

NEW USL TEAM COMING TO LI IN '28 SEASON

USL Long Island will play at Hofstra and looks to be community asset

BY BEN DICKSON

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Backed by a World Cup champion and a leader of Long Island youth soccer, another professional men's soccer team is coming to the Island.

USL Long Island will debut in the United Soccer League's League One — a professional league on the third tier of the U.S. soccer pyramid that launched in 2019 and currently has 17 clubs — in March 2028 and play its home games at Hofstra's Stuart Stadium.

Team co-founder and president Sara Whalen Hess, a Greenlawn native who helped the U.S. women's national team win the 1999 Women's World Cup, and principal owner Glenn Schneider, the CEO of SUSA FC, the Central Islip-based soccer academy, were part of a group that announced the launch of the team in a news conference at Hofstra on Wednesday afternoon.

"I basically reached out to the USL in November of last year and just said: I'm from Long Island, do you have a Long Island franchise? Do we have a team on Long Island?" Whalen Hess told Newsday in a Zoom interview on Tuesday. "They were kind of like, 'We would love to have a team on Long Island, and we would love for you to help us do that.'"

"I started working very closely with the USL from November on, and I was lucky enough to be introduced to Glenn and meet with Glenn in February. . . . We are extremely aligned in terms of what this club can be, what we want it to be, and why we want to do this hilarious thing in the first place."

USL Long Island — a working title as an official team name, crest and colors will be unveiled in the coming months with the help of fan input — is the second minor-league soccer team to be launched on Long Island in the past 11 months. The Island F.C. was launched last October and will debut in MLS Next Pro — the professional development league of Major League Soccer and a fellow third-tier league in the U.S. ecosystem — in March in a new modular stadium at Uniondale's Mitchel Athletic Complex.

"When Sara approached me about getting involved with a professional sports team, I really never thought about doing anything like that," Schneider said. "I was really just focused on the youth. But after listening to her vision about the community and how we want to make this really more than a team, but a home for the community, I really liked her vision, and it just struck a nerve with me and I just felt that it was something that I wanted to be a part of."

"Now that we've been at it since February, I get more excited about it every day. I think it's going to be just a great — not only a great team — but it's going to be great for the community as well."

Getting out in the community is the franchise's No. 1 objective, said Whalen Hess, who previously worked with USL League One's Westchester Soccer Club.

She recognized that Long Islanders are a "fickle bunch," and the team isn't just going to plop onto the Island and ask people to respect it. She said they will go into the community to become part of the fab-



From left, team principals Glenn Schneider (CEO of SUSA FC), Sara Whalen Hess (member of 1999 Team USA World Cup champions) and Lee O'Neill, president of USL League One.

MAJOR FORCE IN THE MINORS

Minor-league teams on Long Island, past and present:

Baseball and softball

Long Island Ducks, 2000-present
New York Rise, 2024-present

Basketball

Long Island Nets, 2016-present
Long Island Ducks, 1977-78
Long Island Knights, 1985, 1987-88
Long Island Surf, 1991-2001

Soccer

The Island F.C. (Soccer), starting in 2027
USL Long Island (Soccer), starting in 2028
Long Island Rough Riders (Soccer), 1994-present
New York Cosmos (Soccer), 1972-73, 2013-20
New York Power (Soccer), 2000-03
New Amsterdam FC (Soccer), 2020-21
New York Arrows (Indoor Soccer), 1978-84
New York Express (Indoor Soccer), 1986-87

Football

New York Dragons, 2001-08
Long Island Bulls, 1969-70
Long Island Chiefs, 1973
New York Sentinels, 2009

Hockey

Long Island Ducks, 1959-73
Long Island Cougars, 1973-75

Lacrosse

Long Island/New York Lizards, 2001-20
New York Saints, 1989-2003
Long Island Tomahawks, 1975
New York Riptide, 2018-24
New York Titans, 2008

Other sports

New York Liberties (Volleyball), 1987-89
Long Island Jawz (Roller Hockey), 1996-97
New York Sets/Apples (Tennis), 1974-77

ric beyond soccer, and she hopes the team's website, USL-LongIsland.com, will be a place where people can engage with opportunities to volunteer or intern.

Schneider, also the former CEO of U.S. nutrition at Nature's Bounty, noted how he loves to build things from scratch. He can tap into his network from SUSA, whether it be high school, club or college coaches and administrators, to help build a youth pathway to the club.

USL League One president Lee O'Neill said the team represents an opportunity to "put Long Island soccer on the map."

"I think it's such a hotbed for talent," he said. "At the end of the day, I think it's been proba-

bly underserved for a long time. They've done very well in the youth space, and that's a connection to the professional pathway, so for us it's a really exciting area."

Jay Artinian, Hofstra's assistant vice president for athletics and chief operating officer, and Village of Hempstead Mayor Waylyn Hobbs Jr. also spoke during Wednesday's news conference. Several youth soccer players were in attendance, and honored guests included Long Island natives Shep Messing, a goalkeeper for the 1972 U.S. Olympic team, and Sue Ryan, who coached Stony Brook's women's soccer team for 31 years.

The USL is on track to become the first U.S. professional league with promotion and rele-

gation in 2028. The USL Championship is USL's league in the second tier of the U.S. system, and USL Premier is a planned tier-one league that would begin play in 2028 and potentially rival MLS.

"As the USL is continuing to grow and move towards [promotion and relegation], Long Island 100% deserves to have a team in the USL now," Whalen Hess said. "This could have maybe been a year or two ago, or maybe three to five years ago, but it's got to happen now."

"Long Island deserves it. This is a competitive group of people. They want to be involved and they want something to be a part of and feel like they belong to, and they don't want to have to go over a bridge or through a tunnel."