



The "Hard Knocks"™ of Building a Football Community in L.A.

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On January 12, 2016, the St. Louis Rams were approved for relocation to Los Angeles, and it's been a roller coaster ride ever since for L.A.'s first NFL team in 22 years.

Immediately deposited into the limelight as the featured team on NFL Films and HBO's preseason reality series *Hard Knocks*, the Rams had barely settled into a new city before cameras were swooping in on their every move. The offense proceeded to struggle mightily, and by season's end, with the team en route to a disappointing 4-12 finish, head coach Jeff Fisher had been fired.

In terms of vibing with a brand new fan base, it would have been amazing to start things off with a bang, or at least a competitive season. Fortunately, successfully marketing the Rams to Los Angeles was not contingent on a winning season, said the team's Executive Vice President of Football Operations and Chief Operating Officer Kevin Demoff, but on establishing an authentic relationship with local communities. And that process began long before the vote to relocate was even cast - back in 2015 when a state-of-the-art NFL stadium complex was approved for construction in Inglewood, Calif.

"That stadium is going to be unbelievable," Demoff told *Extra* and Fox NFL

Kickoff host Charissa Thompson in an onstage interview at PromaxBDA: The Conference on Wednesday. "It's the world's most modern, technologically advanced stadium with an amazing office-retail complex around it."

Scheduled to become the Rams' home field in 2020, the 300-acre property will be 10 times the size of downtown nightlife bastion L.A. LIVE and a destination for going out, working and even living in addition to watching sports. The completed project will "amaze people" of nearby Culver City, Playa del Rey and other west L.A. communities, Demoff said. "There's never been a true entertainment destination [near them] where they can congregate." To that end, the Rams' presence will ultimately mean so much more to the city than football. "This sort of entertainment district can redefine a city like L.A.," Demoff said.

From public family events in neighborhoods such as Watts to the early inclusiveness of a reality TV series, the Rams have looked for opportunities to weave the team into "the fabric of Los Angeles," Demoff said, and "being accessible to fans" wherever possible. In a way, L.A. is a strange sports town because it is a town full of people from other places, who "bring their allegiance from somewhere else," he continued. The team has little expectation of changing who those non-L.A. sports fans root for, but rather "it's getting their kids to grow up as Rams fans."

Building community is the way to the hearts of an NFL team's fan base, and the Rams are well on their way. Their commitment to transparency will take another step forward with the upcoming release of Amazon's All or Nothing, yet another show that will go behind the scenes of their transitional 2016 season. Plus, with exciting new coach Sean McVey on the sidelines and a revamped offense led by quarterback Jared Goff, they have a good chance at rebounding from last season's dismal start, which would go far in completing Demoff's last-but-not-least objective for successful integration:

"We want to make football entertaining," he said, "to be the best possible team we can be for the city, for fans, for the community. There's no reason why we can't become the Cowboys or the Yankees! It starts with being a champion on the field but every day you have to be a champion of the field too."

[Pictured: Kevin Demoff, EVP, Football Operations and COO, Los Angeles Rams; Image courtesy of ImageGroupLA]