

Gryphons' Lair
Issue 84
January 2024

Intro Messaging

Greetings and welcome to the January issue of The Gryphons' Lair newsletter!

As we step into the new year, we're thrilled to embark on what promises to be a groundbreaking journey. Your continued support of the Gryphon Football Program means the world to us, and we're eager to bring you another season filled with immense spirit and triumphant victories.

Thank you for joining us on this exciting adventure into the new year. Anticipate a football season ahead that is brimming with enthusiasm and success.

Sit back, relax, and relish in the pages of Issue 84 of the Gryphons' Lair!

What Happened in December?

Coaching Change

After spending the past five seasons serving as head coach of the University of Guelph football program, [Ryan Sheahan](#)'s time with the Gryphons has come to an end. It was announced on Friday Dec. 15, 2023 that Sheahan has accepted the head coaching position at the University of Calgary.

"We want to thank Ryan for his significant contributions at U of G as the head coach of our football team and wish him well in his next chapter," said University of Guelph, Director of Athletics Scott McRoberts. "We appreciate his time and efforts towards guiding this team through the past five years including through a very difficult time during the pandemic."

Sheahan took over as head coach of the Gryphon football program back in 2019, and over the course of his four seasons of **on-field* action with the Gryphons (*with the 2020 season cancelled due to COVID), Sheahan twice led the Gryphons to the OUA semifinal stage (2019 & 2021) while posting a cumulative regular season record of 13-17.

Prior to arriving at the University of Guelph, the Montreal native spent four seasons (2015-18) at the University of Calgary where he served as the Dinos Assistant Head Coach and Offensive Coordinator.

The Gryphons are pleased to announce that current associate coach [Mark Surya](#) has been named as the new head coach of the football team. Surya has been with the Gryphons since 2019 and previously held roles with Laurier and Toronto as their offensive coordinator. He becomes the 18th head coach in the history of the Gryphon football program. Surya earned his undergraduate degree in Kinesiology from Queen's University and MSc in Kinesiology from Wilfrid Laurier University.

"We are excited to announce Mark as our new head coach," said McRoberts. "We are fortunate to be getting a coach of his character, coaching acumen, recruiting experience, ability to develop young student-athletes to their full potential and a familiarity with our University, which makes him a perfect match. I look forward to watching his leadership as he guides our Gryphon student-athletes into a new era."

"I am truly honoured for this opportunity to lead the Gryphon football program," Surya said. "The last five years have laid the foundation for the program, and I look forward to building on the current success and working towards creating an outstanding experience for the student-athletes."

Congratulations to Mark Surya. The players and members of the program couldn't be happier that you are stepping into this role!

A Note from Mark Surya

Gryphon Nation,

I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude for the honour of leading this remarkable team. The bedrock of this program has been forged through the tireless efforts of extraordinary individuals. My role is clear – to safeguard the program and navigate the challenges ahead. Amidst the inevitable highs and lows of my tenure, I pledge to give my absolute best to Gryphon football every single day.

Together with my dedicated staff, we embark on a journey into a new era marked by collaboration and innovation. To propel our team to perennial national contention, we seek the unwavering support of each member of Gryphon Nation. This transformative moment presents an exciting opportunity to unite our football community and cultivate a championship environment. The leadership of this team is evolving, and I am thrilled to be the catalyst for change. As the adage goes, many hands make light work.

