

Carolina RailHawks

The Carolina RailHawks are a professional soccer team based in Cary, N.C. They play their home matches at WakeMed Soccer Park. The team's colors are orange, blue and white.

The Carolina RailHawks are owned by Selby Wellman, Brian Wellman, Bob Young and Paul Singh.

In three seasons, the RailHawks have a record of 33-29-26 in league play. In all matches, which includes league, U.S. Open Cup and exhibition fixtures, the RailHawks have posted an overall record of 45-38-26. They have an all-time goal differential of plus-24(130 goals scored, 106 allowed).

The club was founded in 2006 by Chris Economides, Steve Donner and Frank DuRoss, the same trio that launched the Rochester Rhinos in upstate New York in 1996. On January 26, 2006, Economides announced during a press conference he and several other investors had purchased a USL First Division franchise and that it would begin play in 2007.

The team's nickname was announced on July 19, 2006, during halftime of the 2006 USL All-Star Game at SAS Soccer Park. The RailHawks name was chosen from a name-the-team contest. Jarrett Campbell, a soccer blogger and founder of the Triangle Soccer Fanatics, the team's independent supporters club, offered the winning submission. He received two lifetime season tickets as his prize. The RailHawk is a fictitious bird of prey that combines the speed and power of the locomotive with the aggressive and fierce nature of a hawk. Cary originally grew out from a depot on the New Bern, N.C.-Hillsborough, N.C. rail line and the CSX and Amtrak lines run directly across from the team's grounds. Hawks are indigenous to the area.

On Oct. 11, 2006, Scott Schweitzer was named the first head coach of the Carolina RailHawks. Schweitzer played eight seasons in the USL-1, seven of which were spent as a defender with the Rochester Rhinos, whom he guided to three league championships and the 1999 U.S. Open Cup title. He retired after the 2005 season. Schweitzer played collegiately at N.C. State, where he was a four-year letter winner and the 1992 ACC Player of the Year.

The RailHawks made their debut on April 21, 2007, before a crowd of 6,327 at SAS Soccer Park. Kuponu Low scored the first goal in franchise history eight minutes into the match -- a 24-yard blast from the top of the penalty area -- but the match ended a 1-1 draw. After an 0-1-3 start to the season, the RailHawks got their first-ever victory in a friendly against Major League Soccer's Chivas USA by a score of 2-0.

They secured their first USL-1 win on May 12 when they

defeated the Atlanta Silverbacks 2-1 at Silverbacks Stadium. Though an expansion team, the RailHawks were in contention for a playoff berth all season. Needing to win in order to clinch the eighth and final playoff spot, Carolina defeated the California Victory 2-0 in San Francisco in the final match of the regular season.

In the quarterfinals, Carolina was pitted against regular-season champion Seattle. The Sounders won the two-leg series 3-0 on aggregate.

The 2007 season also featured the RailHawks entry into the Lamar Hunt U.S. Open Cup, the annual competition open to all United States Soccer Federation-affiliated teams. The RailHawks won their first two matches against amateur teams by a combined score of 8-1. With Major League Soccer teams entering the competition in the third round, the RailHawks drew the Chicago Fire, the competition's reigning champions. The RailHawks won 1-0 and went on to the tournament's semifinals, where they were eliminated by eventual champion New England Revolution, 2-1.

Building off a successful debut season, the RailHawks got off to a strong start in 2008, going 3-0-4 out of the gates. But they were unable to sustain that level of play over the course of the season. The RailHawks were in the mix for a playoff berth all season, and once again, it came down to the final match of the year. Carolina defeated Portland 1-0, but did not get the help it needed. Minnesota defeated Montreal 3-1 on the same day, and the Thunder clinched the seventh and final playoff spot. The RailHawks finished the season 9-10-11 and in eighth place in the USL-1 table.

They also reached the third round of the U.S. Open Cup and appeared headed toward a quarterfinals berth. Leading MLS' Kansas City Wizards 2-0 after more than 60 minutes of play, the Wizards scored twice in the final half hour and prevailed 4-2 in overtime.

Following the 2008 season, Martin Rennie was installed as the RailHawks new coach. Rennie was previously at the helm of the USL Second Division's Cleveland City Stars, where he compiled a two-year record of 23-5-16 and won the 2008 league championship.

Much like he did in Cleveland, Rennie made an immediate impact with the RailHawks. The RailHawks won their first three matches of the season and went on to enjoy their best year in their short history. Carolina posted a 16-7-7 record, finished second in the USL-1 table and returned to the playoffs. Along the way, the RailHawks set a slew of new club records, including most wins in a season (16), most points earned (55), most goals scored (43), fewest goals allowed (19), shutouts (17) and longest unbeaten streak (nine matches). The RailHawks never fell below fourth place all season, and they earned points against every other team in the league.

Though the RailHawks qualified for the 2009 postseason, it ended just like their first trip to the playoffs. Seventh-seeded Vancouver eliminated the RailHawks 1-0 on aggregate.

In the U.S. Open Cup, the RailHawks were upset in the second round by the USL Second Division's Wilmington Hammerheads. After a wild 120 minutes left the teams tied 3-3, the Hammerheads won the match in a penalty kick shootout.

Carolina showed fine form in their friendlies throughout the season, going 4-1 in five matches. They defeated Major League Soccer's New England Revolution 2-1, the Wilmington Hammerheads 3-0, the Panama National Team 1-0 and the Mexican First Division's Estudiantes Tecos 2-1. The lone defeat was to Honduran power CD Olimpia, 2-1.