



# League One British Columbia (L1BC)

*Club/Franchise marketing and branding philosophy and longer-term vision*

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## Background Summary:

A specific quantified objective within BC Soccer's 2016-2019 strategic plan is to "Introduce a professionally administrated adult amateur soccer league..." with the primary goal of developing a platform league platform within the LTPD stage 6 of 'Training to Win' designed to support potential professional and national team players, while also assisting with the transition from youth to adult soccer. The Association is currently in the process of reviewing and updating the League's Operations Manual and Technical Standards document that were developed in 2018, however it is important to note that some significant changes have occurred within the Canadian Soccer landscape, most notably, the formation of Canadian Soccer Business (CSB) with its principal property, the Canadian Premier League (CPL) and BC Soccer establishing a longer-term partnership with CSB

The CPL was conceived in part to help provide a pathway for players with professional aspirations, in addition to expanding the National team player pools, while also working to create a Canadian specific culture surrounding the professional game in Canada.

Canadian Soccer Business is the marketing rights holder(s) of not only each individual club and their respective trademarks, but also commercial agreements and acquired assets on behalf of not only the CPL but also Canada Soccer's National Women's and Men's Programs. CSB, in its short existence, has already established long-term and meaningful relationships with large sponsors such as Volkswagen Canada and most notably a media and broadcast rights agreement with MediaPro of Spain. Further, CSB by their full acquisition of League One Ontario, has publicly demonstrated the importance they place on the layers below CPL environments. The decision to purchase Ontario's tier 3 league was inspired by the need to provide OPDL (Ontario's BC SPL equivalent) with a connective pathway to the Canadian Premier League, in the country's most populated province with the largest player pool.

Based on discussions with, Canadian Soccer Business, we understand their strategy is to have similar arrangements across Canada, which bodes well for BC Soccer as we work to establish our BC League 1.

## League 1 British Columbia:

Establishing a League 1 BC is not an easy exercise with the longstanding organizations and individuals already operating in the soccer community in BC. Therefore, to augment the research and learnings over the last four to five years from similar leagues in Canada, we also need to look at the current organizations that are operating in BC yet participating in foreign leagues (US based).

As the provincial governing body, we felt it important to recognize those entities that have worked hard to establish professional environments and initiate dialogue about the potential to participate in an alternative to the American run Premier Development League (PDL now USL 2).

While the United Soccer League has provided an excellent platform for several Canadian Franchises, those clubs are unable to compete in the expanded Canadian Championships, while also having the additional logistical and financial challenges of competing in a cross-border operation which adds travel time and uncertainty with a fluctuating US dollar. Furthermore, BC Soccer is aware, based on discussion with Canada Soccer, that FIFA is trying to move its Confederations away from cross border competition which will inevitably may lead to a sanctioning issue.

In addition to current USL 2 clubs, BC Soccer also felt it appropriate and prudent to approach other professional clubs about League 1 BC participation. Although “reserve” or “development” teams may be exempt from Canadian Championship participation, the aim continues to be having appropriate player center environments that meet or exceed the technical standards of what currently exists. Should any professional club have a team that participates within League 1 BC, one of the requests is that clubs/teams are not branded as “reserve” or “development” or “U23” sides. The rationale brings us back to the desire to have stand-alone clubs that are established to serve the communities in which they operate, no matter how they are utilized within a larger club’s operating philosophy.

#### Unique, Community Inspired Complimentary Clubs:

A League built solely on existing organizations with proven track records at the desired standard does not satisfy our requirements for a sustainable league. Complimentary clubs need to be established to represent communities with suitable venues and population, which will also increase the asset value of the league as a whole. Increasing the overall value is an important consideration from a commercial perspective from BC Soccer.

The additional community club concepts are contingent on having a qualified owner/operator, and a suitable venue; venue is a critical component given the potential for broadcasting/match streaming and the potential of hosting an MLS or CPL club in the Canadian Championships. Ideally clubs would not have to relocate to different venues to accommodate “bigger” match occasions and their home venue is their home venue for every match in their calendar.

The branding exercise in establishing community clubs in BC to participate in League 1 BC is an important aspect of the creating the league and in doing so, the approach BC Soccer is taking is based on the Canadian Premier League branding guidelines which includes naming clubs without using Geo-centric community names. Building clubs based on values and local stories, without anchoring them to specific communities, thus allowing clubs to potentially move in the event their location is not deemed suitable after a reasonable period of time.

The established clubs bring tradition and brand equity to the league, therefore their colours, branding, and logo composition should be preserved, meaning the new clubs will have to develop distinguishing branding that is unique. To ensure consistency and overall implementation is effective, this must be managed at the league level, thus BC Soccer will have final approval on all branding decisions for individual clubs, with potential support from the CPL/CSB.

#### Asset Management within BC Soccer’s Membership:

BC Soccer values all of the membership organizations (and their member organizations) and the unique and powerful contributions that each make to support and facilitate soccer across the province. It is important with the establishment of our League 1 BC to state that BC Soccer views each district, league, and club as an individual asset, that support soccer for the activity in which they engage. For example, BC SPL clubs provide a critical role in youth development for players seeking the highest challenge, while

Adult Amateur Leagues provide playing opportunities for both the high performing adult players in addition to ones purely interested in the recreational and social component of the game.

There is no exclusion for participation in League 1 BC, so long as owner/operators satisfy qualification criteria, and have a suitable venue, and that new clubs meet BC Soccer/the league's branding guidelines. The notion that BCSPL clubs, Adults Leagues and even cradle to grave clubs can participate in the league under their existing banners is not preferred for several reasons;

- 1) League 1 BC does not want to be considered as a "retention strategy" for existing organizations, but rather a distinct layer in the development pathway, with unique clubs inspired by authentic community stories that will hopefully compel a supporter base.
- 2) A new league one club that is connected to an existing entity diminishes the commercial asset potential of each entity, which is not desired.
- 3) League 1 BC clubs should draw potential players from the entire 'system', rather than captive arrangements which could potentially limit player opportunity.
- 4) By connecting existing entities to League 1 BC clubs, there is danger of over-representing certain communities or operating in communities that don't feature qualified venues. The strategic objective is to have even distribution of clubs across the province that can be financially viable. Cannibalizing communities with over saturation of clubs is not a short or mid term solution.