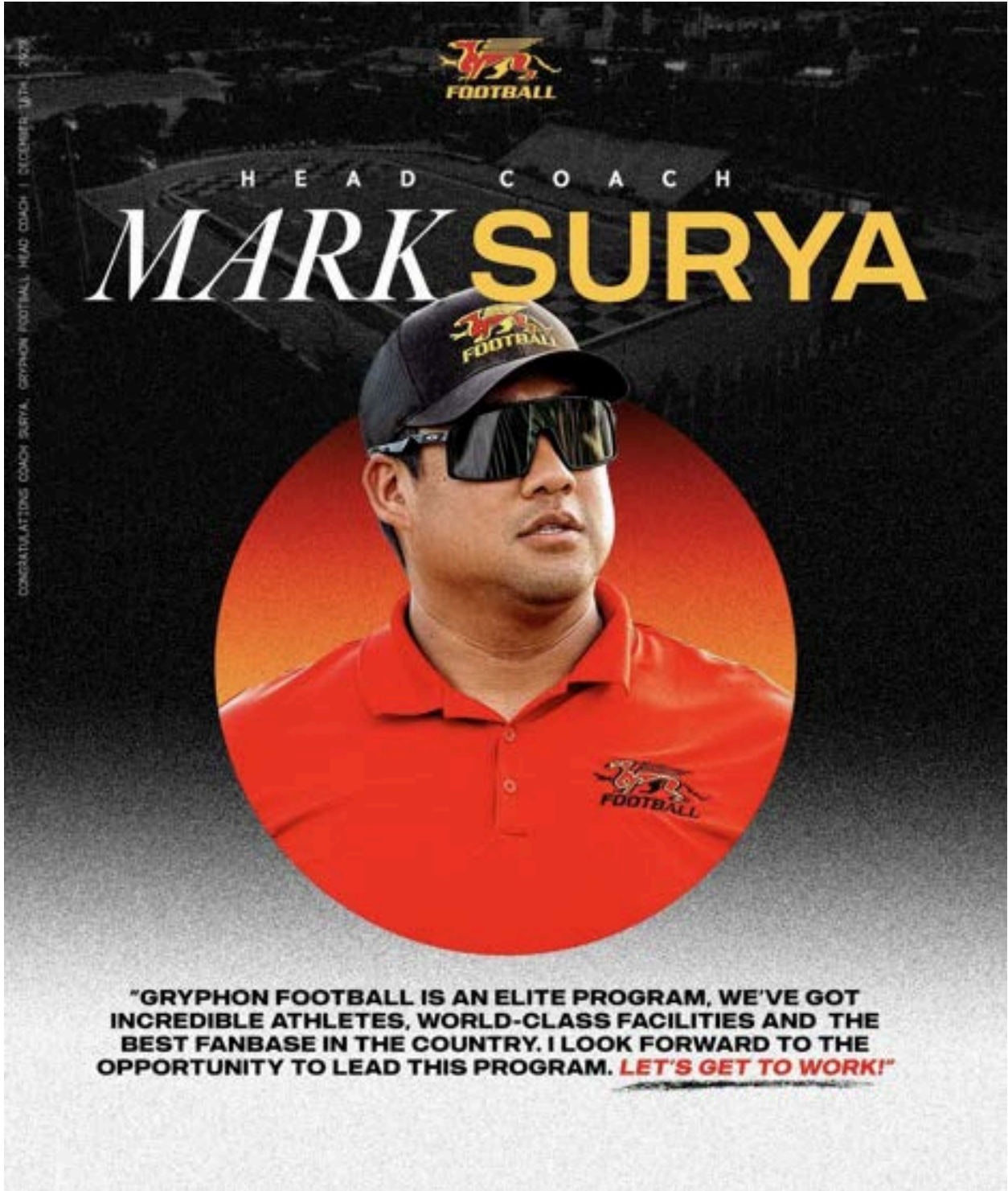
In conclusion, I extend my sincere gratitude. Thank you for entrusting me with the responsibility of guiding these young men and serving our passionate alumni. Greatness demands courage and sacrifice, and my duty is to foster an environment where every facet of our organization can flourish.

Go Gryphons!

Sincerely,


Coach Surya

CONGRATULATING COACH SURYA, GRYPHON FOOTBALL HEAD COACH | DECEMBER 10TH, 2022



HEAD COACH

MARK SURYA



"GRYPHON FOOTBALL IS AN ELITE PROGRAM, WE'VE GOT INCREDIBLE ATHLETES, WORLD-CLASS FACILITIES AND THE BEST FANBASE IN THE COUNTRY. I LOOK FORWARD TO THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEAD THIS PROGRAM. **LET'S GET TO WORK!**"

End of Exams and Holiday Break

As of December 15th, 2023, all final exams came to a close, and the Gryphons officially broke for the holidays. We would like to congratulate the team on a successful fall semester of studies, and wish them all the best heading into their Winter 2024 term. Classes resume for the Gryphons on January 8th, 2024.



That feeling when exams are over for the semester

Annual Gryphon POP Group Holiday Party

A great time was had by all at the POP Group Holiday Party, hosted at Gryph's Craft Kitchen and Ale House in December. 130+ parents, players, and family members attended the event.

Attendees enjoyed an amazing turkey dinner made by Hospitality Services. Check out these photos of some of the many players, coaches, and family members who attended the event.

Celebrations

District 10 Award Winners and All Stars

Congratulations to all of the D10 award winners and all stars who were celebrated at the luncheon held at the Gryphon Football Stadium.

