

Newspaper says Florida group owned MISL's Phoenix Inferno

PHOENIX (AP) — A group of Southern Florida businessmen were the actual owners of the Phoenix Inferno before the Major Indoor Soccer League franchise recently was sold in U.S. Bankruptcy Court proceedings, a Phoenix newspaper reported yesterday.

In a copyright story, The Arizona Republic said the late Rick Ragone and Irv Berger were "used as a front" for the Florida group.

Following Ragone's death in a December, 1981, auto accident in suburban Paradise Valley, Berger was announced as sole owner of the Inferno on Feb. 10, 1982.

The Republic said the Florida group included Manuel Espinosa, 42, a Cuban exile and radio talk-show host; Juan Cid, 28, a private detective; Rogelio "Roger" Novo, 59, part-owner of a Key Biscayne restaurant; Emilio Palmar, a Nicaraguan tobacco grower who owns the Rogers-on-the-Green restaurant with Novo, and Julio Eiroa.

Eiroa's whereabouts and occupation were not known, the Republic said.

A day after Ragone's death, then-Inferno spokesman Mark Middleton announced that, contrary to an earlier statement by Ragone, Ragone was only a minority owner of the franchise.

Middleton said 75 percent of the

ownership was in the hands of three partners in Miami.

A copy of the Inferno stock certificate on file in Maricopa County Superior Court listed Ragone, Novo, Palmar and Eiroa as the original owners, the Republic said.

According to Inferno employees, Ragone regularly flew back to Phoenix from Miami with "suitcases of cash that Ragone said came from Miami," the newspaper said.

Berger, a former real-estate entrepreneur in the San Francisco area, said he put up \$2 million as a down payment to buy the team.

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