



Angel City Football Club

2023

In July 2020, Angel City Football Club (Angel City FC) was announced as the newest National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) team in Los Angeles, California (D'Cruz, 2023). The Angel City Football Club is unique not only as the only professional women's football club in Los Angeles, home to 12 professional sports clubs, but also as the nation's first female majority-owned team (Lago, 2021). Founded by Kara Nortman, Natalie Portman, and Julie Uhrman, the club focuses not only on the sport but also on a deep commitment to a social mission of empowerment. The new club, with its social mission, attracted an expansive list of investors that includes many of the top names in sports, entertainment, and industry, such as Serena Williams, Billie Jean King, Jennifer Garner, Mia Hamm, Christina Aguilera, and many others (Angel City, 2023).

After 22 months of building the team roster, Angel City FC played their first regular season match on April 29, 2022 (Baxter, 2022). The club's home field football pitch is the BMO Stadium, with a seating capacity of 22,000, and it is the newest open-air stadium since Dodgers Stadium was built in 1962 (BMO Stadium, 2023). Just as Angel City FC has values central to the organization, the stadium is LEED Silver certified, evidencing a structure built to the strictest environmental and sustainability standards.

Foundational values of social and community engagement guide the club's activities both on the pitch and off. Angel City FC lists the "Three Impact Pillars" of essentials, equity, and education (Angel City, 2022a) as their guiding organizational values. While other sporting organizations engage in philanthropic endeavors, Angel City FC embraces this as central to their core mission. As a result, the club is active in activities that provide basic necessities to community families in need, provide equitable access to opportunities, and promote education for empowerment. Sponsorship partners support Angel City FC and communities due to the club donating 10% to community programs. The result is an impressive number of community initiatives and programs impacting the lives of many.

However, running an organization with a social mission at its core comes with challenges. Supporters' enthusiasm to embrace Angel City FC's social mission resulted in controversy when it was reported that Sean Nahas would be the club's first head coach (Linehan, 2021). Supporters of Angel City FC were swift to criticize the news. Rebellion 99, an unaffiliated group supportive of the club, tweeted out a lengthy list of female head coach candidates, and many others offered similar criticism (Hruby, 2021). Angel City FC responded to the news with a statement that the

search was ongoing and ultimately hired Freya Coombe as their first head coach and Robert Udberg as assistant head coach (Angel City, 2022c). The controversy over potentially hiring a male head coach was a reminder that Angel City FC attracted fans who also expect the club to advance women's issues on and off the pitch, yet no backlash arose with the hiring of a male assistant. As a result, the club needs to balance competitive success with financial and social priorities.

While Angel City FC's social mission is notable and impressive, the club is mindful that an earlier attempt to build a soccer club was unsuccessful. The Los Angeles Sol was one of seven original clubs that comprised the Women's Professional Soccer League in 2009 but folded after just one season (Fun While It Lasted, 2023). Sol's challenges were primarily financial, with a high stadium rental fee per match of \$75,000 (at the Home Depot Center) and attendance figures averaging just 6,298. While attendance at Sol matches was the highest in the Women's Professional Soccer league and generated over \$850,000 in annual ticket sales revenue, it was insufficient to support the club. Sol's inaugural season resulted in a loss exceeding \$3,000,000.

Angel City FC is determined to avoid repeating the missteps of the Los Angeles Sol, yet has committed to equity and social initiatives that constrain club profit margins. However, any operating margin constraints are counterbalanced by a burgeoning fanbase supportive of the club and its values. The 2022 regular season opening match sold out their 22,000 stadium, and Vanessa Gilles and Jun Endo scored goals to defeat the North Carolina Courage (Ayala, 2022). 2022 was a winning season for the club, with eight wins, five losses, and nine draws (Angel City, 2022b). The club had the highest average attendance of any team in the league at 19,105 per match (Soccer Stadium Digest, 2023).

The 2023 season represents a pivotal time for Angel City FC as they need to build upon the first season's enthusiasm to sustain and grow their base of fans. As of July 2023, midseason figures support that league attendance is up 19% over 2022, and Angel City FC leads with a total attendance of 155,211 (Soccer Stadium Digest, 2023). Average Angel City FC attendance had risen slightly to 19,401.

Rising Fandom, Yet Challenges Remain

Interest in soccer has been rising in the United States for several years. Surveys evidence an overall rise in interest from 37% in 2012 to 47% in 2018, yet more than half of the population remains uninterested in the sport (Nielsen, 2018). A 2023 survey by Morning Consult notes heightened interest in the sports, with 62% of those aged 18-34 as "avid fans" (13%) or "casual fans" (24%). Gallup has tracked fandom of various sports with the survey questions of, "What is your favorite sport to watch?" (Gallup, 2023) from 1937 through 2017, in which soccer did not rise above 1% until 1981 and registered 7% in 2017. By contrast, football has been Americans' favorite sport to watch (37% in 2017), surpassing baseball in 1972. Notably, the 2017 Gallup survey of favorite sports to watch resulted in soccer as the fourth favorite, beating out hockey, auto racing, and figure skating while just 2% shy of baseball.

