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By George Stavroulakis

SOUTH MELBOURNE'S MONEY MAN NOT GIVING UP A-LEAGUE FIGHT



PROPERTY TYCOON ROSS PELLIGRA - THE MULTI-MILLIONAIRE BACKER BEHIND SOUTH MELBOURNE'S A-LEAGUE DREAM - HAS VOWED TO KEEP BANGING ON THE DOOR UNTIL IT FINALLY SWINGS OPEN FOR THE FORMER NSL GIANT.

Undeterred at missing out on the latest round of expansion, with Western Melbourne Group and South West Sydney winning the race - Pelligra is redoubling his commitment to a cause he believes will ultimately be successful.

The man whose family-owned company has burgeoning commercial, retail and residential projects here and overseas, is convinced there is room for a fourth team in Melbourne in a league eventually containing 14 teams.

"When our organisation decides to get involved in something we just keep on going at it," said Pelligra, who is in the process of delivering upgrades to the club's Lakeside Stadium in preparation for a renewed push for a place at the top table.

"The opportunity didn't come around the last time but we're not going away, and we'll continue to work away at it until the milestone has been achieved.

"Melbourne is growing fast and I certainly think there's room for a fourth team here.

"This club already has a huge history and we're doing our bit to give it an even bigger future.

"We're looking at upgrades (to the stadium), rebranding and really transforming the club.

"It's all about getting into the league (at some point) and we're rolling up our sleeves and doing the hard work.

"It's taking longer than we'd hoped. But we're not going away and I've no doubt our time will come. Meanwhile we'll keep making improvements to the facility and build up the membership base."

A part of the youth ranks at NPL side Green Gully as a kid, Pelligra's football roots run deep and he's not just about championing South Melbourne's cause, he's an advocate of the entire A-League.

"It's great for Western Melbourne to have got the nod and you want all the clubs in the league to be successful and lift the profile of the game here until one day it hopefully has the reach you see in Europe," he said.

Pelligra views his involvement as more a labour love than a profit seeking venture, with little likely return on the investments he's willing to make, other than the satisfaction at helping South Melbourne return to the summit.

"This isn't for financial gain ... it's for something that I love," he added.

"The reward will be seeing the sport I love be a big success in Australia long into the future.

"The club have worked really hard to this point. It's now about injecting the capital to take it to the next level.

"It's a very thirsty exercise and a lot of investment is needed. But this is for the community, for young kids to get involved and make a career out of it without necessarily having to go and chase their dreams in Europe.

"It's important for clubs here to have the capital to keep a good portion of the talent in Australia. We want to build a legacy for the next generation. Hopefully other clubs will also have people giving them the backing they need going forward. You need all the clubs to become winners."

South Melbourne bid chief Bill Papastergiadis isn't giving up either, and believes south east Melbourne remains a hot spot for football growth.

He's also convinced that A-League's dipping attendances and tanking TV viewership numbers only strengthen South's case going into the next round of expansion.

"Looking at the metrics, the criteria and evidence we put forward will hopefully galvanise them (FFA) into bringing South Melbourne back," Papastergiadis said.

"Our attendance figures of well over 8,000 when we were in the NSL are in excess of the average of a number of current A-League clubs.

"And that was when there was no social media and scant TV coverage and there were also five teams in Melbourne.

"If the A-League continues to suffer the way it is at the moment I think the case for inclusion becomes more compelling by the day come the next round of expansion.

"We will continue to invest in players and in our junior program which is already the best in Australia, and in our women's program which is already the best in Victoria.

"Hopefully those facts will finally be sufficient for the FFA to accept our admission.

"We're looking at different ways to energise the club with additional links and associations with clubs in Europe and also in India.

"It will be about forging alliances in the development of players and coaches."