

Gryphons' Lair  
Issue 85  
*February 2024*

*Intro Messaging*

Greetings and welcome to the latest edition of The Gryphons' Lair newsletter for February! As we embark on this month, we are thrilled to announce ongoing recruitment efforts for new staff members. February holds the promise of unveiling our new organizational chart, a testament to the exciting developments within our Gryphon community. Recently appointed Head Coach Mark Surya, during the memorable Wildman Awards reception, expressed his eagerness to collaborate with all Gryphon Football program stakeholders, ushering in a fresh era marked by inclusivity and the opportunity for each individual to make a lasting impact. The Gryphon team is currently undergoing rigorous training, gearing up for the highly anticipated 2024 season.

**Alumni Invite from Head Coach Mark Surya**

Exciting News! Join me, Coach Mark Surya, on Feb 15th at the Football Pavilion for a special event unveiling Gryphon Football's future. Your insights are vital! Register [Register Now](#). Can't make it? Email me your thoughts. Let's shape the next era together! #LeaveYourMark



There is no cost associated with registration or attendance, and I sincerely appreciate your consideration of this invitation.

Best Regards,

Coach Surya

Mark Surya | Head Coach  
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With a multitude of exciting updates to share, we invite you to unwind, enjoy, and delve into the captivating stories within the pages of Issue 85 of the Gryphons' Lair!

*What Happened in January?*

### **Gryphon Football Held Open Tryouts on Campus**

On January 10th, Gryphon Football hosted open tryouts at the Gryphon Field House. Over 25 athletes came out to showcase their skills at the tryout. Our campus is brimming with talent!

### **The Herd Networking Event**

On January 25th, the recently established HERD convened at Montana's in Guelph, creating a unique gathering for alumni offensive linemen from the University of Guelph. Montana's served as the backdrop for a special event where former players came together to connect with the current offensive line members of the Gryphon football team. This occasion proved to be a valuable opportunity for both alumni and current players to exchange insights, share their love for their respective positions, and build lasting connections.



*Head Coach Mark Surya and OL Coach Mike MacDonald address the HERD*

The concept of this networking event had its roots in the football season, evolving as players found joy in interacting with alumni after each game, often posing for group photos. Adding an element of excitement, alumni engaged in voting for the "Play of the Game" during each match. The chosen recipient was then honored with a gift certificate generously sponsored by Montana's.

Highlighting the significance of the occasion, Montana's commemorated the event on the 25th by presenting the HERD with two shadow boxes that are prominently displayed above a booth in the bar. These shadow boxes proudly showcased the winners of each game, along with the captivating group shots featuring both players and alumni from every match. This thoughtful gesture by Montana's not only captured the essence of the shared experiences but also created a tangible memento for all involved.

In recognition of Montana's pivotal role, the restaurant has officially become the Home of the HERD. Beyond being a symbolic home, Montana's generously extends meal discounts to all Gryphon football players and HERD alumni, fostering a sense of community and camaraderie. The collaboration between Montana's and the HERD stands as a testament to the enduring spirit of Gryphon football, uniting past and present players in a shared passion for the game.



*Current OL Players, Ethan Pyle, Dan Hocevar, Julian Iamundo and Mitchel Schechinger pose in the official HERD booth at Montana's Guelph.*

*Celebrations*

**Gryphon Football Proudly Presented the Wildman Award**

On January 27th, we gathered at the Delta Hotel in Guelph to honor the remarkable achievements of our Gryphon Football award recipients. The evening was graced by the presence of esteemed past Wildman recipients, including Robert Keith '59, Dave Hume '61, Steve Stewart '69, Mark Brown '78, Andrew Oosterhuis '04, Adam Carapella '05, Colin Dyer '06, AJ Allen '21, and last year's Wildman, Juwan Jeffrey '22. This prestigious memorial award pays homage to the legacy of Ted Wildman, a distinguished 1926 graduate of the Ontario Agricultural College, celebrated for his exceptional athletic prowess in wrestling and football.



