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Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Reading United defeat Red Bulls U23s, win conference title *Khori Bennett scores twice in the first half, defenses come up big in 2-1 win*

READING, PA (July 21, 2018) – Reading United A.C. (14-0-2) claimed the 2018 Premier Development League Eastern Conference Championship with a thrilling 2-1 victory over the New York Red Bulls U23s (11-4-1) on a rain soaked evening at Wilson High School's Gurski Stadium. Khori Bennett's first half brace pushed United into the lead but the hosts had to weather a furious rally by the Red Bulls to claim the club's third Eastern Conference title and it's first since 2010.

In the third meeting of the season between the two clubs that have won the last four Mid-Atlantic Division titles, Reading United would get on the scoreboard first. In the 26th minute, midfielder Zach Zandi collected a pass near the top of the Red Bulls penalty area and cut past two New York defenders. The Union Academy and Villanova product played a low cross to Bennett who made no mistake in beating Xavier Kennedy to give Reading a 1-0 lead.

The goal was Bennett's third of the postseason and ninth on the season and pulled him level with former Reading United star and 2009 PDL MVP Aaron Wheeler on Reading's all-time goal scoring chart with 17 career tallies.

Bennett wouldn't wait long to become Reading's all-time leading goal scorer. In the 42nd minute, midfielder Felipe Hideki found space down the left channel and lobbed a short cross in the box. The ball took a fortuitous bounce and Bennett thumped a header past Kennedy to double Reading's lead to 2-0. It was Bennett's 18th career goal in a Reading shirt, his tenth of the season and fourth strike in the Eastern Conference Final Four.

Reading United took their two goal advantage to the locker room with sights set on the Eastern Conference title. The Red Bulls U23s had other ideas.

Save for a short spell early in the second half, the Red Bulls laid siege to the Reading United defense. As was the case much of the 2018 season, Reading's team defense absorbed much of the pressure, but a miscue at the back afforded the visitors a way back into the game.

In the 60th minute, Red Bulls midfielder Lucas Da Silva fired a speculative effort on frame that was parried by Reading goalkeeper Bennet Strutz and rolled out for a corner kick. New York took a quick corner before the Reading defense was set up and Sylvain Coco headed a ball home to cut the United lead to 2-1.

The match's final thirty minutes were highlighted by nery moments for Reading, but the United defense that allowed the fewest goals in the Eastern Conference came up with brave blocks or clutch saves whenever the Red Bulls looked like they would score the equalizer.

Though the Red Bulls U23s threw everything they could at Reading, the tying goal elluded the visitors. After what seemed like an excruciating six minutes of second half stoppage time, the full time whistle sounded and the Reading United players and staff celebrated their well earned Eastern Conference Championship in front of the hearty hometown crowd that braved the wind and rain to watch their team be crowned champions.

After having a Gatorade bucket dumped on him, Reading Head Coach Alan McCann was full of praise for his team, saying, "It's great, it's superb! It's a very hard fought win, especially the second half. First half we played some sublime football. The two goals were superb, they were exactly the way we want to be. It's the Reading style, the Reading way. Second half we conceded and had to grind it out. There's that character showing through again."

United received even more good news after the final whistle as the Premier Development League confirmed that Reading would host one of the National Semifinals at Gurski Stadium on Saturday, July 28th with an opponent to be determined.

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



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