

A TOUR OF RSL'S NEW HOME

Real Salt Lake's \$110 million stadium, set to open with Thursday night's game against the New York Red Bulls, boasts 20,008 seats with clear views of the field, 32 luxury suites, a wide variety of food stands and an LCD scoreboard. The only drawback for fans may be a long hike from their parking spots. **R4-R5**

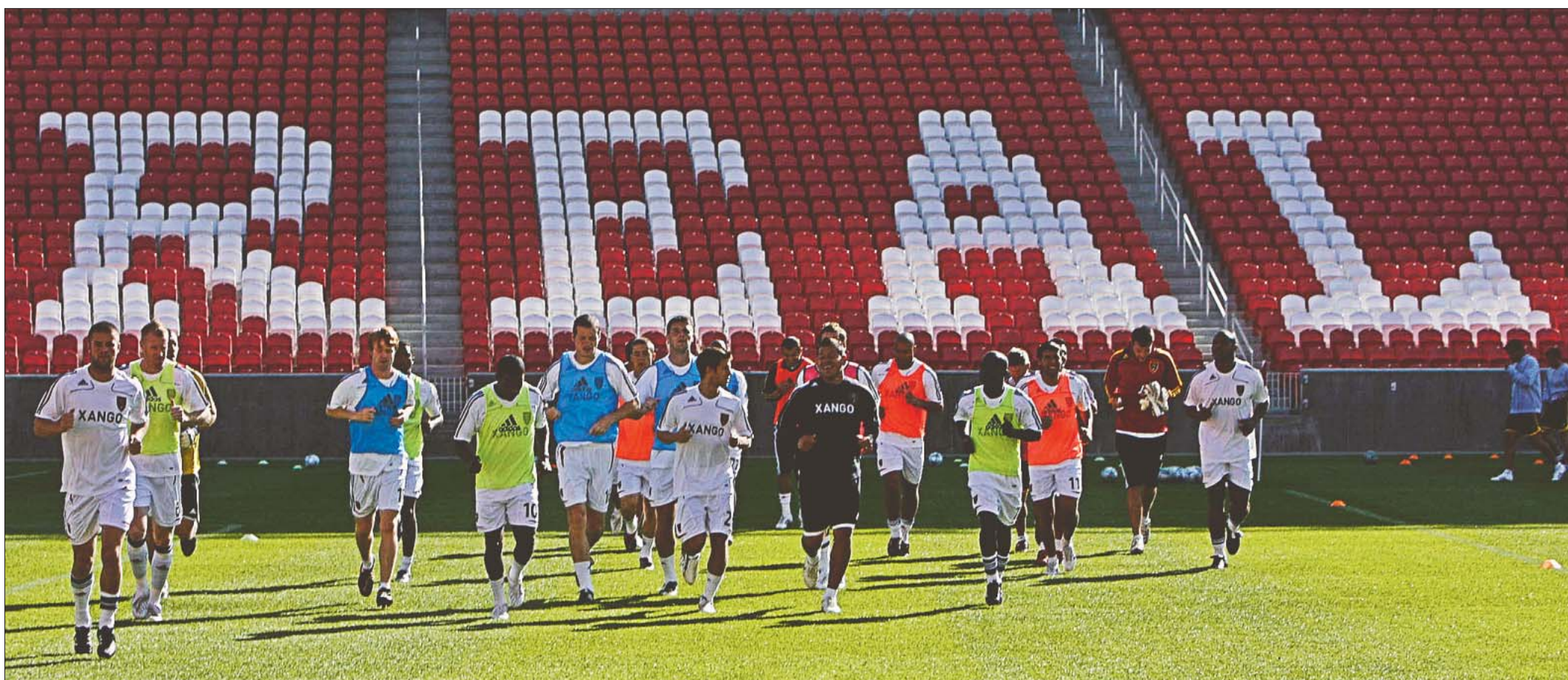
RSL makes pitch for perfection



RIO TINTO STADIUM

The Salt Lake Tribune

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FRANCISCO KJOLSETH/The Salt Lake Tribune

Real Salt Lake players have vacated Rice-Eccles Stadium to practice at newly opened Rio Tinto Stadium, where they will play the New York Red Bulls on Thursday.