A full, comprehensive list of all winners can be in the 519 video. [View Video](#)

PICTURES

Nick Fitzgibbon presents the league MVP "Fitzzy" to Jackson Leshuk and Coach Donnavan Carter presents the Rookie of the year to Colton Beisel. Both athletes play for Centennial CVI.

Food Drive for the Guelph Food Bank

This holiday season, the Gryphon Football team collected non-perishable food items to donate to the Guelph Food Bank. We are so happy to announce that 188lbs of food were donated in the drive.

A special thank you goes out to Josh Masnaghi, Sam Lack, and Kole Watson for dropping off the food and representing our generous Gryphon Football family.

PICTURE

Josh Masnaghi, Sam Lack, and Kole Watson

Alumni Giving Back

Celebrating the power of unity and giving back! Gryphon Football alumni gathered at the Ho Ho Hopewell fundraiser, hosted by the incredible Gryphon alumni "Noblehuis" Andrew Oosterhuis and Dan Noble. Join us in supporting a great cause at [Hopewell Children Homes](#). Together, we make a difference!



Alumni and fellow FOGF members join charity founders Andrew Oosterhuis and Dan Noble

The Herd is Coming

Gryphon Gridiron Chronicles: Jake Piotrowski's Journey from the Trenches to the Farm

In the heart of the Gryphon football legacy lies a story of resilience, hard work, and a deep love for the game. Today, we shine the spotlight on one of our own, Jake Piotrowski, a towering force on the offensive line from Shanty Bay, Ontario.

Hailing from Eastview Collegiate in Barrie, Jake graced the Gryphons with his formidable presence from 2009 to 2013. Standing at 6'5" and weighing in at 295 pounds, Jake was more than

just an offensive tackle; he embodied the essence of a Gryphon, a player with grit and determination.

Coach Mike MacDonald vividly recalls his early encounters with Jake, describing him as a special player destined for greatness in the Gryphon colors. "He was the ideal combination of size, strength, and athleticism that an o-line coach dreams of having," Coach MacDonald reminisces.

As Jake matured on the field, he not only became a formidable force in the offensive line but also emerged as a leader within the team. A man of few words but impactful actions, Jake's work ethic and dedication inspired his teammates on and off the field.

In 2012, adversity struck when Jake suffered a shoulder injury, forcing him to sit out the entire season. Despite this setback, his commitment to the team remained unwavering. Coach MacDonald fondly recalls an incident where Jake, unable to contain his enthusiasm during a playoff game, earned a penalty for stepping onto the field to cheer his teammates—a testament to his undying Gryphon spirit.

Despite missing the 2012 season, Jake's prowess on the field caught the attention of the Montreal Alouettes, who drafted him in the 5th round of the 2013 CFL Draft. Returning for his final season with the Gryphons, Jake showcased his skills, earning a spot with the Alouettes after the Gryphons' season concluded.



In his own words, Jake reflects on his time at the University of Guelph: "My time at the University of Guelph playing for the Gryphons was nothing but positive. There were many changes to the coaching staff after my 1st year so many things were up in the air. Stu Lang became head coach, and specifically Mike McDonald slid into the role of my Oline coach. From this point on, the culture was nothing but positive, especially at the o-line position. Coaches encouraged a strong bond at all positions; the o-line was a very tight unit as we spent

a ton of time on and off the field together. This allowed us to succeed as we were able to be all on the same page which is essential for the success of an o-line. Anytime I've been able to go back to Guelph after graduation, you can tell this strong cohesion is still apparent. This is a huge reason for the success of the Guelph football program. I can attribute a lot of my football success after Guelph to the lessons that were instilled in me while I was there. I will forever be grateful to Mike McDonald and Stu Lang for teaching me these important life skills."

Today, Jake Piotrowski is not just a former Gryphon; he's a husband, a father of three, and a proud farmer near Barrie, Ontario. His journey embodies the core values of The Herd—selflessness, perseverance, hard work, team orientation, and a never-give-up attitude.

As we celebrate the legacy of Jake Piotrowski, let's remember the impact he made on and off the field—a true Gryphon through and through.

Stay tuned for more Gryphon Gridiron Chronicles in the next edition of “Herd it Here First”.

Featured Player

This month's featured player is [Evan Spangenberg](#).

As a Full-back and H-back, Evan's on-field prowess is matched by his academic drive while he pursues a master's degree in BioMed. Currently in his third year on the team, Evan hails from the quaint town of St. Thomas, ON.

Evan's football tale began unexpectedly; he initially walked onto the team, defying expectations. Undeterred, he showcased his mettle through an open tryout in 2020, training vigorously with the team during the off-season.

