How it all began

Like most things, Inter Miami started as an idea. An MLS team in South Florida seemed like the logical next step for its diverse community, but when it actually happened with the founding of the Miami Fusion in 1997, the team foundered.

Inter Miami’s journey began in 2014 when soccer legend David Beckham announced his intent to found an MLS team in South Florida. It took to avoiding local rivals in Miami’s storied history for Beckham to generate enough public sentiment in favor of the MLS.

“The there was always the questions of can MLS really make it here because the fans here are so into the foreign game, the international game, and would they be interested in the domestic game?” Michelle Kaisermani, a 23-year sports journalist who covers Inter Miami for the Miami Herald, said.

“That’s been a big challenge for MLS in a market like Miami … a lot of people for a long time would watch at home and watch the [Eng- lish Premier League] or La Liga on TV, rather than go out and support a local MLS game.”

Beckham partnered with Miami-based business magnates Jorge and Jose Mas, and Inter Miami was officially announced as Major League Soccer’s 25th club in 2017. The team began its inaugural season in 2020 with a 1-3 loss to Los Angeles FC on March 14.

The next three-and-a-half years were tough. Inter Miami missed the playoffs in its first two seasons before finally breaking through in 2022, when it won 3-0 to New York City FC in the club’s recent game against Baltimore’s FC Baltimore.

Love and attendance remained low as its detractors continued to criticize the team. Since Messi joined, the Inter Miami Instagram account has skyrocketed, passing 11 million followers in just three hours. Just seeing Messi, perhaps the greatest player of all time for the world’s most popular sport, was enough.

“Everyone was crying — I was crying. It was emotional. Very emotional.”

“[Messi] just seemed very comfortable and happy where he was.”

Laura Bea

Student and season ticket holder

The Messi Effect

Rumors swirled that Messi would join Inter Miami over the summer, but many, including Kaisermani, weren’t too sure. It wasn’t until Inter Miami came to Fort Lauderdale, played at its own stadium, and fans stood for the last place team that just seemed to not make any sense really, except that he loves Miami,” Kaisermani said.

“He was very skeptical even when the Man City games were feeling optimistic and confident. In June, Kaisermani attended his first game at DRV PNK Stadium in Fort Lauderdale.

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In June, Messi made his decision — he signed with Inter Miami on a contract worth over $125 million that would run through the 2023 MLS season. Messi officially signed with the club on July 15. Chaos immediately ensued immediately. Ticket sales rose 1000% hours after Messi’s signing, breaking the club’s record against local rivals Orlando City on Sept. 3.

“[The club’s social media platforms] grew exponentially, too. Inter Miami now has 14.4 million Instagram followers, which is over 13 million more than the second-most followed team in the MLS, the LA Galaxy. Inter Miami also has more followers than any other MLS or MLS and MLB team, which includes historic franchises like the Dallas Cowboys and New York Yankees.

Local businesses are capitalizing also in capitals like the exultant. Fritz and Fairuz Bader, a German restaurant in Coral Gables, is packed for every Inter Miami game. Whenever the club scores a goal, Fritz runs between the speakers to do the dance steps that he’s done for a common scene across South Florida.

“All these sports bars are now having professors and paying perks for MLS games because of Messi, pure and simple. So it’s helping the owners of all these establishments,” Kaisermani said. “And then sporting good stores that are selling Messi merchandise, like Soccer Locker which is on U.S. 1 … you can’t find Inter Miami gear at all. It’s completely sold out.”

As Messi’s influence became bigger and bigger, his influence became more and more noticeable. The crowd whips into a frenzy.

“So even though it was [short] and it was a little fickle, it was extremely engaging and definitely unfettered to other sports. Definitely made it worthwhile.”

And as Messi’s fame grew throughout the world, his influence became more and more noticeable. The crowd whips into a frenzy.

“It was chaos,” Bea, who attended the ceremony said. “Getting there was a five-hour ordeal. It was lines and lines and lines. Since Messi joined, Inter Miami has more than doubled its following. It was hours three hours before the event. For all the time it took fans to arrive, the ceremony itself didn’t even last 20 minutes. So just seeing Messi, perhaps the greatest player of all time for the world’s most popular sport, was enough.

“The pink jerseys are going for up to $80 on eBay. It’s crazy,” said. “People were screaming, ‘Buy this. ‘So even though it was [short] and it was kind of chaotic with all the people, it was just stunning and really definitely unfettered to other sports, definitely made it worthwhile.”

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Looking for the Inter Miami pink jersey number 17 jerseys sold out until October

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