

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Carolina Rapids to merge with Gaston United, combine forces starting in the fall 2018

Clubs' boards of directors consummate agreement to bring both organizations together as one

CHARLOTTE, N.C.—The Carolina Rapids and Gaston United Soccer Clubs' Boards of Directors and Executive Directors have announced their intentions to come together to start the process of merging the two clubs for the 2018-'19 season.

For the Rapids, which announced its Rapids West branch – to serve communities in Belmont, Gastonia and Steele Creek – earlier this week, it has been a hectic week of announcements and changes, according to executive director Thomas Finlay.

“We’ve had a positive working relationship with Gaston United for years now, even talking to their Board about this opportunity as far back as 2014,” said Finlay. “By combining resources in the community, we absolutely can influence the soccer environment for all participants from the recreational to the most competitive. This doesn’t work unless both clubs share the same vision for the future, and Gaston United have done an excellent job over the years developing players and programs. Working together is nothing but a deliberate investment in the future of soccer for the community.”

Former Rapids coach Neil Orridge will oversee Rapids West as Director, while Jonas Richardson, who served as Gaston United’s Executive Director for the past two seasons, will serve as Director of Soccer.

The merger will not be official until the membership from both clubs have voted on the boards’ proposal to merge. The online voting link, established for Gaston United members, will be open from Thursday, April 26 to Wednesday, May 2.

Gaston United and the Rapids have shared similar philosophies and infrastructures; a number of GUSC players have matriculated through to the Rapids’ U.S. Development Academy (USDA).

“As an executive board, we have had numerous conversations through the years about what’s best for our players in the future,” explained Trey Albright, Gaston United’s President. “This coming together will give our players opportunities to train and develop with a larger pool of players, at all ages, and will enable Gaston United to benefit from the structure and resources the Rapids will provide,” Albright continued. “In the end, we – as an executive board – strongly believe this merger will benefit our players for the long-term.”

Added Carolina Rapids President Eric Davis: “The Carolina Rapids are excited for the opportunities that this merger with Gaston United presents. Gaston United has a solid reputation as a well-run club that produces high-quality players.”

Finlay is encouraged with the growth — and the potential for the future: “We understand members on both sides will have questions — even concerns. We put together a Q&A sheet with some preliminary answers, but members can always reach out to us offline for feedback. We’ve always maintained that we want to develop at the right pace – keeping development of our players, from Recreation to the ECNL and DA, at the top of our agenda. Our goal is simple, to provide the best possible soccer environment – this merger takes us much closer.”

ABOUT THE CAROLINA RAPIDS

Established in 1987, Carolina Rapids Soccer Club has over 5,000 members – serving Recreation, Competitive, Boys U.S. Development Academy, Boys Elite Club’s National League (ECNL), Girls ECNL, Women’s Premier Soccer League (WPSL) and Adult Recreation. Built on the tent poles to serve the community through soccer, the Rapids are the first and only club throughout greater Charlotte to have won a U.S. Youth National Championship. Providing an economic impact of \$10 million to the communities it serves, the Rapids are a proud part of the Colorado Rapids Adidas Alliance, one of five clubs nationally to hold that acclaim. While its overall mission is player development – at all levels – the Rapids execute that mission with its “5 C’s” in mind: CHARACTER, COMMITMENT, COMPETITION, COMMUNITY, and COMMUNICATION. The Rapids have enjoyed steady growth in its three decades, with geographic locations in Cabarrus, Denver, North Mecklenburg, South Charlotte and West. For more information, visit the club’s web home at www.CarolinaRapids.org, [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

Carolina Rapids – Gaston United Merge
Q&A with Carolina Rapids Executive Director Thomas Finlay

Q: What does the merger with Gaston United mean — and when will it be official?

A: Gaston United Soccer Club will join the Carolina Rapids as a merger of two entities. The combined clubs will operate under the Carolina Rapids name – effective for 2018-2019 soccer tryouts. All locations of the Rapids (including Rapids West) will operate with the same philosophy of training and player development.

Q: Will Gaston United – as a club – continue to exist?

A: No. Gaston United Soccer Club, as a club, will no longer exist – and will now fold up under the Carolina Rapids as one club.

Q: Will Carolina Rapids West players all practice in the Belmont, Steele Creek and Gastonia areas – or will they train in Huntersville and Cornelius?

A: Rapids West players will train where their teams train. Some teams will train in the Belmont, Steele Creek and Gastonia area. Teams will train in the geographic locations that tryouts are held. Fields may vary but the location will be the same. For example, if you try out at Steele Creek you will train there; if you try out at Gaston, you will train there.

Q: How will the 2018-19 USYS Tryouts be organized?

A: Tryouts will be held at several locations. Please check our Web site (www.carolinarapids.org). There is a page dedicated to the new Rapids West location with more information. As we transition, this page will continue to be updated with information.

Q: What does this merger mean for my child's current team?

A: If you're a current Rapids member in North Meck, Cabarrus, Denver, South Charlotte and Cabarrus, this merger will have no effect on your child's placement. This merger will support players in the West location by providing more player depth in age groups, greater club support with increased resources in

programming, levels of play, additional fields, coaching resources, and best practices.

Q: How will Tryouts work – will players have to try out all over again?

A: Yes. Each year, all players try out regardless of clubs merging or not. This is standard across the board for all clubs, and aligns with our commitment to the competitive process. The goal is not to break teams up for the sake of doing so but to improve the process for placing players in the best environment for their enjoyment, experience and development.

Q: What about fees? Will Rapids West pay the same fees as other Rapids locations?

A: Great question and perhaps a most important one: The fees for Rapids West will be announced and will be available on our website. In a nutshell, fees are location-specific due to various direct expenses from field costs, rental fees, and staffing.

Q: Will efforts be made to keep current teams together?

A: There will be no effort to break teams up. The goal for this merger is to be an additive to existing teams in the Belmont, Steele Creek and Gaston communities by creating a larger player base.

Q: How much of Gaston United's current staff will be retained?

A: That, honestly, will be determined once an assessment is made – based on number of teams and players. Our goal is to make Rapids West and the merger with Gaston United as inclusive as possible. It's important that coaching staff go through a series of onboarding and training. If a coach matches 'the Rapids way,' then it's important to group them with the appropriate age and gender. This only helps foster the best soccer environment for our players. If an existing coach has done a solid job – in improving players and is highly respected and regarded in the community – we will make every effort to find opportunities for them.

Q: What about uniforms? Will Rapids West players wear Rapids kits?

A: One of the most visible signs of unity is players all looking the part – so, yes – all players will wear Rapids gear – starting with the 2018-2019 season, which is the start of a new two-year cycle.

Q: How will day-to-day operations go for Rapids West and for Gaston United after the merge?

A: Currently the leadership team of Rapids West is being selected. The structure and org chart will reflect the current oversight roles and responsibilities. The existing Rapids leadership will assume responsibility of all staff as a result of the merger and realignment.

Q: Will there be a Gastonia-based office?

A: That, too, is to be determined. We will look at the feasibility of an office in the community to help serve our members. We will continue to assess as we continue planning.

Q: What if we have additional questions, who can we contact?

A: Your main points of contact for Rapids West will be Neil Orridge and Jonas Richardson. Their email addresses are norridge@carolinarapids.org and jrichardson@carolinarapids.org.