While the sport is enjoying growth, each sporting club must grow and sustain its fan base to succeed. Angel City FC enjoys one of the largest stadiums in the league but must also ensure that

attendance counts, sponsorships, and broadcast/streaming channels continue to grow. Additionally, while attendance figures are high, single-match ticket prices are modestly priced between \$19.00 and \$100.00 (Ticketmaster, 2023). By contrast, attending a local National Football League game runs between \$100.00 (Los Angeles Chargers) and \$147.00 (Los Angeles Rams) for the least expensive seats available (Thompson, 2022) and can easily rise to several hundred dollars for premium seating. Additionally, player salaries and a first-in-the-league 1% revenue-sharing model aim to ensure a more equitable sport between the players that sustain the brand and the club's business side (Williams, 2021). As a result, Angel City FC is doing well, but management must be mindful of financial performance to balance and sustain their social and equity-minded initiatives. Club management is aware of the need to engage fans to maintain enthusiasm for the sport, the players, and the club brand. The club is off to a good start, but management is not taking anything for granted.

As women's sports have enjoyed growth in recent years, the value of sponsorships, ticket prices, attendance counts, and viewership has lagged men's sports for several years. The disparity stems from a lack of proper valuation despite growing attendance and viewership. Notably, 40% of all athletes are women (Dara, 2023), yet they receive just 5.7% of sports media coverage (Pickman, 2021). A 2018 study found evidence that the lack of media coverage constrains fan growth and influences attitudes regarding women's sports (Scheidler & Wagstaff, 2018). However, despite constrained media coverage and undervaluation of the sport, women's soccer exceeded the viewership of the men's league, 450,000 to 283,000 per match, according to 2022 figures (K., 2022).

The success of women's soccer teams in the World Cup, winning back-to-back championships in 2015 and 2019 (Reuters, 2023), was primarily drawn from players in the NWSL. The notoriety and talent of NWSL players resulted in 22 of the 23 United States World Cup players drawn from the league rosters and others playing for 16 various national teams (Pro Soccer Wire Staff, 2023). The broad talent across NWSL teams contributes to the growing support and enthusiasm for the sport. Furthermore, a 2022 FIFA survey study found commercial revenue growth of 33%, indicating increasing sponsorship interest and a 22% increase in broadcast revenues for women's soccer clubs (Associated Press, 2022). While the growth rates are impressive, the FIFA study also noted that just 7% of clubs globally reported revenues exceeding \$1,000,000 (USD) across matches, broadcast, and commercial sources.

The growth of NWSL is impressive, considering the limited media exposure that constrains casual fans from easily following the sport. In 2022, just 18 matches were televised on CBS, while 24 were streamed on Twitch and 94 on Paramount+ platforms (Herrera, 2022). The lack of consistent media coverage and low subscriber counts further challenges fans attempting to follow their favorite teams. Paramount+ subscriber count topped 43 million in 2022 but is dwarfed by rivals such as Netflix (220 million) and Disney+ (152 million) (Maglio, 2022). The 2023 regular season has 28 for Angel City, with 14 hosted at home (Baxter, 2023).

Brand Building Through Sport and Social Engagement

Angel City FC is clearly off to a strong start, as is the rising interest in women's sports overall. However, managing the club and brand requires market planning, continuous investment, and

engagement activities. Additionally, until media exposure of the sport moves into more mainstream outlets and is consistently available, NWSL clubs must grow their fanbase organically largely through their own initiatives. Fans may support the club for various reasons. Some may become fans due to local connections to the team as representative of the Los Angeles area, love of the sport, enthusiasm for women's sports, fandom for star players, or the organization's social initiatives and equity focus. These layered motivations present opportunities and constraints for the club to craft engaging brand experiences and marketing communications.

The equity dimensions of the club's values have resulted in players enjoying a 1% share of revenues. ACFC revenue sharing allows the club to use a player's name, image, and likeness (NIL) for promotional activities and merchandise (Williams, 2021). The lengthy list of investors and NIL access provides substantial latitude for the organization to tap into the fanbase and notoriety of the individual players and investors. Fans are apt to respond to the celebrity nature of these high-profile individuals, but the club is also mindful of the need to continue growing its audience. As a result, the current roster of players and investors must be used sparingly, and there is a need to build awareness with those not currently following the club, players, or investors.

The Challenge:

Your team is to craft an influencer-driven integrated marketing campaign that promotes Angel City FC and engages fans to attend matches and promotional events. Your deliverables are:

- 1) Consumer/buyer persona(s) and supporting data.
- 2) A campaign promoting the Angel City FC brand.
- 3) A promotional event to drive attendance and sales of an upcoming jersey merchandise release (see Appendix 1).

The influencer-driven brand promotional campaign budgets are \$100,000 to promote Angel City FC and \$20,000 for the jersey release sales event.

As with most organizations, marketing investments need to deliver a return on investment, and Angel City FC is similarly interested in boosting ticket and merchandise sales. As attendance and viewership rise, the club can attract additional sponsorship deals that ensure the organization's financial success. While the goal is to boost revenues, Whitney Hallock, director of marketing and engagement, notes that "building awareness is also a win for us," recognizing that while the sport is enjoying rising popularity, there is plenty of room for growth for the Angel City FC brand.

