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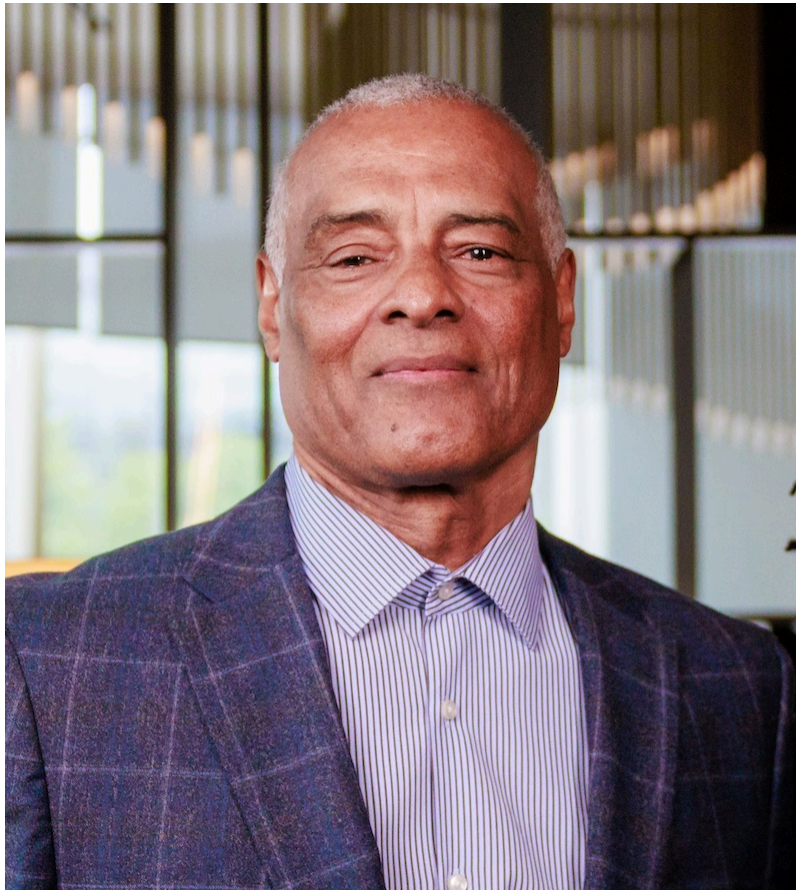
F O R C H A N G E

2024 ALL-STAR HOMETOWN HERO SPOTLIGHT

Columbus Metro Soccer Association Recreational League (CMSA)

Dr. Anthony Williams

Dr. Williams is a respected doctor with over 45 years' experience practicing family care medicine and occupational healthy in Columbus. With his brother, Dr. Williams launched the Columbus Metro Soccer Association Recreational League (CMSA) in 1985 which was designed to provide access to soccer for children living in the inner city of Columbus. Through the CMSA, Dr. Williams created "The Zulus", an elite traveling U-8 soccer team he coached for three years that would go on to leave a significant impact on the game of soccer in Ohio and every player that Coach Williams taught.



“I’m very excited and honored to have been selected as the recipient of the 2024 MLS All-Star Honorary Hero, not only personally, but also on behalf of all the wonderful parents, families, and volunteers who embraced the vision of materializing a concept of an inner-city soccer program in Columbus, OH into a reality. Today, we see the fruits of our labor as many of the tiny footballers went on to have illustrious soccer experiences at the high-school, collegiate and MLS level and are now “soccer moms and dads” themselves. We are proud that the Columbus Metro Soccer Association made its contribution to the blossoming of the Beautiful Game we see today in the MLS and world over.”

— Dr. Anthony Williams

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MLS Unveils 2024 All-Star Hometown Heroes Presented by RBC Wealth Management

MLS Communications

Thursday, Jun 27, 2024, 09:00 AM



Attend the MLS All-Star Hometown Heroes Showcase by registering at tinyurl.com/mrj3d9vm

MLS All-Star Hometown Heroes Showcase presented by RBC Wealth Management on July 23 to Celebrate Inclusion, Innovation, and Impact in Columbus Community



NEW YORK AND COLUMBUS, OHIO (June 27, 2024) – Major League Soccer, Black Players for Change (BPC), and RBC Wealth Management today announced the 2024 All-Star Hometown Heroes. This honor celebrates non-profit organizations

and leaders who demonstrate innovative approaches to serving individuals and communities throughout Columbus.

Media assets including a sizzle video can be found ***here***

Below are the 2024 Hometown Heroes. These heroes all showcase their commitment to serving Columbus through areas of impact including education and literacy, physical and mental wellness, and providing access to youth soccer. Each organization will receive a \$15,000 grant to elevate their work and community impact.

- Columbus Early Learning Centers – **Gina Ginn**, Chief Executive Officer
- Final Third Foundation – **Benjamin Levey**, Executive Director
- Our Helpers – **Dorothy Hassan**, Chief Executive Officer
- Student Success Stores – **Neethi Johnson**, President

Additionally, Dr. Anthony Williams is being recognized as the Honorary Hero, an accolade given to an individual who has not only made a positive impact on the lives of those around them, but has also worked extensively to progress the sport of soccer in their community. A key figure in Columbus for over 45 years, Dr. Williams coached a great number of soccer players, many of whom went on to play soccer in college.

