



'UDC Men's Soccer – A Platform for the Future'

Interview with former UDC Soccer Player and Graduate, Malik Thom, '20

**Q1. Where are you originally from?**

I was born in Germany. A town near the city of Frankfurt and grew up as a military kid moving around from place to place (Louisiana, Alaska, North Dakota). I graduated high school and lived in Rockville, Maryland for a few years, so that could be considered where I'm from.

**Q2. What attracted you to UDC to become a student - athlete?**

Moving around a lot during my childhood caused me to want to stay near my parents and friends as I went off to college, so I looked at my options nearby. I had an opportunity to play at American University and UDC, but financially UDC made more sense for me. Also, the coaching staff and players at UDC made me feel very welcomed and appreciated during my visit to the campus/apartments. I heard from other people I played soccer with that the NCAA D2 soccer is a good level with great players as well.

**Q3. What did you study / major?**

I majored in Business Management and graduated with my bachelor's degree after four years.

**Q4. What did UDC, and men's soccer provide to prepare you for life after college?**

UDC helped me become much more independent and responsible. There was no one watching over me 24/7 like in high school making sure you attend classes and do your homework. Once you get to college, you must make those decisions yourself and practice discipline. If not, you will not succeed. Many professors taught me life lessons that I still apply to my daily life. The men's soccer program taught me to work hard, trust in my teammates, and have belief in my abilities. The program taught me how to be resilient and bounce back after defeat or rejection. It also provided me with lifelong friends that I still love and reminisce with from time to time.

**Q5. Best memory/ memories from UDC?**

My favorite memory from UDC must be the 2017 season when we went to our first ever ECC Final and made it into the NCAA tournament for the first time in school history. We had such a strong bond as a team and talented players that helped make history. Specifically, the NCAA draw when we all gathered in the student center and found out we were in. Other memories that I cherish are the away trips to the hotel and eating Olive Garden with the guys. Going to the apartments in between training and classes to hang out with everyone, and living with my good friends Mike, Gabe, and Joao.

**Q6. You had the opportunity to play soccer in Australia - What was the team's name and level? Can you explain how this came about? How did you enjoy the experience? What was the big difference between soccer in the USA and Australia?**



Yes, I played soccer in the city of Newcastle in New South Wales (NSW), Australia. It was about a 2-hour car ride from Sydney. The team's name was Newcastle Olympic FC and played in the National Premier League (NPL) which is 2nd tier in Australia underneath the A-League. It was still considered semi-professional as the A-League is the only professional league in Australia. Even so, the level was high, and there were very good players in the league. Quite a few of them had A-League experience and some players fluctuated between the two divisions. The opportunity for me came about because of my friend and teammate Daniel Eisenhauer who played goalkeeper at UDC for one semester. We stayed in contact after he left, and he gave me the idea of going over there to play. I did not take it too seriously until the pandemic hit, and I was not able to get picked up by any teams/ got rejected at many trials and combines. The experience playing there was fantastic. I lived basically on the beach, and the people were very kind to me there. The biggest difference might just be the physicality and playing surface. Everything there was grass fields which is different from always being on turf. The style of play was a bit more physical as well.

***Q7. You are now currently playing professional for the Maryland Bobcats - what was the process to get signed? How is this experience so far?***

Fortunately, I had a pretty good season in Australia and created a nice highlight video. My plan was to send it out to a lot of different coaches, agents, and friends that I knew who could get me an opportunity into the professional game. I received a good number of responses and ended up signing with my current agency M7P Sports. They gave me an opportunity in Michigan which went well, and I was very close to signing there. About two months before preseason, I got a direct offer from the Bobcats through a coach who put in a word for me. I played on an amateur team with this coach, and he liked me a lot, so he told the organization about me, and I took that offer. After I signed with Maryland, I let the coaches in Michigan know and went into preseason with the Bobcats a month or so later.

***Q8. If you have any advice for future or current UDC student athletes what would this be?***

The advice I would give to future, or current UDC student athletes is to be persistent and have belief. Do not listen to the negativity or others telling you it isn't possible. There were times I told people that I want to play professionally, and they said there is little to no chance for that to happen coming out of a smaller division 2 school. Now we have three or four guys who are playing professionally right now as UDC alumni. Put your head down, work hard, and be persistent is the best advice I can give. Get your name out there and form connections with teammates and coaches. They may provide opportunities to you that you never imagined. Never stop improving as a player and person, and I am glad that current UDC players can use me and other alumni as motivation to make it to the next level.

# UNIVERSITY OF THE FIREBIRDS DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

## UDC Men's Soccer



# UNIVERSITY OF THE **FIREBIRDS** DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

## Newcastle Olympic FC - NPL





Maryland Bobcats - MSSL

