

FIFA president Infantino was in Miami to announce partnership with Miami Dade College

BY MICHELLE KAUFMAN APRIL 29, 2024 5:10 PM



Miami Dade College

The FIFA presence in Miami continues to grow as soccer's world governing body and Miami Dade College announced on Monday a collaboration that will include a museum exhibit at Miami Freedom Tower, an internship program for MDC students and a speaker series.

FIFA began immersing itself in South Florida last summer, when it opened a permanent headquarters office in Coral Gables in advance of the 2024 Copa America, 2025 Club World Cup and 2026 World Cup.

Hard Rock Stadium will host three Copa America games this summer, including the final on July 14, and seven games during the World Cup. The Club World Cup venues are yet to be named, but Miami is a logical choice.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino, who is based in Zurich, Switzerland but has a home in South Florida, was at MDC's Padron Campus in Little Havana for the announcement of the collaboration, along with MDC President Madeline Pumariega.

"Miami is special; it's a city open to the world," Infantino said. "We are organizing the 2026 World Cup here in North America: the United States, Mexico, and Canada. It is a global soccer capital today and with FIFA's presence, it will become even more significant. With Inter Miami, they already have a hugely iconic team with Jorge Mas, David Beckham, Lionel Messi, and all the other players."

He said the organization is committed to leaving an imprint in Miami.

"Next year, in July 2025, FIFA will help celebrate the 100-year anniversary of Miami Dade College with a very special exhibition coming from the FIFA Museum in Zurich," Infantino explained. "Like the Freedom Tower, it will tell another story of hope and opportunity, a story that soccer gives, especially in the Americas, but all over the world."

FIFA will also establish an internship program for MDC students and a speaker series that will include soccer legends from around the world.

"Think about a young boy or girl on the field in Little Haiti today learning that they have an opportunity to one day be an intern, and so many opportunities start with being an intern," Pumariega said. "They'll have that chance at FIFA, our students will learn from FIFA leaders in the realm of sports management."

Among the dignitaries at the head table was Inter Miami managing owner Jorge Mas, who has a personal connection with the Freedom Tower, which once served as a processing center for Cuban immigrants and sits on Jorge Mas Canosa Way, named after Mas' late father.

"For me, personally, it means a lot that this collaboration is at Freedom Tower, something that means so much to the Cuban-American community and all who have sought freedom here," Mas said. "To see the global sport come to our city... less than five years ago we had no team and the fact that we now have Inter Miami, we have the greatest player on the face of the earth, Lionel Messi.

"Inter Miami gets mentioned in every corner of the world. And the fact that FIFA sees the importance of Miami as a capital of futbol in the United States, bringing their offices here, collaborating here, and of Gianni Infantino calling this home, this bodes very well for our community in the future of soccer."

Others who attended the announcement included Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniela Levine Cava, City of Miami Mayor Francis Suarez, Peruvian soccer legend Teofilo "Nene" Cubillas, and former Inter Miami players Blaise Matuidi and Kieran Gibbs.

The announcement coincides with the launch of the first women's soccer team in MDC history and the resurrection of the men's soccer program, which won junior college national titles in 1979 and 1983. The inaugural women's Sharks team will be coached by Ramiro Vengoechea, a Miami native and FIU graduate who coached Miami Lourdes Academy to a pair of state titles and six trips to the final four from 2013 to 2021. He also coached the semi-pro FC Surge, a Women's Premier Soccer League team based in Miami.

Giuseppe DePalo will coach the men's team, which returns for the first time in 36 years. He coached Nova Southeastern University from 1999 to 2015, the Seattle Sounders academy in 2019, and most recently coached Inter Miami academy teams. Both teams will kick off in August and will train at a new soccer complex at the Miami Dade College Kendall campus.

Read more at: <https://www.miamiherald.com/sports/mls/inter-miami/article288107145.html>