

Feature Story

TWO FORMER MEMBERS OF FFC NPSL FRANCHISE TO PLAY FOR USL TITLE

SPECIAL NOTE: USL FINAL WILL AIR LIVE ON ESPNU ON MONDAY (11/13/17) AT 9:00 P.M.

Posted by Tom Leiss (Nov. 11, 2017 9:07 p.m.)



Kharlton Belmar (right) and Dakota Barnathan (left) both spent a season with Fredericksburg FC's precursor RVA FC when the franchise was in its early stages of play in the amateur National Premier Soccer League (NPSL). Belmar in 2013 and Barnathan in 2014.

Belmar's season was the inaugural one for the franchise and saw it put together an amazing run all the way to the NPSL National Championship. The follow-up season didn't go quite as planned record-wise, but Barnathan was still able to take what he learned and continue to improve his game when he returned to college after the season.

It provided a valuable opportunity at a time when Barnathan really needed one after recovering from an injury suffered during the Spring.

"Absolutely my time with RVA FC was crucial," he said. "Working with [RVA FC coach Grover Gibson] and the rest of the staff really helped push me out of my comfort zone. If you get comfortable with being uncomfortable, and there are a lot of challenging times especially as a rookie, that I think RVA FC and Grover help me deal with."

Now, both will get their shot at winning a professional National Championship when their United Soccer League (USL) team Swope Park Rangers (18-8-9) takes on Eastern Conference No. 1 seed Louisville City FC (20-6-9) on Monday night.

Western Conference No. 4 seed Swope Park reached the final with a penalty kick win over OKC Energy FC in which both Belmar and Barnathan converted PKs in the shootout that ended with a 7-6 score after regulation and extra time played out to a 0-0 tie.

Both players, who are in their first season with Rangers, were prepared when their time came to step up to the spot.

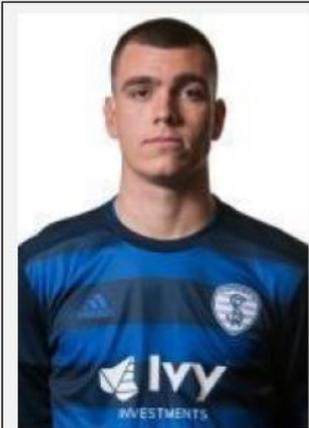
Kharlton Belmar has been on loan most of the season with Swope Park Rangers, but has also made two appearances with his parent club, MLS side Sporting Kansas City this season. Belmar made his Sporting K.C. debut as a late sub in a 2-0 win over the Houston Dynamo in the Round of 16 of U.S. Open play on June 28. He later made his MLS debut as a second-half substitute in a 2-1 loss at the Houston Dynamo on Oct. 11. He was drafted by the Portland Timbers of MLS in January 2015, but did not earn a spot on the team. He later signed with Portland's USL affiliate Portland Timbers 2, making his pro debut in March of that year, scoring twice in a 3-1 win over Real Monarchs SLC. He then joined Swope Park in December 2016.



"I only really had one thing on my mind and that was getting my job done by scoring my PK to help the team advance," Belmar said via email.

"The only thing I was really thinking was believing in my teammates and when I was called upon, just do my job," Barnathan said via Facebook Messenger.

Advancing to the league final was just another step in a season that Barnathan said has been "positive and exciting." He added, "Since the beginning of the season there was something special about this group."



Dakota Barnathan was drafted by MLS's FC Dallas in January of 2017, but eventually was not sign. He found his way to Swope Park Rangers in February and signed with the USL side.

Belmar said he thinks it's nothing less than what the team deserves based on how hard everybody's worked throughout the campaign.

"The squad has continued to put in the work day in and day out throughout the year, with our dedication being rewarded by reaching the USL final."

The two will try to continue their job on Monday, at Louisville Slugger Field, at 9 p.m., and help Swope Park win the league title in its second year.

Sticking to the plan will be hugely important to capping off the Rangers' season after the team fell to New York Red Bulls II in last year's final.

"We have to continue to do the things we did all season and take care of all the little details," Barnathan expressed.

"Continue to play the same way we have all year . . . coming out strong from the beginning," Belmar noted. "Sticking to our style of play and tactics will see us through to success."

And if things get a little tough on Monday night, Belmar can flashback to his NPSL National Championship-winning season with the FFC franchise to help settle keep his mind in the right place.

"It's definitely one of those things that I can take a bit of experience from and use it to ease the nerves a bit on Monday."