



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

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Cosmos Country

Do you recall being in one room and hearing the theme music for your favorite television show emanating from the living room? I liken it to a trumpet call as we scrambled to take our places in front of the old boob tube.

For me, and maybe many of you, I can still recall the distinctive beat that summoned me weekly to WOR (we knew it simply as channel 9) to watch the bad boys of soccer – the New York Cosmos. This was the team that broke New York and really, North America, onto the world soccer scene; a team that imported world-class athletes like Georgio Cinaglia, Franz Beckenbauer, and of course, the immortal, Pele. Until that time, soccer was virtually non-existent in the United States, a game our parents tried to dial in on the fuzzy UHF in vain. Then along came the green and yellow shirts who fired our imaginations and launched America's love affair with "the beautiful game." Today, soccer is one of the most played sports among young people in the United States and many say it started with the Cosmos.

Over the past two years, I have been working with the greater Belmont community regarding redevelopment of the Hempstead Turnpike corridor and, specifically, the south lot of Belmont Park. There have been many suggestions, some good, some not so good.

I guess that's why I'm so eager to let you know that through our efforts, the new, reincarnated New York Cosmos have officially proposed building a \$400 million professional soccer arena right here in Nassau County. It's a dazzling state-of-the-art venue and the ambitious plan includes shops, a community park, several restaurants and a hotel, all to be built on that very same, underutilized, south parking lot at Belmont.

Having just lost our beloved Islanders to Brooklyn, this plan comes as great news, not just for Long Island sports fans, but for anyone concerned about our local economy. According to Long Island Business News, the Islanders' 41 home games drew about 13,000 fans per game and generated more than \$60 million in local spending. Since they announced their move earlier this year, the best minds on Long Island have been busy trying to figure out just how to replace what they brought to the Long Island economy. It's a daunting task because in actuality, there's virtually nothing that offers the predictable and recurring financial impact that an anchor sports franchise does.

In that light, the Cosmos and the private investment they bring will create thousands of jobs, directly and indirectly, from the construction phase right through the creation of permanent jobs that come with running a world-class arena. The project will also generate much-needed tax revenue for our communities and schools and it's the kind of project that can jumpstart economic development along the Hempstead Turnpike corridor.

Besides the undeniable economic benefits, I believe that Long Island, which is home to 3 million people, needs a team it can call its own. Teams tend to become integral parts of the landscape, partnering with schools, nonprofits, and local business to create opportunities for young people and to galvanize communities with regional pride. Soccer's immense popularity on Long Island makes it a perfect fit and who knows - we may even become a hotbed for local talent development.

It's a win-win for everyone. Belmont was designed to accommodate over 100,000 people for the Belmont Stakes. Ample parking and infrastructure already exist, so the proposal to construct a 25,000 seat stadium is an easy fit. Belmont Park also has the benefit of an existing Long Island Railroad station and sits along the Cross Island Parkway with its own entrance and exit ramps already in place – making it incredibly convenient for anyone this side of the Hudson. Just think my fellow sports fan, a day out without traveling to the Meadowlands! I invite you to learn more about this proposal by visiting www.cosmosstadium.com.

We've all heard the talk about economic development and job creation for decades. Today, we're seeing action. I am proud to have secured the funding for the Empire State Development Corp. to conduct the study to explore development of the site because I'm tired of hearing that Nassau County, America's first suburb, has had its day. I don't believe that for a minute. Nothing is impossible. This Cosmos stadium project is a perfect example and I truly believe it's just the start of many good things to come.

Success in these types of endeavors has a lot to do with our perspective going in. Remember the old saying, "Whether you believe you can, or whether you believe you can't, you're absolutely right."