

Seattle Sounders: How to Grow a Sports Franchise

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By Laura Rehrmann

“How to Grow a Sports Franchise” was the featured program, and according to owner Adrian Hanauer, the formula for success was simple:

1. Create moments (be passionate about the game).
2. Enrich lives (focus on making our community a great place to be).
3. Unify the community through soccer.

The three men on the panel expanded on the formula as they were interviewed by **President Mark Wright**. Owner Adrian Hanauer, head coach Brian Schmetzer and Alan Hinton, former soccer player, impassioned soccer coach and Seattle Sounders former club president informed, entertained, and inspired the audience.



Hanauer grew up going to Sounders’ games and aspired to be a professional soccer player. In 2002 he got involved with the Seattle Sounders when he was asked to invest in the team, although he said it was more like philanthropy when he and Drew Carey, Paul Allen, and Joe Roth bought the team in 2007. At that time, he saw it as a good business opportunity because he was convinced the timing was right and that soccer would make it as a professional sport. He was driven by the Hanauer family focus on making our community a great place to be and the potential impact soccer could have on players’ and kids’ lives. He credited Drew Carey with implementing a model he saw in Europe, where fans were decision makers at a high level and would be more involved than just customers. The Seattle Sounders fans participate in a vote of confidence for the general manager every four years which Hanauer said exemplifies the owners’ role as stewards of fans.

Brian Schmetzer was 17 when he was drafted by the Sounders after beginning his soccer play with the Lake City Hawks. He continued as a professional player with the Sounders, Tulsa Roughnecks, San Diego Sockers, and Tacoma Stars. He began his coaching career in 1988 and was named Sounders’ head coach in 2016. When he took over, the previous head coach had been fired and he said the team knew they were underachieving. Schmetzer said he made them believe they could go as far as they wanted and held them accountable while calling out mistakes.



In just a few short months, Schmetzer coached the team to be MLS Champs in 2016.



Alan Hinton played 500 games in England and went on to play for Vancouver in 1978. He coached the Seattle Sounders from 1980 to 1982 and then the Tacoma Stars. He spent a number of years coaching youth soccer in the Puget Sound area. He said that in his day, you could be a bit of a bully with players because they had no agents. He said he picked on the great players, like Brian Schmetzer, and when he did, they gave him their best. There was a lot of drinking among players in those days, but today, he said, the bars are empty as players are sensitive to what they need to play the big games. He sees soccer participation continuing to grow as parents keep their children out of football.

Mark asked a final question about where we are compared to other countries in developing soccer players. Hanauer responded that we are in the second or third inning and still getting our feet underneath us as there are four bigger sports in the US and dozens of opportunities for kids to get involved in other sports. In the US, the best athletes can choose from a variety of sports. For the rest of the world there is only one sport: soccer. In the US most development in youth clubs is aimed at winning and going to college. Elsewhere, it is about developing players into professionals.

The panelists' stories and observations delighted both the soccer fans and those less familiar with the sport.

We left the meeting with daffodils from the Pike Place Market, thanks to our member, **Lillian Sherman**, executive director of the Pike Place Market Foundation. Lillian thanked the members for their donations to the SRSF which awarded a \$3,000 grant to the farmer relief fund. Supporting small farmers is the mission of the market and because most flower farmers are on leased land, when floods and other calamities befall them, they need assistance.

The opening song, *My County Tis of Thee*, was led by **Kim Moore** accompanied by **Burr Stewart**. **Connie Miller** gave the invocation and asked that we all pause to send our thoughts to **Tom Jaffa** as he continues to recover from his recent stroke.



We recognized **Jim McCurdy Sr** for his 68 years of membership with a standing ovation in tribute.