A permanent feel

Kurt Kragthorpe

RSL achieves staying power

Real Salt Lake midfielder Kyle Beckerman stood near the spot where soccer star David Beckham once stuck a shovel into the dirt to help launch the most challenging building project in Utah sports history and looked around in appreciation, promising that his teammates would live up to their new surroundings.

"This stadium's going to demand nothing less than a winning team," Beckerman said after a recent practice.

It certainly would be worthy of hosting a Major League Soccer playoff game, the first of its kind in Utah.

Rice-Eccles Stadium successfully staged elaborate ceremonies to open



See **KRAGTHORPE, R2**



FRANCISCO KJOLSETH/The Salt Lake Tribune

Nat Borchers runs through training drills in RSL's new stadium in late September.

New stadium — better team?

Real Salt Lake and other Major League Soccer teams are moving into their own soccer-specific stadiums in a bid to create new revenue streams and put a better product on the field. But new stadiums don't automatically translate into better on-field performance — at least not in the following season.

Team	Stadium built	W-L-T before	W-L-T after
Colorado	2007	11-13-8	9-13-8
Toronto	2007	- *	6-17-7
Chicago	2006	15-13-4	13-11-8
Dallas	2005	10-14-6	13-10-9
L.A. Galaxy	2003	16-9-3	9-12-9
Columbus	1999	15-17-0	19-13-6

* Expansion team created in 2007.

2008 MLS attendance

	Dates	Total	Average
Los Angeles Galaxy	13	336,132	25,856
Toronto FC	14	281,247	20,089
D.C. United	13	252,714	19,440
New England Revolution	13	228,049	17,542
Chicago Fire	13	227,243	17,480
Houston Dynamo	12	193,864	16,155
New York Red Bulls	13	206,623	15,894
Real Salt Lake	13	205,054	15,773
Chivas USA	13	195,125	15,010
Columbus Crew	13	177,056	13,620
Colorado Rapids	13	176,341	13,565
San Jose Earthquakes	13	184,667	14,205
FC Dallas	14	181,242	12,946
Kansas City Wizards	12	130,572	10,881
MLS Totals	182	2,975,929	16,351

Stadium will boost revenues for team

By MICHAEL C. LEWIS
The Salt Lake Tribune

Real Salt Lake's new stadium isn't going to win any soccer games for the club. The lush grass field won't head home any corner kicks, the exclusive private suites won't convert any penalties, and the luxurious new locker room won't make any diving stops in goal.

But that doesn't mean it won't help.

"Does playing within those four walls immediately make you a better team?" general manager Garth Lagerwey said. "No, it doesn't. But it allows you to do things that will."

Primarily by controlling the revenue the new Rio Tinto Stadium generates, team officials believe RSL soon will have more tools at its disposal when competing against its rivals in Major League Soccer. The team figures to be able to spend more on all manner of competitive amenities — from scouting and

See **RSL, R3**

Stadium debut

New York Red Bulls at Real Salt Lake Thursday, 8 p.m., ESPN2

Year by year at Rice-Eccles

	Rec.	Avg. fans
2008	7-1-5	15,773*
2007	4-7-4	15,736
2006	6-4-6	16,366
2005	5-8-3	18,037

*in 13 league games this season

INSIDE

> NOW IT HAS TO WORK:

The pressure's on for politicians and business leaders who supported RSL's stadium drive. **A1**

> **DEAL MAKERS, DEAL BREAKERS:** The stadium deal in 10 easy steps. **R2**

> **MAKE LIKE RIO TINTO:** After selling the stadium's naming rights to Rio Tinto, the team expects to attract more corporate backers. **E1**

> **BLOG:** Tribune reporter Michael Lewis debuts his RSL blog at www.sltrib.com

Kragthorpe

► Continued from R1

and close the 2002 Olympics and was home to an unbeaten college football team two years later. But it is a football stadium, not a *football* venue. With an artificial surface that's hardly suited to soccer, yard lines and logos that appeared as if a fourth-grader had colored over them and a field squeezed between the seats, everything about the setting of RSL's first four seasons of existence cried out "temporary."

