

Zlatan Ibrahimović celebrates his first goal as a member of the Galaxy at home vs. Los Angeles FC last season.



# HEALTH REST





## NEW NAMING-RIGHTS PARTNER IS ONE PIECE OF FRESH APPROACH AT L.A.'S DIGNITY HEALTH SPORTS PARK

BY TIM NEWCOMB

**T**HE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN the Los Angeles Galaxy of Major League Soccer and San Francisco-based Dignity Health started about a year before the health care provider signed on as the naming-rights sponsor for the 125-acre campus outside of Los Angeles that includes the 27,000-seat home of the Galaxy.

That relationship became official Jan. 1, when the site became Dignity Health Sports Park, the third name in the 15-year history of the venue.

"We had been connected to them through industry relationships, trying to figure out what would make the most sense," said Robert Vartan, senior director of global partnerships for AEG, which owns and operates the Galaxy.

"The opportunity of naming rights came up after the introduction and we felt they were the appropriate group to approach. We had been in a general long-form relationship with them for about a year."

As the Galaxy's partnership with StubHub — the site in Carson, just south of Los Angeles, was named the Home Depot

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 40**

# H Y A R T





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Sports Park





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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 37

Center for about 10 years and StubHub Center for about five years — was “sunsetting,” Vartan said the timing worked out in their favor to sign Dignity Health during the MLS off-season, making the agreement official in January and changing over all the venue’s signs in time for the March 2 opening of the MLS season.

The Galaxy’s stadium is also the home of the NFL’s Los Angeles Chargers until that team moves to Inglewood in 2020.

The Galaxy declined to release the terms of the 10-year Dignity Health deal, but reports at the time of the announcement had sources speculating it could be worth \$6 million annually.

The deal includes the change in venue name and an agreement for the health care provider to work with the charitable arm of the Galaxy to host community events; provide in-stadium first aid services; support youth programs, teams and tournaments; and offer a mobile wellness clinic onsite throughout the season. Galaxy players will make regular visits to Dignity Health hospitals, and expect viewing parties for patients at Dignity Health hospitals for select games.

“It is our hope that we will deepen our ties with the communities we serve in the greater Los Angeles area through the Dignity Health Sports Park,” Lloyd Dean, president and CEO of Dignity Health, said in a statement. “Whether supporting the youth sports league, offering health clinics or providing funds to charitable organizations, together we will promote greater health and wellness for all.”

In the end, the familiarity of the

Galaxy brand and the popularity of soccer in the Los Angeles area helped cement the deal, Vartan said.

“I think we were fortunate that our club, the Galaxy being the main tenant, had enough clout to them,” he said. “As they had been exploring moving more into sports, for their brand alignment, they felt that specifically they wanted to serve a bit more of the community and have a more grassroots effort as opposed to traditional NFL, MLB or NBA deals. Soccer and the growth of soccer in the past five to seven years appealed to them.” Plus, with plenty of staff already fans of the game, the Galaxy proved a household name in the Dignity Health circles. “It is exciting for us and the ownership at AEG that they believed and had interest in soccer organically,” he said.

The deal was brokered on the venue side by AEG Global Partnerships, the division with AEG that facilitates all large-scale corporate partnerships. Advantage Marketing represented Dignity Health for the cultivation of the partnership agreement and will work on future activation elements.

Katie Pandolfo, Dignity Health Sports Park general manager for AEG, said the Jan. 1 announcement offered an opportunity to rejuvenate the entire campus. “We are refreshing all our signage to give us a nice new fresh look,” she said. “We have a number of new partners that have come in with tandem with Dignity Health.”

The Galaxy built a new premium hospitality area, the Tunnel Club, that is now sponsored by one of those new partners, Spectrum. Another, Status Royal, has taken over the sponsorship of the Champions Lounge for premium-seat holders.