Let's extend a hearty round of applause to our exceptional Gryphons who earned well-deserved recognition at the Wildman Awards! Their unwavering dedication and outstanding achievements have left an enduring impact on Gryphon Football. Join us in celebrating each outstanding recipient:

- Rookie of the Year: Tristan Aboud and Marshall McCray
- Plug Family Community Service Award: Kumail Khilji
- Richard P. Kohler Perseverance Award: Tommy Bourikas
- Riddell Coach of the Year: Justin Shoniker
- Kyle Walters Trophy: Curtis Woodmansey
- Brian Cluff Support Staff of the Year: Jessie Kennedy
- Tom Mooney Lineman Of The Year: Ethan Pyle
- Tom Dimitroff Defensive Player of the Year: Devynn Cromwell
- Stu Lang Offensive Player of the Year: Donavin Milloy
- Donald Forster Trophy (Most Valuable Player): Donavin Milloy
- Special Teams Player of the Year: Braeden MacDougall
- The Ted Wildman Memorial Trophy: Simon Chaves

Congratulations to each of these outstanding individuals who have contributed significantly to the excellence of Gryphon Football!



### *The Herd is Coming*

#### **A Titan in The HERD: Celebrating Chris Portwood, Gryphon Football Alumnus**

In this edition of “Herd it Here First”, we are thrilled to shine the spotlight on one of our esteemed alumni, a linchpin of The HERD – Chris Portwood. Join us as we traverse through his remarkable journey, from a walk-on tight end in the fall of '96 to a commanding offensive lineman, leaving an indelible legacy within Gryphon Football.

**From Tight End to O-Line Powerhouse** - Chris Portwood, standing at a slender 6'5" and 225 pounds when he first arrived at Guelph, evolved into a formidable 6'5", 325-pound force on the offensive line. His journey reflects not only physical transformation but also a deep commitment to Gryphon pride.

**On-Field Triumphs and Accolades** - Portwood's impact on the field is immeasurable. As a member of the Yates Cup team in '96, an OUA All-Star in 2000, and a recipient of the Honour Award, he etched his name in Gryphon history. Notably, he set a 1000lb record in 2000 – an astonishing 1654 lbs showcasing his strength and dedication.

Beyond his playing years, Portwood shared his knowledge and passion as the O-Line Coach during the 2006 and 2007 seasons, contributing to the continued success of Gryphon Football.

**A Pillar of The HERD** - The '90s Team of the Decade proudly boasts Portwood as one of its own. His decision to come to Guelph was not merely about football; it was about embracing the essence of a university campus – old buildings, abundant trees, and an inviting atmosphere.

Reflecting on the highs and lows of his playing years ('96–2000), Portwood emphasizes the unique nature of playing on the O-Line. It's about doing the dirty work, being stronger and smarter than the opponent, and above all, protecting those around you. The Gryphon ethos, as he describes it, is about working hard, playing hard, winning hard, and even losing hard experiences that galvanized the team and taught invaluable life lessons.

**Beyond the Field: Brotherhood and Legacy** - For Portwood, the fondest memories aren't just about the battles on the field but the time spent off it – in the locker room, hanging out, and the enduring camaraderie with his Gryphon brothers. These connections, he notes, are lifelong bonds, many even closer than family.

Now, as a proud father, Portwood looks to the future with humility and pride as his son expresses a desire to follow in his footsteps and join the Gryphon legacy.



*Coach Chris Portwood and Son Nolan back in 06/07 Season*

In conclusion, Chris Portwood remains an honored member of The HERD, also a long standing FOGF member, a true Gryphon Football Alumnus. His journey embodies the spirit of Gryphon pride, perseverance, and a commitment to something greater than oneself.

Here's to you, Chris Portwood – a Gryphon legend!



*Chris Portwood (68) poses with our own Gryphon historian John Casasanta*

### Featured Player

This month's featured player is Nick Partchenko.

As he enters his fifth year with the Gryphons, Nick's journey from the trenches of the offensive line to the frontlines of defense exemplifies resilience, adaptability, and an unwavering commitment to the sport.

Transitioning from the offensive line during his initial years, Nick embraced the challenge with grit and determination. He is currently completing his degree in Marketing Management, with a minor in Finance, serving as a testament to his commitment to both academics and athletics.

Recruited by Mike MacDonald, Nick fondly recalls his introduction to the Gryphons' program as being a personal and genuine encounter that set the tone for his journey. Entering a team brimming with talent bound for the CFL, Nick describes the Gryphons as "furious" and says that while he was a little intimidated, he was inspired.

For Nick, the essence of Gryphon football lies in its close relationships. He says that inviting university friends from the team to his hometown on winter break "felt like a crossover episode", intertwining his Gryphon family with his home life.