Beginning this week, with the opening of Rio Tinto Stadium, Real becomes more and more permanent in the Salt Lake Valley.

Even beyond the striking features, special touches and other accommodations to fans, that's what this stadium means: This team is here to stay.

"All the work and all the emotion that went into building this place, it's uplifting," said coach Jason Kreis, an original Real player. "It's always been a difficult situation. I don't think we've ever been on level ground with the rest of the clubs. . . . Once you see this, it's like, 'Yeah, this club's here for the long term.'"

RSL may never be widely embraced among traditional sports fans, and the effects of all the fighting and dealing that went into getting the stadium built still resonate throughout the valley. Even after Beckham participated in the supposed groundbreaking ceremony in August 2006 when his Real Madrid team played an exhibition game against RSL, there still were many obstacles to overcome.

But the finished product is worth everything it took to make it a reality. For those who wondered if this thing would — or should — ever happen, the proof is here: It's Real's, and it's spectacular.

Nobody's sure how long the novelty of the stadium itself will drive interest in the team. At some point, as Beckerman suggested, the players will have to do their part. They could start by making the playoffs this month, helping to christen the stadium with some postseason play.

Regardless, RSL's two remaining regular-season games, plus a USA Rugby doubleheader and a junior college football bowl game should prove attractive to anyone interested in getting a glimpse of the facility.

RSL owner Dave Checketts drew from his experiences at soccer stadiums in Europe and the other venues being built by MLS teams to incorporate some remarkable features.

It starts at the top, with roofs on the east and west sides resembling waving canopies, to provide some weather protection and help keep the sounds in the stadium. The bottom also is impressive, with perfect, natural grass and a drainage system modeled after Augusta National Golf Club's.

The seats themselves are nothing special, but every one is chairback style. To me, the best view is from the top row of the east side's second deck, still relatively close to the field. As for the premium sections, club seat-holders will have access to a patio just 12 rows from the field, and members of the exclusive Center Circle club can watch the players walk in and out of the midfield tunnel at halftime.

Checketts pretty much thought of everything. There's even a platform leading from the owner's suite out over the seats, where awards presentations can be staged. If and when anything like that happens is up to the players, but there's no doubt that they now have a stadium worthy of anything they can do in it.

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10 STEPS TO STADIUM

By ROSEMARY WINTERS
The Salt Lake Tribune

After all the wins and losses, all the pitches and promises, all the rallies and reversals, all the deal makers and deal breakers — Real Salt Lake has its stadium.

Here is a look, in 10 easy steps, at the long, strange journey the team took to its new home in Sandy:

1. THIS IS THE PLACE FOR MLS

Former Utah Jazz President Dave Checketts snags a contract in July 2004 to bring a Major League Soccer team to Salt Lake City. He vows to build a soccer-specific stadium.

2. TEAM WINS DEBUT AT THE U.

Real Salt Lake leases the University of Utah's 48,000-seat Rice-Eccles Stadium until it can build a more intimate home of its own. In its April 2005 home debut, RSL edges the Colorado Rapids, 1-0, before more than 25,000 cheering fans who endured long ticket lines and basked in the carnival-like atmosphere. "I loved it," said an enthusiast from Bear River City. "There was so much energy and enthusiasm."

3. STADIUM SWEEPSTAKES HEATS UP

Murray, pitching a site near the 4400 South TRAX station, and Salt Lake City, offering the Utah State Fairpark and some downtown blocks, emerge as early favorites for a 20,000-seat RSL stadium. Even developers in Utah County pursue the venue. But Sandy quietly peddles an alternative spot kitty corner from the South Towne Expo Center.

4. SANDY SCORES A GOOOOOAL

Sandy beats out other competitors in the great stadium chase in October 2005, luring RSL south with promises of public funding and ample land to develop a mega-Gateway "super block" with hotels, restaurants and shops around the soccer venue.

