

Press Release



Thunder Announce Revolutionary Youth Development System

Minnesota Thunder joins forces with Bangu Tsunami FC and Wings SC, two of the state's most successful clubs, to develop an international-style soccer academy

(June 12, 2008) The Minnesota Thunder Professional Soccer Team has taken a bold new step to help reshape the soccer landscape and make Minnesota a national innovator in soccer development. After seven months of extensive dialogue and collaborative research, the Thunder has combined two of the elite soccer clubs in Minnesota under the Thunder banner to add a new dimension to youth soccer in the state. With the inclusion of Bangu Tsunami FC and Wings SC, the Thunder Academy will begin with over 90 competitive teams forming one of the largest clubs in the Midwest. Together the two elite clubs have produced 39 State Cup Champions, 6 Regional Finalists, and 3 Regional Champions since 2002.

Coinciding with the inception of the Minnesota Thunder Academy (MTA), the Thunder will offer an Open Affiliate Program which is available to all soccer clubs. This program is designed to help Minnesota soccer youth organizations promote the sport in their community, by offering access to the Thunder's growing network of resources, players, and coaches. "Since our inception in 1990 the Thunder has served as a soccer ambassador to the Minnesota community," comments Thunder owner Dean Johnson, "This new program is an extension of our overall cooperative vision."

The Minnesota Thunder Academy will be comprised of Regional Academies (North, South, East, West, and Urban) and the Minnesota Thunder Elite Academy.

Regional Academies are open to all interested players and will provide professional leadership for recreational and competitive players ages 4 to 19. "The great thing about this collaboration is that these Regional Academies will embrace the structure and programming of both Bangu Tsunami FC and Wings SC, in addition to the youth development philosophy of the Minnesota Thunder," says team President Manny Lagos.

The Minnesota Thunder Elite Academy will be focused on the development of Minnesota's top players. There will be two teams formed at each age group/gender from U13 to U19 with the goal of regional and national success. "Our philosophy is to bring together talented players under the guidance of top-level coaches in order to help the players reach their full potential," states Thunder Technical Director Steve Bellis.

Including Thunder Regional Academies and the Thunder Elite Academy, over 1400 players will wear the Thunder badge beginning in the fall of 2008.

Modeling the structure on existing European and South American academies, the Minnesota Thunder Academy will provide a uniquely American path from youth to professional. "I'm committed to adding more Minnesota players to the Thunder roster," states Thunder Head Coach Amos Magee, "This youth initiative will help us identify and develop future Thunder and Lightning first team prospects."

The Minnesota Thunder Academy has hired the following Directors to oversee this progressive program:

Mark Cook	MTA Girls Elite Team Director
Chad Moore	MTA Girls Elite Team Director
Rob Zahl	MTA Boys Elite Team Director
Tod Herskovitz	MTA Boys Elite Team Director
Mark Abboud	MTA Technical Director
Steve Bellis	MTA Technical Director

The Thunder Academy's innovative youth to pro structure, along with its history of successful soccer in the Midwest, has already sparked dialogue and interest from potential European partners. These relationships are expected to include player and coach exchange as well as shared best practices.

The Thunder Academy will be a non-profit organization focused on providing soccer opportunities for all participants regardless of economic status. "In the United States, many high potential athletes are prohibited from taking advantage of professional-level training due to financial restraints. A goal of the Thunder Academy is to provide cost reduction and eventual program cost elimination for all players through Thunder partnerships and sponsorships," adds Thunder Technical Director Mark Abboud.

The Thunder Academy is actively seeking out the most interested soccer players and coaches to participate in structured, year-round training within team contexts. Tryouts for U08-U11 players will be in July and for U12 and older players in August. Tryouts will be open to *all* interested

players, regardless of previous club affiliation and led by Thunder Academy Directors, Thunder Academy professional staff members, and Thunder/Lightning players.

Full program details will be available by June 30, 2008, at the Thunder website, www.mnthunder.com

John Jerabek, Wings SC Board Member

Wings SC is extremely excited about this opportunity. One of our main goals in structuring this arrangement was to provide opportunities for growth for all players within the organization, without requiring the children to leave their neighborhood teams at an early age or lose the community programming that both clubs have found successful. The combined programs will provide for the development of every player at every ability and level of interest by bringing together Minnesota's top youth and professional coaching staffs, providing additional training opportunities for all players and enhancing those programs that have a proven track record of success. This model provides the best of both worlds for the children in our community and provides a model organization for Minnesota youth soccer where the good of the players and families come first.

Rob Zahl, Bangu Tsunami FC Boys Coaching Director

I have been with Bangu Tsunami FC as a player, coach and director for nearly 20 years and have seen us grow from a handful of teams to the most competitive club in the state. We began discussions with the Thunder late last year and the end result is a amazing collaboration for Minnesota soccer.

Along with the Wings SC and the Minnesota Thunder, we have created a unique development environment that will enable us to set the curve not only statewide but also nationally. I am thrilled to be involved with this group and very excited to see the quality opportunity we will provide for the soccer community.