

YOUTH INITIATIVE
Hunt awards medals to members of the FC Dallas Special Olympics program.



GIVING ANSWERS Hunt speaks on various FC Dallas initiatives during a press conference.

PHOTOS / COURTESY FC DALLAS

FIFA WORLD CUP

Dallas – the new center of American soccer

As FC Dallas President and Dallas's 2026 World Cup Host City Bid Chairman, Dan Hunt '96 is making a difference in the soccer community. From building an academy that breeds future World Cup players to ensuring Dallas will host high-stakes World Cup matches, he's bringing his efforts to a global stage.

STORY Ben Adams

November, the United States Men's National Team will compete in the 2022 FIFA World Cup — the most-watched event in all of sports, drawing billions of fans to "the beautiful game."

Nearly a third of the roster will be composed of former or current FC Dallas players.

In the summer of 2026, the World Cup, co-hosted in the U.S., will come to Dallas for several games, including for a possible semi-final or final.

And it was Dan Hunt '96 who worked tirelessly to make it happen.

Hunt's father, Lamar Hunt, was one of the founders of Major League Soccer (MLS), the top American professional soccer league, in the 1990s.

"He initially wound up with the Kansas City Wizards and the Columbus Crew," Hunt said. "But in November 2001, the league gave us FC Dallas, named the Dallas Burn at the time. We eventually moved the team here in Frisco at Toyota Stadium and renamed it to FC Dallas."

From his family's leadership in the creation of MLS to his four-year varsity soccer career here, soccer runs in Hunt's blood. In Nov. 2012, Hunt took a major step in his career when he became the interim president of FC Dallas.

"My family asked me to take over operations on an interim basis. It was only about a week and I loved every bit of it," Hunt said. "I said, 'I'm going to work my tail off on this,' and I became full time president of FC Dallas in January 2014."

Each team in MLS — and around the world — has its

own academy system, in which they try to produce youth players that will eventually compete on their senior team.

"We're traditionalists of the game, and if you look at the clubs around the world, about 96 percent of them are net developers of talent, and they develop their own players," Hunt said. "We believed that was the direction for Major League Soccer for a very long time because that's how it's done in the rest of the world."

Over the last decade, FC Dallas has solidified itself as the top academy in the MLS through its success in youth competitions and the number of "homegrown" players produced. Now, the rest of the world will see the dividends of the investment put into the FC Dallas academy at the World Cup.

"We're going to be a huge contributor to the World Cup team," Hunt said. "In fact, we're going to be a contributor at FC Dallas in a way that only Bayern Munich, Real Madrid and Barcelona are to their national team squads. Very few clubs in the entire world will have a percentage like we will have of players that have come through FC Dallas one way or another."

Although the competition for the starting striker spot on the national team is still taking place, two of the consensus top three strikers were both developed by FC Dallas. Ricardo Pepi came to FC Dallas when he was 12, staying with the team until he was sold to German club FC Augsburg for a club-record fee of \$20 million euros. Jesus Ferreira, currently still playing with FC Dallas, has been with the club for even longer.

"Jesus Ferreira has been with FC Dallas since he was eight," Hunt said. So we've known everything about him and watched him develop and grow into a top talent. We know who he is, and he's going to be a big contributor."

Along with Hunt's goal of winning the MLS Cup with FC Dallas and helping provide players to the national team, he also understands the bigger picture — for soccer to gain popularity in the U.S. Therefore, he knew his job as Dallas's chairman for the 2026 World Cup host city bid, the same job Lamar Hunt held for the 1994 World Cup, was very significant.

"I'm incredibly proud to be the chairman and lead that effort, but there are a lot of great people involved," Hunt said. "It is such an incredible honor to bring this here, and we were told to assume that we'll get a minimum of four games at AT&T Stadium, and I think there's a potential to get a maximum of seven games. Obviously the big prize is the final — that's what I'm chasing."

No matter what Hunt has been able to accomplish in his career, he will not forget the memories made or lessons learned here on campus. In the most difficult times of his job, he was able to rely on his past experiences.

"St. Mark's is one of those special places in the entire world, from the administrators to the students to the facilities," Hunt said. "Everything is done with such a high level of integrity, and St. Mark's taught me that nothing comes easy. It's about hard work. COVID was incredibly difficult, and we had this whole World Cup process going on in the background. I think St. Mark's prepared me for that."

As the World Cup nears, soccer fans around campus make their picks

BY Oliver Peck

Who do you think has the best chance of winning the World Cup this year?

Sophomore Alden Reagins: I believe that France has the best chance of winning the World Cup this year. However, I do think that Brazil is a tough competitor, and Argentina as well. France will win because they have the strongest and fastest center-backs. The addition of key players such as Kylian Mbappé and N'Golo Kanté are very important as well and will help lead France to a World Cup victory.



ALEX SOLIZ
Soccer fan

Junior Alex Soliz: I do believe France will win the World Cup again this year. But France, Germany, Brazil, Argentina, and maybe Belgium are all strong teams as well.

How do you think the USA will do?

AR: At first, we thought they were going to perform well, but in these recent pre-World Cup matches, the United States has performed poorly. Particularly versus Japan, in which they actually ended up losing 2-0 before the end of the first half. It's not the results we like to see out of our home country's squad, so we're going to have to see, but it's not looking too bright right now.

AS: I think the USA will definitely put up a good fight.

Who is your underdog pick to make a deep run?

AR: I think Senegal, the AFCON Cup winner, is an underdog team that could make it far in the tournament. Sadio Mané and Kalidou Koulibaly are both excellent players that could take them far.

AS: I think the Netherlands is definitely an underdog team who could make it far. People don't talk about them enough.

How do you think Argentina and Messi will do in most likely his last World Cup?

AS: I think this is definitely Messi's last World Cup, but he's the greatest player in the world, so I think Messi has a good chance of carrying Argentina to the finals. But he also doesn't need to carry his team completely because he has good teammates.

AR: He's a washed old man. I could beat him in a 1v1.



ALDEN REAGINS
Soccer fan