

# Would the 1989-90 Invaders have succeeded in the MISL?

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Indoor soccer in the United States was at its peak when the Canton Invaders were winning American Indoor Soccer Association championships.

The AISA, later renamed the National Professional Soccer League, was one of two indoor leagues in the country for most of the 1980s and early '90s. It operated out of Canton when former Invaders owner Steve Paxos became commissioner and had teams in large markets such as Atlanta, Chicago, Memphis, Milwaukee and Tampa Bay.

Many considered the Major Indoor Soccer League the more established indoor league at the time. It stretched from Baltimore to San Diego. Cleveland's team, the Force, averaged a league-leading 14,111 fans during the 1986-87 season. By comparison, the NBA's Cleveland Cavaliers averaged 10,905 fans a game that year.

"There were a lot of good players in the MISL," former Invader Joe Pavlek said. "It had a lot of ex-professional players from all over the world. It was a bit different."

The 1989-90 Invaders went 36-4 during the regular season and lost just once in the playoffs on their way to a fifth league title. Leading scorer Rudy Pikuzinski, midfielders Marcelo Carrera and Gino DiFlorio and defender Oscar Pisano were among the players who had previous MISL experience.

How would the Invaders have fared if they played in the MISL that season?

"I don't think we would have been that dominant, but I think we could have competed against any of those teams," Carrera said. "We would have had a good season in that league."

The MISL folded in 1992. The league's teams in Baltimore, Cleveland and Wichita joined the NPSL.

### **Home sweet home**

Counting the playoffs, the Invaders were 22-1 at home during the 1989-90 season. Their lone loss: a 13-6 setback against Hershey in their final home game of the regular season.

### **One last hurrah**

The 1990 championship was the fifth and final title won by the Invaders.

Canton made one more championship series appearance in 1992, but was defeated by the Detroit Rockers 3-2 in the best-of-five series. Despite having a better record, the Invaders were forced to play the decisive fifth game in Detroit due to a scheduling conflict at Memorial Civic Center. They lost the final three games of the series.

### **The final chapters**

The Invaders left Canton for Columbus in 1996 and played one season at Battelle Hall as the Columbus Invaders. The team moved again in 1997 to Montreal and operated as the Montreal Impact for three seasons. They played their games at the then-Molson Centre, home of the NHL's Montreal Canadiens.

Carrera experienced highs and lows with the Invaders. In addition to playing on the record-setting 1989-90 team, he also played with the Invaders in 1995-96 when they finished 5-35.

"I played in the best year of the Invaders and the worst year," Carrera said. "(1995-96) was my best year as a player because I was one of the leading scorers in the league. Winning-wise, it was really bad. The situation was not good.

"It was really sad to see the team go down."

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