Whiskey brand Tullamore Dew puts its name on one in-stadium bar, and another has taken on the tequila brand Milagro. Both brands are part of the William Grant & Sons company. With the Tullamore deal, the Galaxy will refresh an existing space, while the Milagro partnership will enable what was previously a temporary bar to turn into a more permanent location.

Mezcal El Silencio, a Los Angeles-based mezcal label,

## New name puts the ‘sports’ into this sports complex

Once the Galaxy and Dignity Health agreed on the naming-rights deal, then came the fun part: coming up with the actual name of the site.

Katie Pandolfo, Dignity Health Sports Park general manager, said that in her 15 years working there the “center” name was used in an effort to help convey that the complex is more than a soccer stadium, but it also made people who weren’t familiar with the site wonder what the venue was all about.

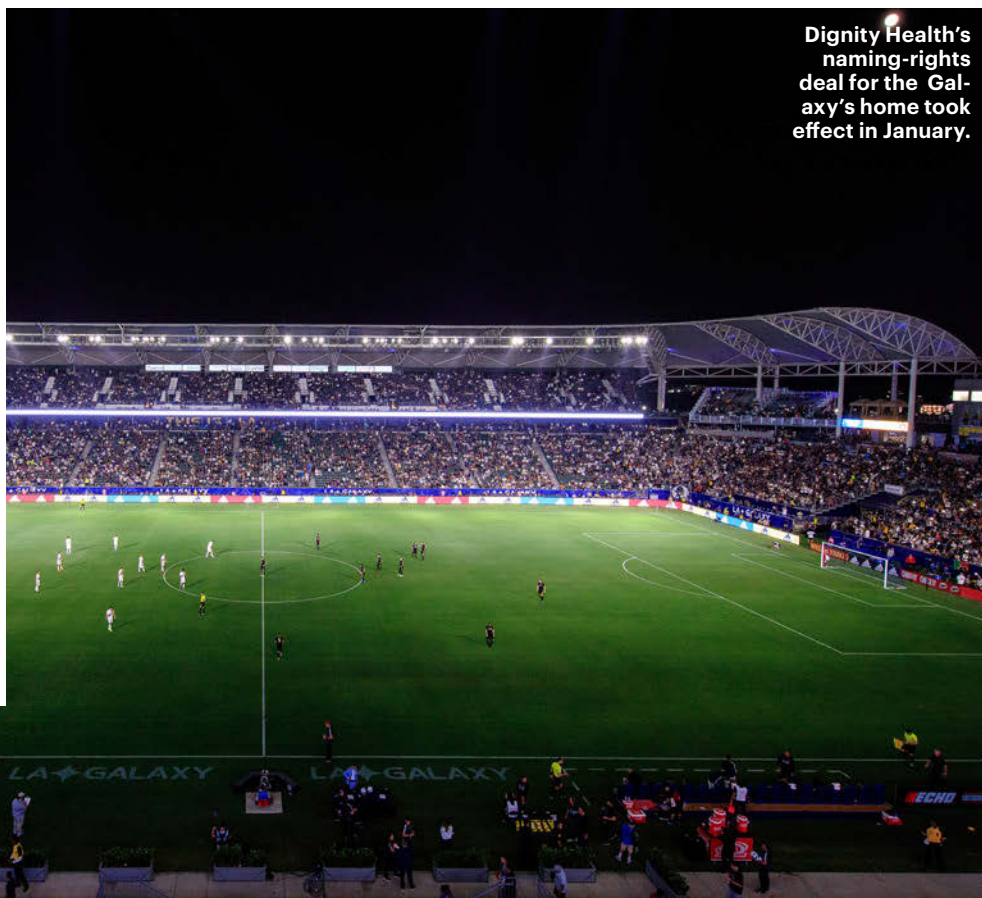
The confusion may end with the new name. “Sports park defines itself,” she said.

