MLS Commissioner Don Garber Addresses Key Issues at Talk

Successful Pro Soccer Teams must Provide Quality, Customer Service, Opportunities

Don Garber was featured at the Commissioners' Series, a distinguished speaker series held by the Sports Business Institute of the USC Marshall School of Business. David M. Carter, executive director of the Sports Business Institute, said Garber highlighted how he is building the value of the league's franchises by working to raise the quality of play, strengthen customer service and identify growth opportunities.

Garber, who was named MLS' commissioner in 1999 after a 16-year career in the National Football League, also pointed out that his league's teams must manage an array of tough issues to thrive. For example, the teams need to keep a good balance of both domestic and foreign star players on their rosters, and they must maintain the loyalty of hard-core fans while also pursuing casual fans.

Another issue that was touched on, Carter noted, is that youth soccer league players and their parents "are a perfect target market" for the MLS. Yet given the many hours that soccer families spend on weekends involved with their own teams' games and practices, Carter said, MLS teams "have to find a way to capture that fan base while making sure they're not viewed as a competitor to family time."

More than 200 people attended Garber's talk, which took place on campus at the Town and Gown. In the audience were nearly two dozen executives from MLS and the league's Los Angeles Galaxy and Chivas USA teams, along with youth soccer officials, local business leaders and USC alumni and students. A silent auction also was held at the event to raise funds for the Marshall School's Sports Business Institute.

The Commissioners Series, which was launched in November, 2006, features presentations by the commissioners of America's premier sports leagues and organizations. Carter said he anticipates scheduling another Commissioners Series address for the fall of 2009.

About USC Marshall School of Business
Based in Los Angeles at the University of Southern California, at the crossroads of the Pacific Rim, the USC Marshall School is the best place to learn the art and science of business. The school's programs serve nearly 5,000 undergraduate, graduate, professional and executive-education students, who attend classes in facilities at the main Los Angeles campus, as well as satellite facilities in Irvine and San Diego. USC Marshall also operates a Global MBA program in conjunction with Jiao Tong University in Shanghai, China.