

Professional soccer's trading window is closed and the draft is completed. Major League Soccer teams are into training. Two teams have been invited to compete in the Pan-Pacific Championship, a new international tournament in Hawaii, bringing together teams from the US, Japan, and Australia.

On February 20, the tournament launches with a game between LA Galaxy and the Japanese club, Gamba Osaka. David Beckham has returned from training with the English Premier Club, Arsenal, to join Galaxy in the tournament. ESPN Classic will carry the game live at 9:00 PM MST.

MLS Cup Champion, Houston Dynamo; Yamazaki Nabisco Cup Champion, Gamba Osaka, LA Galaxy, and Sydney FC make up this year's competition. Watch the skills of Endo who plays with Gamba and an exceptional young player, Alex Brosque who shares the Sydney spotlight with Brazilian Juninho. This is a terrific new opportunity to see soccer style from the Pacific Rim.

In the US, the "pre-season" is already underway with friendly matches in warm places. Several teams are in residency training in Florida while some are using the warmth of southern California. The actual opening game is March 29 but being match-fit before that requires some games and playing in Chicago or Columbus in February is an unpleasant thought.

Expansion team, Seattle, will keep the name of their semi-pro team, the Sounders. One of the owners, Drew Carey of television fame, is selling fan memberships with voting rights, a system similar to many of the European clubs. It could be possible that the fans

might fire a coach with a no-confidence vote. When the team enters play in 2009, it will be interesting to see how that works.

MLS Commissioner, Don Garber, is looking to Pennsylvania for the next expansion. Philadelphia has agreed to a \$47 million dollar investment to back a new soccer stadium in an adjoining suburb, Chester, modeling it on the MLS plan to surround the stadium with 25 youth fields.

Wherever this model has been built, the surrounding area has experienced an economic transformation. In suburban Denver, (Commerce City to be exact) in the neighborhood where the Rapids opted to build the Dick's Sporting Goods Stadium, there are new shopping malls, business centers, and multiple upscale restaurants sprouting. The influx of professional, adult, and youth teams brings a whole new opportunity for economic development.

- Local area teams will fill the Young Center in Spearfish this weekend for the indoor tournament. Games begin on Friday with finals on Sunday.
- Next weekend, February 22-24, teams will meet in Pierre for indoor competition with the Gillette tournament to follow on February 29 through March 2. The local indoor season winds up with a return to Rapid City on March 7-9.

Registration for the spring season continues through the first week of March. If you want to guarantee your child's place on the roster from last fall, you need to complete

registration by February 29. You can register online (www.rcysl.com), download the forms, or pick one up at Scheels.