

LACROSSE

It's official: Pro lacrosse has arrived

By **Chris Snow**
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Aaron Sickman, a Wild public relations official, stepped to a podium inside Xcel Energy Center on Tuesday and proclaimed, "Welcome to the state of lacrosse."

He got a good laugh for a clever play on the "State of Hockey" moniker Wild owners developed in 2000 to launch the NHL team and develop what has become one of the NHL's healthiest fan bases.

Now the Wild's parent company, Minnesota Sports and Entertainment (MSE), believes it can ply its marketing savvy in the world of professional indoor lacrosse.

Wild owner Bob Naegele Jr.

and National Lacrosse League Commissioner Jim Jennings announced Tuesday the addition of Minnesota as the 11th NLL team, to begin play this December.

"Here we go again," Naegele said. "We just can't stop reproducing ourselves."

The expansion fee for an NLL team is \$3 million, but the Wild bought the rights to the dormant Montreal Express for a little more than \$1 million, Jennings said.

The team will play eight home games, all on weekends, among a 16-game schedule to be released in mid-September.

The club does not yet have a coach, a general manager or a team name, though those issues will be resolved by the

end of September. The NLL will hold a dispersal draft and entry draft in September.

Season ticket deposits are \$25. Tickets begin at \$10 (lower-level ends, rows 17-26) and peak at \$25 (lower-level sides).

For now, MSE is selling seats only in the arena's lower bowl, which has a capacity of 9,900, plus rail standing-room seats. The 10-team NLL averaged just more than 10,000 fans per game in 2003-04, Jennings said.

NLL players earn between \$10,000 and \$20,000 per season, making this an inexpensive venture for a company such as MSE with an arena at its disposal. The NLL has reorganized in recent years, aligning six of its 11 teams with NHL ownership groups.

Running the NLL team might allow the Wild to maintain staff who otherwise might be cut during an NHL lockout. Unlike a number of NHL teams, Wild Chief Financial Officer Pamela Wheelock said, the Wild has no plans to lay off any of MSE's estimated 200 employees.

"Our whole philosophy is built on valuing partnerships, with fans, the community and our employees," Wheelock said. "We want to find a way to honor that."

Fans can vote for one of four team names at <http://www.lacrosseminn.com>. The options are the Minnesota Thrill, Rush, Swarm or Bullheads.

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