In collaboration with BPC – an independent organization of Black MLS players, coaches and staff working to bridge the racial equality gap in soccer and society – and the Columbus Crew, the honorees will be recognized at the third annual MLS All-Star Hometown Heroes Showcase presented by RBC Wealth Management. The private event will take place on Tuesday, July 23 from 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. at the Lincoln Theatre in Columbus (769 E Long St., Columbus, OH 43203). The event is part of the League, Columbus Crew, BPC and RBC Wealth Management’s ongoing efforts to amplify and celebrate the impactful work taking place to within the community, and will feature an intimate discussion, moderated by BPC’s Executive Director Allen Hopkins, Jr., to put a spotlight on leaders of each organization.

"MLS is humbled to honor Columbus Early Learning Centers, Final Third Foundation, Our Helpers, and Student Success Stores as the 2024 MLS All-Star Hometown Heroes," said Sola Winley, Executive Vice President, Chief Engagement and

Inclusion Officer of Major League Soccer. "I would also like to acknowledge the thoughtfulness of the members of our selection committee. At a time when we celebrate the best of MLS in Columbus, the Hometown Heroes committee is shining a light on community leaders and organizations who provide service and hope every day and are among the countless stars of this city."

This year's Hometown Heroes were selected by a committee consisting of: Sola Winley, Dee Haslam (Haslam Sports Group CEO), Evan Bush (Columbus Crew Player), Jeremy Ebobisse (San Jose Earthquakes Player), Dante Washington (Former Columbus Crew Player & MLS Great), Ray Gaddis (MLS Great), Peter Kaldis (RBC Wealth Management-U.S. Director of Business Development), and Michael Corey (Chamber of Franklin County Executive Director, Human Services).

Among the criteria for selection was the individual's use of an innovative approach to helping those in the local area with the greatest need, whose actions directly have a positive impact on the community, as well as the commitment of the leader's organization to serve underrepresented individuals and communities throughout the Columbus area.

"I don't know if the word 'heroes' is a strong enough word for these organizations and the people who work for them. As a Columbus resident myself, I was humbled and inspired by their selfless contributions and dedication to making our community a better place to live and work," said Peter Kaldis, Director of Business Development at RBC Wealth Management-U.S. "Supporting our communities is a cornerstone value at RBC Wealth Management and the MLS Hometown Heroes Showcase is one way we can help amplify and recognize the great work being done by nonprofits in our community."

The MLS All-Star Hometown Heroes Showcase presented by RBC Wealth Management is part of the League's schedule of events in the lead-up to the highly anticipated 2024 All-Star Game presented by Target between MLS and LIGA MX on Wednesday, July 24 at Lower.com Field in Columbus. For additional information on this year's honorees, visit [MLSSoccer.com](https://mlssoccer.com). Media interested in attending are encouraged to R.S.V.P. by contacting MLS@BerkCommunications.com or Peter.OBrien@MLSSoccer.com.

2024 MLS All-Star Hometown Heroes Honorees presented by RBC Wealth Management

****Columbus Early Learning Centers** – Gina Ginn, Chief Executive Officer**

Columbus Early Learning Centers (CELC) is the oldest early education and care provider in the Midwest. Founded in 1886, CELC has been committed to supporting Columbus' children and families by providing education to children 6 weeks to 5 years old through year-round, all-day programming at education and care centers, home-visit programs and familial support.

****Final Third Foundation** – Benjamin Levey, Executive Director**

Final Third Foundation is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization with a mission to inspire, engage, and educate through soccer-based and education-based youth-focused programs and events. Programming includes soccer & literacy, environmental awareness and professional development.

****Our Helpers** – Dorothy Hassan, Chief Executive Officer**

Our Helpers is a women led, immigrant-founded nonprofit in Columbus, Ohio focused on improving the lives of immigrants and refugee families by connecting and providing resources in all aspects of human services.

****Student Success Stores** – Neethi Johnson, President**

Student Success Stores (SSS) exists to meet the basic needs of students in grades 6-12 from economically disadvantaged communities and to remove barriers to learning that can be created when life necessities are unavailable. The organization provides free, anonymous stores inside schools filled with hygiene products, easy-to-eat food items, school-code clothing, and school supplies. By supplying students with the essentials, they aim to ensure that each child starts the school day healthy, confident and ready to learn.

Honorary Hero: Dr. Anthony Williams

Dr. Williams is a respected doctor with over 45 years' experience practicing family care medicine and occupational health in Columbus. With his brother, Dr. Williams launched the Columbus Metro Soccer Association Recreational League (CMSA) in 1985 which was designed to provide access to soccer for children living in the inner city of Columbus. Through the CMSA, Dr. Williams created "The Zulus", an elite traveling U-8 soccer team he coached for three years that would go on to leave a significant impact on the game of soccer in Ohio and every player that Coach Williams taught.

