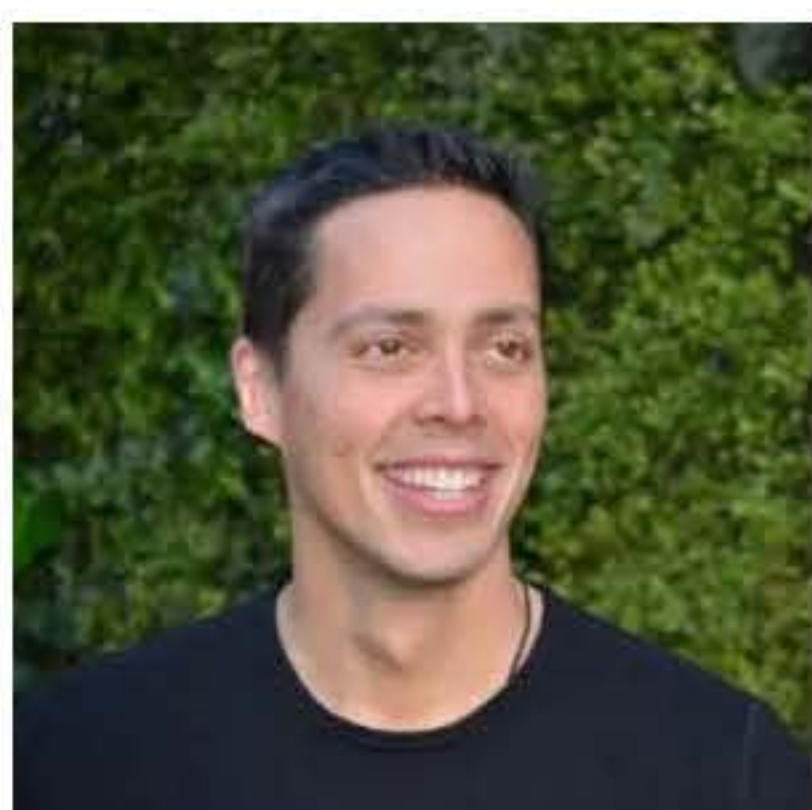


"This is a business where if the public does not embrace this club as their own club, it's not going to work."

by Nipun Chopra

March 10, 2017

Brian Andres Helmick, CEO of San Francisco Deltas, is passionate, humble and aware. Passionate about the beautiful game and the platform for social progress it provides. Humble about what he's already achieved by bringing professional soccer to the Bay area. Aware of what he's up against – specifically the challenges of the recent history of the league and seducing a thus far hesitant SF fan base. Throughout our interview, Helmick remained bullish about the team and the league itself. This is part one of a two-part interview with Helmick.



SF Deltas CEO Brian Helmick. Credit: Twitter

### Nipun Chopra – Wanted to start with asking you how the USSF delay has affected sponsorship and player signings for Deltas

Brian Helmick – I think the reality is, as a start-up guy, you can only control what you can control. When things change with market forces, you need to adapt. One of my favorite sayings is, "If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans." Would we have liked more time? Sure. But, do we feel like we can't do anything about it? No. Fortunately, we are in the situation where a strong relationship between myself, the executive team as well as the investors. We are in an accelerated path to have the conversation about "here's the schedule, this is where we're going to be and these are the opponent."

From the player signing perspective, the feedback we got was that they were really impressed with how we were treating them (the players), and the transparency we extended. It also helps to have someone like Marc Dos Santos

whose reputation precedes him: he wouldn't go somewhere he didn't believe in. We have to be creative. There are challenges to any market, but some are specific to San Francisco. As an entrepreneur, I'm an eternal optimist – I understand things go wrong that are out of our control.

We had a Deltas family happy hour where we got all the players, technical staff and their families together. We're releasing this video (Update: **This video is now available, and is a must-watch**) about not who we are but WHY we are. The name of the video is "Only Together". The players were like – "Holy crap, I got goosebumps watching it, when can we release it?"

**NC – Here's a question from John at American Pyramid Blog (@APyramid\_Blog on twitter): In your recent AMA, you mentioned that you wished you had had more time to set up the team. Ideally, how much time would you have liked to have, and what would have you done with it?**

BH – You can always benefit from more time. I believe the right amount of time is 18 months. If you have 24, that's even better. In our situation, I spent a lot of time dealing with league stuff last year, so that slowed us down. If I had 3 more months, I would spend more time getting to the right people who are the 'influencers'. They are the supporters and promoters. The fans who know us, adore us. They think we are going about it the right way. Things for our community – making it affordable – a 3rd of our stadium are discounted tickets. Making sure we're giving back: all the VIP area is going to be done by **La Cocina** – a nonprofit which helps women become food entrepreneurs. Street cleaning after the game will be done by a nonprofit called "**Taking it to the street**" which houses and employs homeless youth. Concessions are being sold by homeless youth by a nonprofit called Juno Ventures.

