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## B.C. (re)united: Paladins together again in Vancouver

**FAR FROM THEIR FORMER HOME** in Greenville, two Paladins are making waves north of the border.

The city of Vancouver, British Columbia, has been eagerly awaiting this spring's promotion of the Vancouver Whitecaps FC to Major League Soccer. The franchise has long been targeted by MLS to build on the success of the Seattle Sounders FC with the goal of making the Pacific Northwest the premier region for soccer in North America. Among the players in line to help lead the Whitecaps' efforts are two members of Furman's Class of 2008, Shea Salinas and Jonathan Leathers, both of whom were selected by the club in November's expansion draft.

After completing their college eligibility, Salinas (left photo) and Leathers (heading ball, right) became the first Paladins to be drafted into MLS since Clint Dempsey in 2004. Salinas, a midfielder, was selected by the San Jose (Calif.) Earthquakes, with whom he played two seasons before joining the Philadelphia Union in 2010. Leathers, a defender, was taken by the Kansas City Wizards (now Sporting Kansas City), where he spent the last three seasons.

The two hope that their knowledge of each others' games, built during their Furman years, will translate to success on the pitch in Vancouver. "Sometimes it's us versus everybody out there," Leathers said during a break in training camp. "It adds to camaraderie during training." Salinas added, "We're the only two players in MLS that went to Furman, so the odds of us being on the same team aren't very great. It's nice to know each other's tendencies already."

While their college camaraderie may ease the transition to a new team, they are also adjusting to life in Vancouver. Leathers says he has been impressed by the area's emphasis on outdoor activities, and Salinas, a native of Grapevine, Texas, says he and his wife,



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Julie Swinson '08, have been adapting to the climate and cost of living.

"I thought San Jose was really expensive, but this is a step above that," he says. "Going from San Jose to Philadelphia to Vancouver, it's tough to build up a savings account in those three cities. And we saw the sun yesterday for the first time. But it's not really that cold, it's more of a temperate climate. It's just wet. I think soccer is a better sport when things are wet — the ball moves faster, you can slide-tackle better, and your defender slips."

The Whitecaps entered MLS play this spring with the Portland Timbers, and both expansion franchises are eager to challenge Seattle's status as one of the league's most successful clubs. To help emphasize regional ties, the three teams met for a series of preseason matches hosted by the Sounders in early March. Fans of each team stood, sang and cheered throughout the contests, despite the chilly Northwest weather. "I think the rivalries in the league seem to stem more from fans than they do players," Salinas says.

Leathers, from Athens, Ga., senses that the enthusiasm for soccer in the Northwest

is indicative of burgeoning interest in the sport in general. "The culture in America is all about success," he says, "and as we continue to get better and compete worldwide, I think soccer will grow in popularity and more people will want to take up the sport."

Although fans and the league alike may have high expectations for the Whitecaps, Leathers and Salinas are cautious about buying into the hype.

"I don't really get too far ahead of myself," Leathers says. "I just want to focus on the day-to-day and be the best I can possibly be."

Salinas says, "We've looked at it as an adventure. Julie mentioned the other day that we would have never imagined living in the North, or in California, and I probably would have never visited Vancouver. And now I've lived in all of these cities. It's been a cool adventure."

To follow the Furman duo's efforts this season, visit <http://whitecapsfc.com>.

— BLAINE UHLMAN

*The author, a 2009 graduate, is pursuing a master's degree in sport administration and leadership at Seattle University.*