



Reading United A.C.
3103 Paper Mill Rd.
Wyomissing, PA 19610
www.readingunitedac.com

Press Release

Contact: Sean Doyle, Media Coordinator
sean@readingunitedac.com
484-269-0319

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

United plays chart their path along the Union Way *Union Academy alums discuss path to pros*

READING, PA (June 26, 2018) – The annual Philadelphia Union Fest heads back to Berks County and players from Reading United, Bethlehem Steel and the Philadelphia Union come together for a night of games, fan interaction and some competitive soccer between the pros of today and of the future. Ahead of the game, Reading United players Lamine Conte, Will Campbell and Rob Campbell reflected on their experiences coming up through the Union Academy system and how it affected their soccer careers.

Defender Will Campbell, who attends the University of North Carolina, says that he started playing for Delaware County based Nether United FC. Campbell recalls being noticed by then Philadelphia Union Head Coach John Hackworth, who currently coaches the U.S. Soccer Under-17 Boys National Team. He was invited to play in the Union system before there was even the Union Academy based out of the YSC Academy. Will was only 14 at the time when he started to play with the team.

His brother, Rob, started off playing for Nether United and played in the Union Juniors system before they became a full-time academy. His time with the Union Juniors is what earned him a tryout with the Academy. Once the Union Academy was officially formed, the brothers were a part of some of the first ever teams. This fall, Rob will play his college soccer at the University of Delaware.

Lamine Conte came over to the United States in 2013 and was brought to a try out by Idrissa Kone referred to as “Baba” who is now a coach within the Union system. Lamine credits his play with Junior Lone Star, a Philadelphia based NPSL team founded by West African immigrants, as a factor in being noticed by the Union scouts.

Conte, who is transferring to the University of Louisville following two seasons with the University of Mobile, is one of the Premier Development League’s Top Prospects. The defender, a key part of Reading’s dominant defensive unit, was an NAIA All-America selection in 2017.

Will Campbell played under Jim Curtin, the current Philadelphia Union coach, for his first year at the academy when they won the 2012 Generation Adidas Cup. He has high praise for Coach Curtin, saying, “He’s one of the main reasons that I raised my game to a higher level. Previously, I had just been playing in a small-town area and he helped me realize what it takes to play at a higher level.”

Rob Campbell came in for his first tryout with the organization’s Under-16 team. The first coach he played under in the Academy was coach Jeff Cook, current head coach at Penn State. “It was more of a professional environment playing for the Academy. Going from practicing two days a week with local clubs to now practicing five days a week with games on weekends was a good change which was a helpful to my development as a player.”

Lamine Conte came onboard in 2014, joining Rob and Coach Jeff Cook. He had a bit of a more difficult time at first as he barely spoke English when he first arrived. “Playing there helped me develop as a player. It was something that I had never experienced, playing academy soccer, and it also helped me to make a smoother transition into living in the United States. I gained so much playing under those coaches which helped me to be able to play soccer in college.”

The guys have gotten to experience playing soccer with some of the top players in the country and were lucky enough to play with some teammates that were able to sign home grown contracts with the Philadelphia Union. Lamine and Rob called current Union players Anthony Fontana, Auston Trusty, Mark McKenzie and Matt Real teammates. Will played alongside Union midfielder Derrick Jones, Zach Pfeffer, the Union’s first ever homegrown signee and Andrew Skundrich, who currently plays for the Bethlehem Steel.

The Union Academy was also a great way for the rising Reading United stars to gain some national exposure. All of the players agreed that playing for the Union Academy helps players take the next step in their soccer careers, whether it be playing at the collegiate level or making the jump right to the professional game.



Official Premier Development League Affiliate of the Philadelphia Union





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ABOUT READING UNITED AC

Reading United A.C. is the Greater Reading area's premier minor league soccer team. Led by the ownership group of Berks Professional Sports, Inc. the club was founded in 1995 as the Reading Rage. As the club entered its 15th season a name, logo, and color change was made to better feature the ties to the local and state community as well as the soccer goals of the team and its partners. Now in its twenty-third season, Reading United's commitment to professional player development has produced over fifty players currently on the rosters of professional clubs throughout the United States, Europe and Latin America. Reading United is the official Premier Development League affiliate of Major League Soccer's Philadelphia Union. For more information about Reading United AC, visit www.readingunitedac.com.



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