



NEWS RELEASE

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MLS NEXT Announces Steps to Combat Racism, Hate and Discrimination

NEW YORK (*Thursday, March 18, 2021*) – MLS NEXT today announced a series of initiatives aimed at combating racism, hate and discrimination while advocating for social justice in the sport of soccer. With a mission of ensuring an inclusive player development environment, free from racism, hate and discrimination, MLS NEXT has established the Equity Action Committee (EAC), adding this new diversity, equity, and inclusion arm of the player development platform, to the [overall MLS NEXT governance structure](#).

MLS NEXT is committed to creating and enacting policies and programs that protect and educate its youth soccer culture of players, coaches and staff through a series of initiatives including educational sessions, guided discussions, and shared experiences. MLS NEXT will provide support for coaches and players without discrimination while emphasizing the League's commitment to drive positive social change.

“Major League Soccer is committed to cultivating and ensuring an inclusive environment at all levels of the game,” said Sola Winley, Major League Soccer's EVP and Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer. “The MLS NEXT platform offers an important opportunity to increase access and representation for diverse athletes and administrators, while educating the next generation of players, coaches, leaders and fans who will shape the future of our sport and our communities. Through the implementation of these key initiatives, our hope is that each participant that comes through this program will grow as an athlete and as a person.”

“We are committed to creating lasting change in youth soccer and continuing to build a platform that does not tolerate racism or other discriminatory language or behavior in any context.” said Fred Lipka, MLS NEXT Technical Director. “MLS NEXT will reach tens of thousands of young athletes during a critical time in their life and educating all participants on the value of diversity from the moment they enter our platform is a top priority as we continue to build the sport for a new North America.”

MLS NEXT has outlined the following initiatives that are being immediately actioned:

Educational Seminars

Working to build antiracist environments throughout the platform, MLS NEXT welcomes Dr. Sonja N. Robinson of *Thrive Mind Solutions* for this first in a series of instructional discussions. Through this educational workshop, leaders throughout MLS NEXT will focus on implementing equity and inclusion principles, and practices, in their own clubs.

Exchange of Best Practices

MLS NEXT will continue to work closely with the [Girls Academy](#) to further enhance the strategic relationship and offer a deeper more holistic approach to player development. We acknowledge that racism and acts of systemic racial inequalities are not gender specific. Additionally, MLS NEXT in collaboration with Black Players for Change will continue to develop youth programming across the United States and Canada.

Increased Representation in Positions of Influence

MLS NEXT is focused on increasing diversity in leadership positions within the league and participating clubs. Two members of the MLS NEXT Equity Action Committee will join the MLS NEXT Executive Committee, and one member of the MLS NEXT Equity Action Committee will also sit on the MLS Diversity Committee. In addition, diversity in club leadership has been added as admission criterion for MLS NEXT expansion clubs.

Increased Opportunities for Diverse Coaches

MLS NEXT is committed to incorporating an increased number of diverse coaches with the opportunity to earn a coveted Elite Formation Coaching License. The EFCL program is a year-long intensive coaching course, available to select MLS academy coaches and staff, as part of a partnership with the French Football Federation. Many top academy directors and coaches, as well as MLS first team coaches have participated in the program.

Policy Review and Implementation

The MLS NEXT Equity Action Committee is actively reviewing, enhancing, and implementing policies to ensure an environment free from discrimination of any kind, in any context. To date, the Equity Action Committee has established a direct line of communication to report incidents and has implemented a Disciplinary Process to address infractions with disciplinary measures.

Training Materials

Coaches, players and parents will have access to training materials amplifying stories, voices and experiences of minority/racialized players, their caregivers, and coaches.

The launch of these programs comes on the heels of the recent hire of Sola Winley as Major League Soccer's Executive Vice President and Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer.

ABOUT THE MLS NEXT EQUITY ACTION COMMITTEE

The MLS NEXT Equity Action Committee will guide MLS NEXT to facilitate positive change for an aware, equitable, just, and responsible soccer community. The committee consists of MLS NEXT Coaches, Directors and Girls Academy leaders.

The 2021-22 MLS NEXT Equity Action Committee consists of the following nine members.

MLS NEXT Coaches/Directors

- Akinola Lake (Baltimore Armor)
- Arnold Rijsenburg (Real Salt Lake)
- Chris Nurse (Weston FC)
- Mutanda Kwesele (Columbus Crew SC)
- Omar Cervantes (Sheriffs FC)
- Rumba Munthali (Sporting KC)

Major League Soccer Player

- Justin Morrow (Black Players for Change)

Girls Academy

- Lesle Gallimore (Commissioner)
- Nikki Washington (Representative of the GA)

ABOUT MLS NEXT

MLS NEXT is a new paradigm for player development, launched in 2020 to transform youth soccer in North America. Sponsored by adidas and founded on a collaborative approach to governance and a commitment to innovation, MLS NEXT players have access to the highest level of competition, training and personal development opportunities that will prepare them for their futures, both in soccer and in life. Current membership includes 118 clubs, 521 teams and over 11,000 players across the U.S. and Canada. For more information about MLS NEXT, visit www.mlssoccer.com/mlsnext.