

Canadian Premier League approved Saskatoon franchise

By **Robert Belardi**

When Alan Simpson first caught wind a domestic soccer league was coming to Canada, he immediately picked up the phone.

'I called the CPL office from Saskatchewan [and] I said, 'I like what you're doing.' They said, 'Well, how can you participate?' I said I'd like to participate from an ownership standpoint,' Simpson said.

'It just grew from there to where we are today.'

The Principal of Living Sky Sports & Entertainment (LSSE) saw his vision come to life two weeks ago. On March 12 the Canadian Premier League formally announced that a new team will be coming to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

'It's a very big step forward in terms of sporting options in Saskatchewan,' Simpson said. 'It gives the kids who are playing at the club level and recreationally, the ability to develop a vision and a pathway to perhaps, professional in their own city, or province or country.'

The soccer culture in Saskatchewan is quite large. According to Simpson, 8,000 children are registered in the sport and 3,000 adults take part as well.

When the introduction of the new team was announced, Simpson said he was astounded by the number of impressions reached on social media. The Canadian Premier League confirmed with Simpson that 729,000 interactions surfaced in the day and #CanPL was ranked seven, in Twitter Canada.

'I've been at this trying to get something done since 2017 and over the course of those years, I've become closer to the business of soccer and the sport in terms of understanding the level of interest. I'm blown away by the number.'

The venue is set to take place at the Marquis Downs race track in Prairieland Park; a six-minute drive from downtown Saskatoon.

Prairieland Park and LSSE have come together with a plan to refurbish the grandstand that has been there since 1960 with respect to the history of the track. A venue between 5,000 and 6,500 seats is set to be built there with expandability to upwards of 10,000 seats.

Simpson says this plan is hoped to be completed by 2023. If not, worst case is 2024.

Amidst the construction of the building, Simpson says a team name and colours will be determined when the shovels hit the ground.

'Once we know we got a stadium then we'll go out and engage the supporter groups and the broader community. We'll make it a collective undertaking. We'll ask the community to chime in on what they think the name should be, what they think the colour should be, and what the kit should look like. That should be a lot of fun. I see that as the fun part out of this whole undertaking.'

The community stadium and the ability to participate in the team until the time arrives will be the joy in bringing the city of Saskatoon together. A soccer team on top of all of that is a nice cherry on top.