5. DEAL FIZZLES, CHECKETTS FUMES

In July 2006, Sandy Mayor Tom Dolan declares the project "dead" after Salt Lake County rejects an early proposal to funnel \$30 million of county hotel taxes to the stadium. Checketts says the team's future in Utah is in "jeopardy" and decries the county as dysfunctional and Mayor Peter Corroon as the "King of England." Corroon fires back that "it's not smart to insult community leaders" and notes that the RSL owner's tirade represents a "Harvard case study on how not to do business."



6. ROCKY RESCUES SANDY'S STADIUM

Salt Lake City Mayor Rocky Anderson becomes an "unlikely hero" in the stadium saga, salvaging the deal by persuading the county and RSL officials to compromise in August 2006. RSL agrees to kick in \$7.5 million toward youth sports fields planned in northwest Salt Lake City. The capital mayor joins Dolan and Checketts in Sandy to hoist golden shovels with soccer superstar David Beckham for an impromptu groundbreaking. Checketts calls the still-to-be-finalized compact "a big act of faith."

7. RSL THREATENS TO BECOME REAL ST. LOUIS

Corroon buries the stadium deal — again — deeming it too "risky" in late January 2007, after a lengthy review of RSL's financial plan by an outside firm and the county's debt review team. Checketts threatens to sell the franchise, and a St. Louis group pursues the team. Corroon, burnishing his emerging image as a guardian of the public purse, declares that Salt Lake County's "integrity is not for sale."

8. RSL 'HERE TO STAY'

Days later, Republican Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr. and legislative leaders unveil a plan to save the stadium and keep RSL in Utah, touting the Sandy facility as an engine for economic growth. The Legislature passes a bill Feb. 8, 2007, that channels \$35 million of county hotel taxes to land, parking and infrastructure for the \$110 million stadium — although the measure's original sponsor abstains. Sporting RSL scarves on Capitol Hill, Checketts calls it a "blessed event" and Huntsman declares the soccer team "is here to stay." Sandy pledges up to \$15 million — the final amount ends up being \$10 million — of redevelopment funds toward the project. RSL agrees to build an elite soccer academy in Utah, contribute \$7.5 million to Salt Lake City's planned youth sports fields and assist with economic development in Sandy and the state.

9. REAL CONSTRUCTION KICKS OFF



Ground work on the stadium site at 9256 S. State St. begins in spring 2007. Opponents of the stadium's public-funding package organize as Get Real Utah and try to force a voter referendum on the deal, but fail to gather enough signatures. RSL celebrates the "topping out" of steel in December 2007. At a nearly completed stadium in July 2008, the team announces it will host the 2009 Major League Soccer All-Star Game.

Joseph Haywood installs some of the thousands of red seats on the east side of the Rio Tinto soccer stadium in June.

AL HARTMANN/Tribune file photo

10. GAME ON — IN SANDY

RSL, contending for a playoff spot, falls in its final game at Rice-Eccles Stadium before 26,000-plus fans Sept. 20. A little more than a week later and coming off a key road victory, the team announces a naming-rights deal that will christen its Sandy home Rio Tinto Stadium after the mining company, which owns Kennecott Utah Copper, agrees to a multimillion-dollar accord. RSL now awaits its inaugural match Thursday in its new Sandy digs in a nationally televised showdown against the New York Red Bulls.

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Kennecott Land is part of the global Rio Tinto company. It's big. But what's really big is the cause that brings us together — a focus on sustainable development practices.

As a result, Oquirrh Lake at Daybreak was designed and is carefully maintained to provide a natural habitat to indigenous fish, birds, plants, and animals. We're proud of that. Respecting the environment is just part of our long-term commitment. To learn more, please visit www.kennecottland.com or www.riotinto.com.

RioTinto

Andy Kirby, Manager, Engineering Planning, Kennecott Land, maintains ecology at Oquirrh Lake in Daybreak. Andy is one of 65,000 Rio Tinto employees committed to sustainable development practices.