The Major League Soccer (referred to as “MLS” or ‘the league’) is a men’s professional soccer league certified by U.S soccer. The MLS is considered soccer’s highest level in the United States and Canada. The league consists of 22 teams (19 from the U.S and 3 from Canada). The arrival of foreign players has made the league grow significantly in the last decade and has gained a lot of popularity among the American population. However, there is a long way for the MLS to reach the level of popularity that other sports have.

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**Strengths**

MLS among the most distributed soccer leagues

MLS signed an eight-year contract in 2014 selling the television and media rights to FOX Sports, ESPN and Univision in the United States. However, the MLS has also signed contracts with international television partners and has expanded their league to more than 150 countries and territories. Among these television partners, there is: Globosat (Brazil), Sky Sports (UK), Letv Sports (China), Abu Dhabi Media (Middle
East and North Africa), BeIN Sport (Asia and Australia), Fuji TV (Japan), FOX Sports (Africa), and Eurosport (Europe).

Sixth-best attended professional soccer league

Last season, the league broke the average attendance record in the history of the MLS. The average attendance was 21,692 fans per game, meaning, forty percent higher if compared to the 2006 season. Moreover, the MLS had a total attendance of more than 7.3 million fans and summed 162 sellouts (one more than the previous season). As a result, the league was named the sixth most attended professional soccer league worldwide.

Player diversity and foreign stars

On the previous season, the MLS had a total of 59 different nationalities spread among the its clubs. This portrays the diversity of players on this league while also making the MLS the most diverse league in North America. On the other hand, the arrival of foreign superstars on the last decade has guaranteed a steady growth for the league. On the past years, fans have seen players like David Beckham, Didier Drogba, Steven Gerrard, Frank Lampard, Andrea Pirlo, Kaká, David Villa, among many more, landing on the MLS. Their arrival has expanded the MLS brand, helping it reach international recognition and, of course, sell more around the globe.

Increased number of soccer-specific stadiums

It is not a secret that the MLS is planning to expand to 28 teams in the years to come. However, in order to expand and grow the league one of the requirements from the MLS to new teams is having their own soccer-specific stadium. The reason why is because it has increase the investments into the league and for fans to have a place the can call ‘their own.’ As an example, the Orlando City SC was required to have a soccer-specific stadium few years ago before entering the MLS.

Weaknesses

Not the most popular sport in the U.S

Although soccer’s popularity in the U.S has been growing steadily in the last decade, there is still a long way to go. There are many sports with greater popularity and reach in the us than soccer, for example, baseball, football, basketball, and ice hockey. These sports have managed to under the skin of the U.S population, and has even become part in family tradition. That last one has a significant impact on soccer because it affects the decision of the young when deciding which discipline they want to be a part of. Therefore, since soccer is relatively ‘new’ some might be hesitant about it.

Young players have the desire of playing in Europe
Europe is where the highest level and most popular soccer is played. It is where the superstars that every young soccer player admires and looks up to. Therefore, it is important to understand how difficult it is to reach that level, even for the South American countries where soccer is life. Therefore, the MLS, as every club in South America, has to work as a fabric of great players who then make the ‘jump’ to Europe to reach their potential. That way, not only these players will help the national team reach great things, but eventually they will return to their home country as ‘superstars.’ An example of this is Landon Donovan.

Opportunities

Invest on foreign superstars at the end of their career

As seen on the last decade, the arrival of foreign international superstars at the end of their career has had a huge positive impact on the league. These superstars had serve as the marketing face of their respective clubs and the MLS as a whole. The tendency of bringing in superstars from other leagues will not only have a positive impact on the financial aspect, but it will also increase the soccer fan base and boost the young’s’ game. Moreover, the arrival of foreign players has put the MLS on the ‘soccer map’ as people who follow players like Kaka, will thus follow the Orlando City SC, for example.

Increase number club affiliations

There is a big opportunity to increase the level of the league by increasing the number of club affiliations between MLS clubs and foreign (preferably Europeans) clubs. Taking as an example New York City FC, they are affiliated with Manchester City (a high caliber club). This affiliation has helped them land young players like Yangel Herrera, who was bought by Manchester City and then loaned to New York City FC. Also, this will serve for American players to easily make their jump to Europe.

MLS “Legends” match

The idea of doing a yearly “Legends” match is to bring retired players who are on their 40s and 50s to one of the MLS Stadiums. However, aside from trying to bring retired superstars like Ronaldinho or Maradona, retired MLS players are ideal as well because it will be more appealable to fans. Moreover, some coaches can be part of it too. The idea is to have a team like the MLS All-Star, but in this case the LA Galaxy Legends, for example, and players like Beckham or Donovan can be brought to face FC Barcelona Legends with Ronaldinho.

Threats

Growing leagues more financial power (China)

In the past few years, the Chinese Super League have gained a lot of popularity because its clubs have invested a huge amount of money into bringing players at their
peak level. One of the most notorious cases is Ezequiel Lavezzi, who at the age of 31 was offered a contract with a weekly salary of £493,000, making the highest paid soccer player in the history. There are several players that have decided to move to China to take advantage of these contracts. That being said, the MLS cannot compete with that kind of money.

**MLS is perceived as a ‘retirement’ league**

A major threat to the league is that players in Europe see the MLS as a retirement league. Therefore, players at their peak level might stay away from the MLS because of that. However, that is something seen across the whole continent because every player in Latin America, and the U.S, wants to go to Europe. So, there is an opportunity from the clubs to provide promising players are then sent abroad getting good money for them.

**Other popular sports in the US**

In the United States there are other sports that reign over soccer. For instance, baseball, football, basketball, and ice hockey. Game day events for these sports might steal fans who were going to attend a soccer game. Although soccer is becoming more popular among Americans, it still has a long way to go to compare itself with football, for example. Moreover, for people that do not love soccer, the event itself might be boring or slow. So, some may choose something more quick and exciting as ice hockey.
References


