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## Rowdies to return to USL-1 in 2010

New owners to launch club and build privately financed stadium

USL News Release

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TAMPA, FL -- New owners announced a throwback to earlier times today with the return of the Tampa Bay Rowdies soccer team to the USL First Division. Speaking for the ownership group, which included 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.



"Soccer is a family-friendly sport and the plans of this group are impressive. We think the time is right and the ownership is committed to bringing a quality product to the USL family," said Holt. "We have long wanted to have a USL-1 franchise in our home town and have been very particular with any potential ownership scenarios over the years before the current group came to the forefront just over a year ago. Their stature and plans for building a full soccer club and a privately financed stadium will take Tampa soccer to new heights in North American soccer."

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](http://www.tbrowdies.com).

"We are really interested in connecting with former Rowdies, Loudies, and Fannies," said David Laxer, who grew up as a young player at Campkickinthagrass and was an original season ticket holder along with his family. "We are hoping they'll find us online so they can become a part of our now larger family."

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 league later merged with the Western Soccer League (born in 1986) to form the American Professional Soccer League (APSL). The APSL donned the abbreviated "A-League" name and in 1997 merged into what is now United Soccer Leagues, the system of soccer leagues founded and headed by USL founder Francisco Marcos, a public relations executive with the original NASL Rowdies and several other NASL clubs. The A-League was renamed to USL First Division in 2005. The Rowdies last played in what is now the USL from 1988-93 and made four playoff appearances in six seasons. The Rowdies won the division title in 1989 and reached the APSL Championship Game in 1992.



"I am thrilled to see everything come full circle," said Marcos. "The Rowdies have been in my blood since my early years in Tampa, which was among the reasons I moved the USL headquarters here from Dallas in 1996. It is perhaps fate that my former team is returning to the USL First Division – after so many years – in a time in which the sport in this country is experiencing a level of success it has not seen since the peak of the NASL. The league itself has advanced greatly from what it was during the late eighties and early nineties when there were a handful of teams trying to keep the sport going at the professional level despite the difficulties. They represent one of many teams and numerous owners who have played a part in getting the sport to this point, and that is why this is such a triumphant return."

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. In addition, the San Jose Earthquakes (currently an MLS side) were originally reborn as a member of the Western Soccer League in 1985, and played through 1988. The Sounders were reborn in 1994 in the APSL, and although Seattle will be leaving USL-1 after 2007, the name will continue in MLS after resounding fan support in a public vote. The Whitecaps name returned in 2001 when the veteran team previously known as the 86ers was re-named. The Timbers joined the USL First Division in 2001.

A glance back at the Rowdies history:

\* 1975: The Rowdies joined 19 other teams in the North American Soccer League and were owned by George Strawbridge, a wealthy Philadelphia businessman whose vision was sparked by the fact that Tampa had no professional sports teams at the time. In that first year, playing in the old Tampa Stadium, the Rowdies were a huge success on the field, going 16-6 and winning the NASL championship, 2-0 over the Portland Timbers in San Jose in front of 17,483 fans. The Rowdies were also a relative success in the stands at home, drawing an average of 10,728.

\* 1978: The Rowdies reach the NASL championship game, playing in front of 73,064 fans at Giants Stadium, losing 3-1 to the New York Cosmos. Tampa



finished the season 18-12, averaging 18,123 fans a

game. Rodney Marsh led the team in goals with 18, followed by Dave Robb with 16.

\* 1979: Tampa once again finished second in the NASL championship, losing 2-1, this time to the Vancouver Whitecaps in front of 64,035 fans. Rowdie Oscar Fabbiani led the league in scoring with 25 goals.

\* 1980: Tampa averaged a team-record 28,345 fans per game, but only made it to the American Conference semifinals before losing. The Rowdies finished the season 19-13 which amounted to a team-record 32 games played in a season. Steve Wegerle led the Rowdies in scoring with nine goals.

\* 1984: One of only five teams left in the NASL, Tampa finished the year 9-15 and didn't make the playoffs. Roy Wegerle, Steve Wegerle's brother, led the team with nine goals, tied with Neill Roberts. This would be the final season of the NASL.

\* 1986: Cornelia Corbett became the team's sole owner in 1986. With Rodney Marsh as the head coach, the Rowdies played as an independent team for two years, playing many "friendlies" before joining the American Indoor Soccer Association for one season (1986-87).

\* 1988-93: In the summer of 1988, the Rowdies joined the third incarnation of the American Soccer League. After six years, the ASL folded.

\* 2008: Dozens of former players made their home in the Tampa Bay area. Hundreds, if not thousands, of Tampa Bay area children have taken up the game of soccer following the Rowdies' influence.

The spirit is still alive as the Rowdies join the USL with plans to build a new stadium -- with no taxpayer money.

*\* Click photos for larger version*



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