Amidst the challenges of the pandemic, Nick faced his largest trial yet—transitioning from the offensive line to becoming a starter on the defensive front. Yet, through perseverance and determination, he forged ahead, embodying the Gryphon spirit of resilience in the face of adversity.

Reflecting on his journey, Nick offers sage advice to incoming players: "Take things seriously, enjoy yourself, and work hard. But above all, learn, meet people, and savor the experience for what it is."

We are so proud that Nick Partchenko is part of the Gryphon Football team.



### *Featured Alumnus*

Introducing AJ Chase, this month's featured Gryphon Football alumnus.

Having been a wide receiver, AJ graced the field with his prowess for five remarkable years, navigating the challenges of four seasons amidst the tumult of a COVID-altered landscape.

Studying Management Economics and Finance, AJ's journey to Guelph was in pursuit of great academics, community, and comradery. Hailing from Montreal, where the urban sprawl contrasts with Guelph's close-knit energy, AJ found solace in the warmth of Gryphon camaraderie, where players and community members alike lived mere minutes from campus—a testament to the inclusive spirit that defines both Guelph and Gryphon football.

Driven by a desire to make a meaningful impact, AJ was drawn to the team's active involvement in city initiatives, such as food banks. This is something that he recalls as having been a favourite memory from his time at Guelph.

Reflecting on his time with the Gryphons, AJ mentions the program's unwavering standards. Through the trials and tribulations of COVID-19, the team's dedication and unity shone brightest, a testament to the team's spirit.

Friday nights before home games held a special place in AJ's heart—the camaraderie and connection shared over meals at Cutten Club stand as cherished memories of his Gryphon journey.

Post-graduation, AJ has ventured back to Montreal, where he works in the digital marketing space for a pharmaceutical company.

We want to thank AJ for his continued support of the Gryphon Football program.



## FOGF

In this installment of FOGF Moments, Adam Carapella and Andrew Oosterhuis, both esteemed FOGF members, unite with their fellow teammate and fellow Wildman recipient, Colin Dyer, at the Wildman Awards reception held on January 27th. The camaraderie among Oosterhuis (2004), Carapella (2005), and Dyer (2006) reflects their shared history as teammates.



## Mr. Casasanta's History Class

### Gryphons Gone Pro

In this edition of Gryphon Gone Pro, we shine the spotlight on [Kian Schaffer-Baker](#). Formerly a standout wide receiver for the Guelph Gryphons, Kian has seamlessly transitioned to the professional arena as he dons the jersey #89 for the Saskatchewan Roughriders in the CFL.

Hailing from Brampton, Ontario, Kian pursued a degree in psychology during his time at the University of Guelph. The Gryphon family extends heartfelt congratulations to Kian on his

impressive journey to the pros. Your accomplishments are a source of immense pride for all of us!

### *Did You Know*

As we gear up to witness the Super Bowl on February 11th, the entire Gryphon Nation stands united in supporting Gryphon Alumnus Tavius Robinson of the Baltimore Ravens. Although the journey fell one game short this year, our pride in Tavius and his remarkable path remains unwavering. Delve deeper into Tavius's inspiring journey to the NFL in the article below:

### **Making sure Canada's tuned in': Tavius Robinson's remarkable journey from Guelph to the Baltimore Ravens**

You'd wonder if the junk removal industry in Guelph has ever recovered from such a crippling blow.

While the cliché of every [NFL](#) career beginning with "the call" has long since moved past tired to jaded, that doesn't mean it isn't true. [Tavius Robinson](#)'s winding road from the University of Guelph to the [Baltimore Ravens](#) and the most fearsome defensive line in football began with a call. But not the one you're thinking of.

Robinson had taken things into his own shovel-sized hands in the early days of COVID, the summer of 2020, cutting his own hype video and pitching himself directly to the biggest programs in U.S. college football. But things were quiet and times were tight which meant backup plans couldn't stay too far back.

“That was a crazy, crazy situation,” says Robinson, the most genial of giants. “I was getting ready to get to work, to save money for school in case nothing happened with the video. I had got a new job with 1-800-GOT-JUNK and the next day I got the Ole Miss offer and I had to call (the company) saying, 'You know, I'm really sorry. I can't come in now. I'm about to leave for Mississippi!' I don't know if they ever replied to me.”

In short, Got Junk got dumped and Robinson got moving. First from Guelph, his hometown as well as his university, to Ole Miss and then to the Ravens. Yet it is what he has done in his rookie year in the NFL that has made the journey all the more remarkable. Just three years removed from playing U Sports football, the six-foot-six, 260-pound linebacker rolled into the most richly talented defensive corps in the NFL and made an immediate impact.

