

Salazar starts pro career as teenager

BY MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

After spending nearly a year at the Barcelona Soccer Academy in Arizona, Alex Salazar got the opportunity to advance in his soccer career this summer.

The former McNary soccer star signed a contract in June to play in North Carolina for the semi-professional team Wake FC of USL League Two.

As an 18-year old, Salazar was the youngest player on the team.

"It was a great feeling to be able to take advantage of an opportunity I know every 18-year old doesn't get. I just feel really blessed to be where I am at," Salazar said. "Being the youngest guy on the team was insane. I was playing with 26 and 27-year olds, but they all made me feel very welcome. Playing with those older guys pushed me to be better."

Before signing with Wake FC, Salazar helped the Barcelona Soccer Academy to a #1 ranking in the country for high school academies.

"It was amazing to play at the academy. They do a really good job of teaching you and preparing you on and off the field," Salazar said. "I really felt at home there. Coaches were really supportive and cared about you and saw you as more than a soccer player."

Salazar was also able to train for 10 days this summer with CD Leganés, a Spanish team just outside of Madrid.

"That experience left me speechless. Soccer is all they know in Spain. I saw kids in the street playing all the time," Salazar said. "The level of play was incredibly high."

As his academy season was coming to an end, Wake FC head coach Gary Heale saw film of Salazar playing at the Barcelona Academy and made him an offer to come play for his team.

"My coach was super excited to have me and said that I liked the way I played," Salazar said. "It definitely gave me more exposure."

After not playing in front of fans for over a year, it was a surreal experience for Salazar to sign autographs for youngsters after games and play in front of thousands of people.

"It was nothing like I had ever experienced. There would be kids coming up to me after games and asking for



Former McNary soccer player Alex Salazar played five games with Wake FC of USL League Two earlier this summer.

Submitted photo

autographs and for my shoes or jersey. It was an unbelievable feeling and something I will never forget," Salazar said.

Salazar played in five of the team's final seven games as a defender. He recorded an assist in his second game with the team, and played all 90 minutes in a contest against the North Carolina Fusion U23 team.

Although Wake FC is a professional team that pays their players, Salazar elected not to collect a paycheck in order to keep his college eligibility — Salazar accepted

a scholarship to play at Fresno Pacific University in the fall.

"I am really thankful to get a

scholarship and be able to play at Fresno Pacific. I am ready to get to work to win a conference title," Salazar said.

Despite having a four-year scholarship, Salazar admitted that he would leave school if he got an opportunity to play a high level of professional soccer. He is hoping that moment happens sooner rather than later.

"I am trying to go pro as soon as possible. I want to do whatever it takes to play in the MLS or in Europe," Salazar said. "I just need to continue my hard work and show people how much I want it."

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— ALEX SALAZAR

Former McNary soccer player



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