



THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

April 19, 2022

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Nick Kelly, CEO, Tepper Sports and Entertainment

By Bill Bartee

Nick Kelly shared the evolution of his job from the President of Charlotte FC, our Major League Soccer (MLS) team, to his current position as CEO of Tepper Sports and Entertainment (TSE). Kelly has been in the role at TSE since February of this year. His responsibilities include oversight of the NFL's Carolina Panthers, the Charlotte FC and Bank of American Stadium.

Part of the evolution regarding the Charlotte FC had to do with timing. The team was awarded in 2019 with a planned 2021 launch but COVID-19 caused a decision to delay one year. The club's home debut at Bank of America Stadium occurred on March 5, 2022, and set an MLS attendance record for a single match with over 74,000 people in attendance.

One of the goals of being the 30th MLS team in the league was to build a team that Carolina fans could relate to. Therefore, they've pursued many highly competitive professional players and coaches with several having a Carolina connection.

The Charlotte FC has a diverse fan base that watches and celebrates matches differently than the NFL games (2-hour versus 4-hour games, as one example). Kelly attributes some of this to the long history of the NFL and fans from teams other than the Panthers attending, while the Charlotte FC fans are united because everyone is "for the home team". A lot of what has been learned from the MLS team has allowed management to "re-think" some ways the Panthers operate.

Other upcoming soccer pursuits include Pro Player Pathway ("like Triple-A baseball") which helps develop players and to have successful partnerships with corporate sponsors. These partners have done more than just write checks but have helped in introducing the team to the community.

Offering a different product to different fans is a part of TSE's goal and includes the

experience of an NFL game versus an MLS game versus a show or concert at Bank of America Stadium. This complementary model includes utilizing Bank of America Stadium throughout the year. Therefore, they continue to pursue different shows and acts, along with the Panthers and Charlotte FC schedule. Thus far there have been more concerts now than in the previous 25-years (Kenny Chesney, Billy Joel, Elton John, Garth Brooks, and Red Hot Chili Peppers are all upcoming concerts).

Kelly briefly commented on a question from our Rotary audience about “the Rock Hill Project” and later stated that “communication is integral to a successful partnership.” (We had just learned that the Panthers and City of Rock Hill agreement was terminated).

Other questions included plans for a new stadium or renovations to Bank of America and how PSL would be handled with a different stadium, to which Kelly responded that there are currently no plans regarding the stadium and PSL ownership. He referred to supply chain issues delaying jersey purchases for fans, the desire for the best players to represent their country during World Cup years, and recent draft pick, Ben Bender’s focus on being an athlete instead of a focus on social media.

*A recording of the program is available here: <https://vimeo.com/700968079>
The presentation begins at 16:30 minutes.