name present in the USL First Division. The league is currently home to the Portland Timbers, Vancouver Whitecaps and Seattle Sounders.



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