Plus, with five Olympic sports already slated for the site when Los Angeles hosts the Olympics in 2028, Pandolfo said they had already agreed with the organizing committee they were going to call the venue the South Bay Sports Park. The International Olympic Committee does not allow the use of corporate names in venue names, meaning that many must take temporary names when the Games come to town.

As they discussed a new name with Dignity Health, “sports park” offered what Pandolfo called an “amazing opportunity” to ramp up for the Olympics.

“This will have a natural flow and symmetry, which will be great for our partner and good for us as well,” Pandolfo said. Plus, now there’s no more wondering what happens at the center. It is, after all, a sports park. — *Tim Newcomb*

Dignity Health’s naming-rights deal for the Galaxy’s home took effect in January.



The familiarity of the Galaxy brand in LA helped cement the deal with Dignity Health.



signed on with the Galaxy in late February to create a custom bar on the main concourse next to one of the main stands, Pandolfo said. Built and designed by the creative team at Silencio, the branded space will feature storytelling, technology and a hidden speakeasy designed to offer a fresh experience for those who find the space. The bar will include exclusive cocktails on tap.

As part of a deal brokered by AEG Global Partnerships, Silencio also signed on as an official partner across AEG-operated L.A. music venues the Roxy Theater, Shrine Auditorium and Expo Hall, Fonda Theater and El Rey Theater.

Credit union Kinecta, which signed on with the Galaxy as a partner about a year ago, is activating space in the southeast plaza to create a location full of pregame entertainment.

"We did spend a lot of energy (on the naming-rights deal), but we have been doing a lot of other (deals) at the same time," Vartan said. "It has been really helpful not only to do the complete changeover of signage and branding, but it has also given us a really good excuse to continue reinvesting and making upgrades in the property where we can, not just for this one partner but for all partners."

The Galaxy has also done work outside the venue, creating the Legends Plaza with improved lighting, an LED board, speakers and the first of many statues — honoring former Galaxy star and international legend David Beckham, unveiled March 2 — ahead of the MLS season. "We re-envisioned the area and created more of a gathering place," Pandolfo said. "It was the perfect time to implement the plan with the new naming-rights partner. ... It brings more life to the front of the building and makes it a very versatile area to hang out before the game and potentially use it for other events."

With the opening last year of Banc of California Stadium, another MLS soccer venue about 10 miles north of Dignity Health Sports Park, Pandolfo said it allowed her team to reflect on what they were doing at their venue to

"stay true to their core mission and values," which she believes they have.

"We are very different," she said. "They are just a soccer stadium in the middle of the city which comes with a lot of different attributes and challenges. We are a little outside the city and on 125 acres and have all this space. I think we attract a different type of event than they would. Competition is good and brings more awareness to the sport of soccer, and that is what we want. We want to grow soccer in L.A. Another competitive team down the street is good for all of us and good for the sport."

Dignity Health Sports Park is more than just a 27,000-seat stadium and its new spaces. It includes an 8,000-seat tennis stadium, the home of a U.S. Tennis Association high-performance training center; a 2,000-seat facility for track and field; a 2,450-seat indoor Velodrome, the Velo Sports Center, for track cycling; the national team training headquarters for the U.S. Soccer Federation; and Exos, a high-performance training center with locations nationwide, all on 125 acres on the Carson campus of California State University, Dominguez Hills.

That sports park experience means that 250 athletes come through the site every day, from soccer to tennis to cycling. Staying focused on the core brand and mission puts a premium on sports, but it also leaves room for plenty of other events. The venue hosts international soccer events, plenty of boxing matches inside the tennis stadium, graduations and concerts. Pandolfo expects to announce a new large-scale concert in the coming weeks and the site will continue to host festivals and other events.

Pandolfo said that with Dignity Health signing on, she envisions increasing the number of 5K runs held on the property. "With their focus on wellness and health, they have a huge push to do a lot of community activities around wellness and families," she said, "so I could foresee doing a few more events like our family 5Ks." ▮