**NC – From everything I'm hearing, Deltas haven't sold as many season tickets as you'd like. What plans do you have in place to help make the team a success from a season ticket/PR perspective?**

BH – This is a business where if the public does not embrace this club as their own club, it's not going to work. I don't care how much money you have or how many league championships you've won – we've seen that in our league. The fan needs to say – 'I want this club' – If the fans decide that they're going to tell their neighbor, the Uber or Lyft driver, the coffee shop person next to them, then this can be successful. I can't force anyone to come buy a ticket.

I think it's going to be interesting to see what happens now that the league stuff is behind us. We have a schedule now, we can focus on marketing and other things to spread the word. On March 17th, on the anniversary of when the stadium was approved, we're going to be doing an event on the steps of City Hall. We're doing this with one of our nonprofit partners – America Scores – who encourage literacy using soccer. So, we are trying to get out there, but, honestly, at some point, we want fans to say, 'this is our club, and we want it to be successful by getting our neighbors and colleagues out to the stadium.

**"THIS IS A BUSINESS WHERE IF THE PUBLIC DOES NOT EMBRACE THIS CLUB AS THEIR OWN CLUB, IT'S NOT GOING TO WORK. I DON'T CARE HOW MUCH MONEY YOU HAVE OR HOW MANY LEAGUE CHAMPIONSHIPS YOU'VE WON – WE'VE SEEN THAT IN OUR LEAGUE. "**

**NC – Back in March 2016, the idea for Kezar Stadium was to spend around \$500,000 on infrastructural upgrades. A year later, what's the status on that?**

BH – Great question. We ended up spending about twice as much – just under million dollars. One reason is related to the seats in the stadium – we have capacity for 10, 000 people. The stadium itself was 9000 bleachers and 1000 candlestick park seats. They were 49ers red, now they're Deltas red. We looked at it and wondered why aren't there 10,000 seats? We found the company that bought those 1000 seats and they told us that they had around 4000 candlesticks seats.



So that was a moment, where we had budgeted less, but, we felt it was the right thing to do from a perspective of the history of the community. We believe it looks beautiful. Kezar has so much history in it's own right – I found fliers of national teams like Scotland and Germany playing there, Pele played there, Jesse Owens ran track there, Led Zeppelin concerts, Vietnam protests happened. There's so much history that we have a certain responsibility to take care of it as well as highlight that history to some in San Francisco that might not know about it.

**"KEZAR HAS SO MUCH HISTORY IN IT'S OWN RIGHT – I FOUND FLIERS OF NATIONAL TEAMS LIKE SCOTLAND AND GERMANY PLAYING THERE, PELE PLAYED THERE, JESSE OWENS RAN TRACK THERE, LED ZEPPELIN CONCERTS, VIETNAM PROTESTS HAPPENED."**

**NC – About the 18 or so Investors. How is the partnership broken up? Is it equitable? Or are there some more heavily invested than others?**

BH – It's not even, we don't spend so much time talking about that. We don't differentiate how we treat one investor or another. We don't like the word "owner", because we believe the fans are the owners. For purposes of the way USSF is set up. This started with my friend **Fabio Igel** reached out to me and said – "Hey Brian, we should do professional soccer in the US." My initial reaction was negative because soccer in Colombia and around the world isn't a very transparent business. And then, when I think of sports in the US, most of these people are sons of billionaires. And, I don't come from money. So, I just didn't fit the profile.

Fabio was very insistent and eventually I came around to the idea of working this as an outsider. Coming from transparency, humility, and working bottom-up rather than top-down would be successful in a market like San Francisco. Fabio is very kind, generous and thoughtful and has a level of human sensibility. That's important to me – it's why Fabio and I have known the 18-19 investors for over 10 years. So, we're treating this in a different way than people usually treat investors.

**NC – So does Fabio count as the principal owner, as required by USSF?**

BH – Yes.

**NC – With 18 owners, how are decisions made? Are there veto votes for an even number? Or is it ultimately your decision**

BH – Yeah so, this is why knowing people for over 10 years helps. The environment in valley is – you have a group of investors who hire a CEO and say, "Go, I trust you, if you need me, you can talk to me." For really big decisions you need to consult the board. Such as fundraising or taking bank debt. But, it's not the way other clubs are run. This is run like a professional business/startup model.

Join us for part two of our interview with Helmick which will be released on Sunday (March 12th). You can follow Nipun on twitter @NipunChopra7.

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