The proposals should include your recommended course of action and justification for why it is a good fit for Angel City FC. Your submissions should include appropriate key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure and manage implementation and benchmarking against other efforts. A storyboard or mock-up of your influencer campaign is recommended. Buyer personas are needed to help illustrate your suggested campaign's fit and help ACFC executives envision the appeal to fans of your proposals. Angel City FC collects ticket sales data that may be useful

(see Appendix 2 & 3). While you are not required to utilize the ticket sales data, your recommendations must be based on evidence to support your campaigns.

Angel City FC is keen to tap into influencers to drive online and in-person fan engagement. Therefore, anything you propose to include should detail audience reach, estimated costs, proposed influencer actions, and the rationale. Additionally, your proposed promotional campaign and events should be documented regarding who will be involved, where events occur, and a storyboard or mock-up of the content. Many marketplaces have formed to make it easier to locate influencer talent, and you are encouraged to seek out these avenues. For example, Opensorse.com is a marketplace website for student-athletes to be matched with organizations seeking NIL deals. Collabstr.com is another marketplace to locate influencers for Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube.

Some Angel City FC partner organizations and investors could be asked to participate but must be called upon sparingly as all have other obligations. The investors and organizations support Angel City FC, women's sports, and the organization's three pillars (essentials, equity, and education). However, if you do choose to utilize any of the individual investors, a second choice should be included as it is possible that they might not be available (e.g., Natalie Portman or Jennifer Garner might be shooting a movie and not available for a particular event due to prior engagements).

The jersey sale event is particularly important to ACFC due to the investment in inventory, the need to generate sales, and the drive to sustain interest beyond the initial launch period. The 24-72 hours after the jersey release is vital to generating sales and sustaining long-tail enthusiasm for the brand. As a result, your proposals must clearly articulate what is planned and how it is expected to drive traffic and plans for sustaining the campaigns over the next 12 months. ACFC has initially ordered 2,300 Nike jerseys and aims to sell 15% within 72 hours of the launch and achieve annual revenues of \$110,000 within 12 months. Prior launch events have generated between 3-6 million organic impressions in the three days before and following the release. Additionally, the event resulted in an increase of 6,000-7,000 followers across ACFC's various social media platforms.

Investors that may be called upon to participate:

Natalie Portman
Jennifer Garner
Uzo Aduba
America Ferrera
Lilly Singh
Becky G
Gabrielle Union
Billie Jean King
Candace Parker
Matthew Stafford
Shawn Johnson East
Ryan Kalil

Anna Deparseghian
Julie Eddleman
Erik & Natalie Anderson
Heather Brooks & Theodore Samuel Karatz

Angel City FC has also supported various community organizations with their philanthropic outreach. As a result, the following organizations are likely to be willing to engage further:

All People's Community Center
CalSouth Foundation
Downtown Women's Center
Football For Her
Garden School Foundation
IFundWomen
Los Angeles LGBT Center
LA Rec and Park - Girls Play Los Angeles
Las Fotos Project
Twinning

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Appendix 1

Angel City FC 2023 Nike Jersey
Priced at \$140.00



Appendix 2

ACFC Ticket Sales Demographics

- Age of all ticket buyers from 2022-present
 - 17-26 **10.8%**
 - 27-34 **27.6%**
 - 35-42 **24.1%**
 - 43-50 **18.1%**
 - 51-58 **10.2%**
 - 59-66 **5.2%**
 - 67+ **3.9%**
- Gender of all ticket buyers from 2022-present
 - Female **56.8%**
 - Male **43.2%**
- Household income of all ticket buyers from 2022-present
 - Less than \$50k **31.2%**
 - \$50k-\$99k **37.2%**
 - \$100k-\$149k **15.7%**
 - \$150k-\$249k **7.0%**
 - \$250k+ **9.0%**
- Location of all ticket buyers from 2022-present
 - United States **99.41% (475,935 tickets sold)**
 - Canada **0.41% (339 tickets sold)**
 - United Kingdom **0.07% (183 tickets sold)**
 - Saudi Arabia **0.04% (48 tickets sold)**
 - Germany **0.01% (46 tickets sold)**
 - Australia **0.01% (46 tickets sold)**
 - Mexico **0.01% (46 tickets sold)**
 - France **0.01% (30 tickets sold)**
 - New Zealand **<0.01% (19 tickets sold)**
 - Japan **<0.01% (18 tickets sold)**
 - Philippines **<0.01% (15 tickets sold)**
 - Sweden **<0.01% (10 tickets sold)**
 - Singapore **<0.01% (10 tickets sold)**
 - Switzerland **<0.01% (10 tickets sold)**

Appendix 3

Angel City FC First-time Ticket Buyers

- Age of all first-time buyers in the 2023 season
 - 18-25 **2.0%**
 - 26-35 **22.3%**
 - 36-45 **33.6%**
 - 43-55 **23.2%**
 - 56-65 **12.1%**
 - 65+ **6.0%**
- Gender of all first-time buyers in the 2023 season
 - Female **41.8%**
 - Male **57.2%**