

My View

The price of frugality



BY MIKE WOITALLA

Frugality. MLS's word of the year. As D.C. United coach Ray Hudson said, "We need every red cent, and by the time the season starts, we'll be cutting those red cents in half."

MLS Commissioner Don Garber, talking recently to SA Senior Editor Will Kuhns*, repeatedly referred to the tight-fisted approach.

On contraction: "Economics. It's pure economics."

On administration: "20 percent less than what it was a year ago."

On player's salaries: "We are as lean as we possibly can be. We are bare to the bones in terms of efficiency. Still, the majority of our budget goes to pay players."

But how much will frugality cost the league?

On the player front — the fear of losing Americans to foreign leagues — has been overstated.

February's SuperDraft proved that most young U.S. players, because they're not in demand overseas, must play here. They don't have the leverage to demand high salaries from MLS; they can hope to use MLS as a stepping stone or move into a higher salary bracket as several of their predecessors have.

That the nation's top stars, such as Claudio Reyna, play abroad makes MLS no different than the vast majority of the world's leagues.

The exorbitant price on foreign superstars has long put them out the reach of MLS, which must continue finding players like Diego Serna and Alex Pineda Chacon — affordable talent that's worth paying to watch.

Marketing the league on a penurious budget is perilous. It's long been underpublicized. But a half-decade deal with ABC/ESPN, thanks to Philip Anschutz's purchase of World Cup rights, creates hope.

Garber says if MLS limits its losses, it will lure new investors during the next five years that span the current investors' commitment.

Indeed, if MLS can be run on the cheap and be a *major* American sports league, it will impress a lot of people.

It will also make history.

*See the Garber interview at: www.socceramerica.com/article.cfm?article=55669