What Hometown Heroes Are Saying

"We have served the diverse and hard-working families of Columbus for 137 years - since 1887! With the support of generous partners like the Columbus Crew and Major League Soccer, our services make it possible for parents in low socio-economic households to work or attend school, while their young children are also given a strong foundation for success in school and in life," **said Gina Ginn, Chief Executive Officer, Columbus Early Learning Centers.** "A big thank you to the MLS, the Black Player's Association and RBC Wealth Management for selecting Columbus Early Learning Centers as an MLS All-Star Hometown Hero 2024. A recognition of this magnitude will assist us in carrying out our mission to help young learners develop, families succeed, and neighborhoods thrive. Columbus Early Learning Centers envisions and strives for a Columbus community where all children, birth through pre-kindergarten, has access to a high-quality early learning experience, regardless of their zip code or economic status. We are grateful for the MLS community's support to highlight CELC's important work in Central Ohio."

"Our team at Final Third Foundation and I are honored to be chosen alongside three amazing leaders and organizations making an impact in our city," **said Benjamin Levey, Executive Director, Final Third Foundation.** "This is hopefully a launching pad that allows people to understand how F3 utilizes soccer, wellness, and education to grow the game and level the playing field—on and off the pitch. We are so grateful to RBC Wealth Management and MLS for giving us this platform—thank you!"

"It is incredibly humbling to be recognized by MLS as a hometown hero for the work that Our Helpers is doing to help New American families improve their lives and transition from simply surviving to thriving, said **Dorothy Hassan, Chief Executive Officer, Our Helpers**. "We are connecting the dots across organizations, partners, and institutions to recognize the wholeness of immigrant and refugee individuals, with mental wellness at the very center of our why. I am honored that the work we are doing is being valued and celebrated in a way that surpasses my wildest dreams! This award is an absolute honor."

"Being named an MLS All-Star Hometown Hero is an incredible honor for Student Success Stores," said **Neethi Johnson, President, Student Success Stores**. "This recognition shines a spotlight on our mission to support students by providing essential resources such as food, clothing, and school supplies to students in need in Columbus. It underscores the impact of our efforts in helping students overcome barriers, stay focused on their education, and achieve their full potential. This honor from MLS All-Star acknowledges the importance of ensuring that no student goes without the basic necessities needed for academic success. It fuels our passion and commitment to continue serving and expanding our reach to even more students in need. We are deeply grateful for this recognition, as it inspires us to strive even harder to create a nurturing and supportive environment where every student can thrive. Thank you to MLS for celebrating and amplifying the importance of our mission and insuring that every Columbus student starts the day healthy, confident, and ready to learn."

What MLS' Honorary Hometown Hero Is Saying

"I'm very excited and honored to have been selected as the recipient of the 2024 MLS All-Star Honorary Hero, not only personally, but also on behalf of all the wonderful parents, families, and volunteers who embraced the vision of materializing a concept of an inner-city soccer program in Columbus, OH into a reality. Today, we see the fruits of our labor as many of the tiny footballers went on to have illustrious soccer experiences at the high-school, collegiate and MLS level and are now "soccer moms and dads" themselves. We are proud that the Columbus Metro Soccer Association made its contribution to the blossoming of the Beautiful Game we see today in the MLS and world over." – **Dr. Anthony Williams**

About Major League Soccer

Headquartered in New York City, Major League Soccer -- celebrating its 29th season in 2024 -- features 30 clubs throughout the United States and Canada, including a new expansion team in San Diego that will debut in 2025. All MLS, Leagues Cup, and select MLS NEXT Pro and MLS NEXT matches can be watched through MLS Season Pass, available on the Apple TV app on Apple devices, smart TVs, streaming devices, set-top boxes, and game consoles, and the web at tv.apple.com. MLS Season Pass features the most expansive and accessible lineup of programming ever for MLS fans. For more information about MLS, visit mlssoccer.com. For more information about the Apple TV app, visit apple.com/apple-tv-app.

About Black Players for Change

Black Players for Change (BPC) is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization consisting of over 170+ Black players, coaches and staff from MLS, working to bridge the racial equality gap that exists in society. BPC is committed to tackling the racial injustices that have limited Black people from having an equitable stake in the game of soccer and society. Among the many goals, the organization strives to advance the attention on human rights inequalities from protests to programs, partnerships, and policies that address systemic discrimination. For more information visit www.BlackPlayersForChange.org.

About RBC Wealth Management

Founded in 1909, RBC Wealth Management delivers trusted advice and world-class wealth solutions to individuals, families and institutions. A subsidiary of Royal Bank of Canada (RBC), it is one of the largest full-service wealth management firms in the U.S., supporting the complex needs of high-net-worth and institutional clients by providing access to private banking, credit, investment management, asset management and other services. In the United States, RBC Wealth Management has \$583 billion in total client assets with more than 2,100 financial advisors operating from 190 locations in 42 states. RBC Wealth Management, a division of RBC Capital Markets, LLC, registered investment adviser and Member NYSE/FINRA/SIPC. Learn more at rbcwm.com.

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