Robinson played in 11 games for John Harbaugh's team as it raced to the best record in the AFC, logging almost 30 percent of defensive snaps and over half on special teams where his wingspan,

more condor than raven at around seven feet, makes him a real asset. His first NFL sack was a highlight-reel takedown of Bengals star Joe Burrow.

Read more of The Star article [here](#).

### **Empower Women's Flag Football at U of G: Your Support Makes a Difference!**

We are thrilled to shine a spotlight on the University of Guelph Women's Flag Football Team—a dynamic and dedicated group of athletes promoting female participation in sports since their establishment in 2022. As we gear up for an exciting 11v11 winter season, our women's team faces the challenge of covering tournament fees, organizing events, and acquiring essential equipment.

In an inspiring display of teamwork and support, members of our men's Gryphon football team have stepped up as coaches for the women's squad. Their guidance and expertise contribute significantly to the development and success of the women's team. Now, as our women's flag football team aims for victory on the field, they seek your generous support to overcome financial hurdles and secure the resources necessary for a competitive edge.

To ensure their success, we invite you to be part of their journey by making a donation. Your contribution will directly impact their ability to participate in tournaments, create memorable team events, and acquire the essential equipment needed for top-tier competition. By supporting our women's team, you are not only investing in their success but also contributing to the empowerment of women in sports.

No donation is too small, and every contribution brings us one step closer to achieving our goals. Your support is crucial in making this season a remarkable one for women's flag football at the University of Guelph and building a lasting legacy of inclusivity and excellence.

Please consider giving to the cause by following this link:

<https://give.uoguelph.ca/project/womens-football/>

Thank you for your time, consideration, and support. Let's unite as a community and make this season an unforgettable one for our Women's Flag Football Team at the University of Guelph.

**Johnny on the spot: Bombers re-sign Canadian RB Johnny Augustine**

The Winnipeg Blue Bombers have signed Canadian running back Johnny Augustine to a one-year contract extension ahead of free agency next month.

The five-foot-nine, 200-pound back was second on the team with 45 carries for 267 yards last season, dressing for all 18 contests. He also added eight special teams tackles.

The 30-year-old signed with Winnipeg in 2018 after going unselected in the 2017 CFL Draft, having previously received looks from the Edmonton Elks and Saskatchewan Roughriders. In 75 career CFL games, he has posted 195 carries for 1,195 yards and one touchdown, caught 14 passes for 130 yards and another score, and notched 21 special teams tackles.

Prior to his CFL career, Augustine played five seasons at the University of Guelph from 2013 to 2017. He carried 483 times for 2,742 yards and 28 touchdowns over that span.

Read more of the 3 Down Nation article [here](#).

### *Save the Date*

Thursday, February 15th - Meet the Coach Event - 7:00 - Redzone in the Football Pavilion

Saturday, April 27th, 2024 - Guelph Curling Club - FOGF Poker Tournament (Details to Follow)

Saturday, June 1st, 2024 - Exclusive FOGF Member invite (Details announced soon - Save the Date)

Friday, July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024 - FOGF Golf Tournament @ Guelph Lakes Golf and Country Club

### *FOGF Membership*

Interested in becoming an FOGF Member? There are three different tiers to our memberships: Red, Black, and Gold. To find out more information about our memberships and what is involved in each level, please click [here](#). For questions about the membership, please contact Bill Brown at [brownw@uoguelph.ca](mailto:brownw@uoguelph.ca)

**INSPIRE  
ENGAGE  
SUSTAIN**

**FRIENDS OF  
GRYPHON FOOTBALL**

VISION: Identify through membership a proud and inspired community of alumni and friends of Gryphon Football, positively influencing the success of the football program.

**FOGF  
MEMBERSHIP**

**JOIN  
NOW**

**Apparel Alert!** Get ready for the FOGF swag drop in late February, 2024. An exclusive online store is in the works for FOGF members and activation details will be sent directly. Redeem your annual clothing benefits during a limited two week period. Stay tuned for style updates! #FOGF #SwagRelease2024



*Share Your News*

If you have any news or updates, we would be more than happy to share them in our upcoming newsletter. Please reach out to [brownw@uoguelph.ca](mailto:brownw@uoguelph.ca) for any celebrations, announcements, or bereavements that you would like us to share.