

Atlanta Vibe pro volleyball joins city's sports scene

By Doug Roberson | August 4, 2023

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Atlanta soon will get another professional sports team.

The Atlanta Vibe, a six-woman indoor volleyball team, are scheduled to start play in January in the Pro Volleyball Federation. The team colors will be the red, familiar to many teams in the city, and an ice blue. The logo is a red A intertwined with an ice blue V.

The franchise was introduced Friday at Atlantic Station during the Atlanta Open AVP beach volleyball tournament.

The Vibe's 24-match season will start in early February, with the league championship in May, just before the start of the Olympics. The team will play at Gas South Arena in Duluth. It is owned by Colleen Craig, with former Olympians Edwin Moses and Sinjin Smith as minority owners. Former Dream President Theresa Wenzel will be the Vibe's president.

"Atlanta wants winning teams, and we want to do our best to deliver," Craig said.

Craig said Atlanta and the league are banking on the growing popularity of indoor volleyball, and women's sports, to resonate with supporters. She said that indoor volleyball is the fastest growing girls' sport, with membership in the Southern region of USA volleyball growing from 11,000 in 2018 to 21,767 in 2022-23. The number of junior female (ages 10-18) members within that is 18,002. The Southern is one of 40 regions. The Southern is the fourth-largest region. It consists of Georgia, most of Alabama, and eastern to central Tennessee.

"We are cautiously optimistic but need the community to rally around women's sports," Craig said. "We are providing a platform for this pent-up demand that continues to be there and continues to grow."

The league is set up with each team a franchise in the traditional model. The league is scheduled to start with seven teams. Three more are scheduled to come online in 2025. The five other current teams are located in Columbus, Ohio; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Omaha, Nebraska; Orlando, Florida; and San Diego. One more franchise is scheduled for a later announcement.

Each team's roster can start with as many as 30 players. That roster must be cut to 14 players by the start of the season. Two of the 14 players can be internationals. The roster is composed from a college draft and free-agency. The Vibe roster includes 16 players, including several NCAA champions and five who have played for the U.S. national team. The team will be coached by Todd Dagenais, formerly the coach of Central Florida, which he led to six NCAA tournament appearances. He also has coached in the U.S. Youth development program.

Players 18 years and older are eligible to be drafted. Contracts will be for one year for the first year. PVF CEO Jen Spicher said she expects that after its first year the league will offer multi-year contracts.

Part of the goal of the Pro Volleyball Federation was to ensure that the players could make a living wage. With two exceptions, each player will make \$60,000. Each team can sign two franchise players who make \$100,000. The Vibe's franchise players are Morgan Hentz, a libero, and Tori Dilfer Stringer, a setter and the daughter of former NFL quarterback Trent Dilfer, who also is an investor in the league. Players can earn bonuses for advancing to, and in, the four-team playoff, as well as for end-of-season superlative awards. The league winner will receive a \$1 million bonus, according to Craig.

The revenues will come from a broadcast rights deal that is being negotiated. The league also will generate revenue from jersey sales. Individual franchises will generate revenue from matches, community engagement and other merchandise. The Vibe are working on their season-ticket prices and hopes to announce those prices soon. They will be "family friendly," according to Craig. Season-ticket deposits are being accepted. The team's website is www.atlantavibe.com.

The PVF is the first indoor women's league in at least 20 years.

Players who excelled in college and wanted to pursue a professional career would go to play for clubs in Europe.

Vibe player Leah Edmond, who was the first to sign with the league, said she's excited that young women who are playing will be able to more easily follow their favorite players as pros.

"I had my favorite college players and after they graduated from college, they disappeared because there was no way to continue on without going international," Edmond said. "So being able to know that girls coming up through college can stay here and their fans and people from their cities, or wherever they are, can follow them still is really exciting."

Being able to stay in the U.S. and receive a wage that is much higher than the average for playing in Europe, with it also being a shorter season, is also very important, according to Edmond.

“It’s really hard to go overseas, and then try to come back here and live off of that,” she said. “And so being able to know that I can support myself, even when I’m not playing is really nice.”

Club seasons in Europe will overlap with that of the PVF, so it’s unlikely that players will try to play two seasons for different clubs.

The name “Vibe” came from several “name the team” competitions that started with more than 1,000 submissions from 18 states.

Craig said they landed on “Vibe” because it fit for many different reasons.

“We’ve got so many different elements to our city,” she said. “We’ve got the sports teams, we’ve got the music scene, we’ve got the culinary arts and cultural aspects of it. It has its own unique vibe in so many fields. So we think it resonates that we’re very much Atlanta, and Atlanta has its own vibe. We want to part of that vibe. We will have our own vibe.”