However, the onset of the pandemic disrupted training sessions. Undaunted, Evan persisted, using the time to intensify his training regimen, emerging stronger. His persistence paid off when, in 2022, he officially joined the team after sending another email to the coach.

Evan refers to the team as a “brotherhood” and has made lasting friendships with his teammates.

Crediting his development as a player to the guidance of coaches Sheahan and Suryea, Evan acknowledges their pivotal role in his growth, shaping him not just as an athlete but as an individual.

Beyond the field, Evan aspires to make a difference in the clinical research realm, a passion rooted in his lifelong dream of helping others. Already making strides, he devotes his time to part-time research positions, aiming to impact lives behind the scenes.

Looking ahead, Evan's offseason goals revolve around enhancing his physical strength, aiming for an All-Star performance in the upcoming season.

We are so proud to have Evan on the Gryphon Football team.

Featured Alumnus

Introducing Anthony Hall, this month's featured Gryphon Football alumnus. During his time at Guelph, Anthony played on the football team as a half back and full back, while studying General Arts.

Anthony played on the team for all 4 years of his General Arts degree, having joined the team at 21 years of age. Upon joining the team and being away from home for the first time, Anthony recalls the older guys on the team as having been "like brothers to him" and has fond memories of them "showing him the ropes".

Through his time at Guelph, Anthony refers to his brother as having been one of his largest inspirations. He says that his brother taught him "important skills such as how to manage [his] time". His brother helped to coach spring training camp and played professionally, contributing to his inspiring nature. Anthony also positively reflects on the help of University programs such as the SAM program, when it came to balancing football and his studies.

Tony had many large accomplishments throughout his time as a player, one of which was receiving the Community Service award at the Wildman. His impressive efforts have continued to be apparent to the program, as today, Tony looks forward to participating in alumni events such as the Alumni Dinner and Golf Tournament. He played in the golf tournament for the first time this past year and referred to it as "a highlight".

When asked about his favourite memories, Tony recounts the tradition of heading to Osmows, a local Shawarma restaurant owned by a former Gryphon, in first year. Being referred to as the "Osmows guy" by his teammates became a badge of honor, symbolizing the camaraderie shared over meals.

Tony has now graduated from police college and has been hired on as a constable in Guelph. This month he will be starting his work in the role and will be working alongside a coach officer. What an accomplishment!

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

Featured FOGF Member



FOGF North Endzone

Join the Friends of Gryphon Football as we continue our mission to unite the Gryphon Family and kindle the shared passion for our beloved program. In the previous season, the FOGF elevated the North Endzone Party to unprecedented heights, and we're committed to further enhancing opportunities for alumni, community members, and families to immerse themselves in the Gryphon spirit. Be on the lookout for upcoming thrilling events as we pave the way for the 2024 season. Don't miss out on the excitement – sign up for a FOGF membership today and ensure you're part of the extraordinary moments that lie ahead!

Mr. Casasanta's History Class

Welcome to GFB – 100. Welcome back to GFB - 100. I hope you had a wonderful Christmas and a happy New Year. I am your instructor John Casasanta, your resident Gryphon Football historian. GFB -100 is a master's class where we will delve into interesting and historical facts about all things Gryphon Football. Each month I will provide you with an interesting fact about the Gryphon Football program. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any of your own facts or stats to add to this segment each month. Forward any information, stat, story or correction to me at jcasasan@uoguelph.ca. The monthly goal is that you find this section informative and educational. I look forward to sharing with you all, so with no further to do let's begin.

For this month's lesson we will continue with our pictorial retrospective of Gryphon Football. January's focus will be the 1996 Yates Cup Champions. Let's begin with a quick synopsis of that 'Cinderella' season.

The Gryphons were 1-7 in 1995 and were coming off a frustrating season. The 95 Gryphons were a talented group but were hampered with injury, a revolving door of QBs and just plain old bad luck. But this group of Gryphons refused to feel sorry for themselves and as soon as the offseason began and with the bad taste of the 1995 season fresh in their mouths the Gryphons were ready to make the climb and become the champions of the OUA.

Unfortunately, the Gryphons got off to a slow start, with a 1-2 record going into week 4 the Gryphons rebounded and beat U of T to even their record to 2-2. As important as this win was to the Gryphons and their confidence, the week 5 match up vs. York proved to be a season changing contest. Going into the half time of this game the Gryphons trailed York 24-0 and the playoffs were at risk. Coming out of the locker room the Gryphons rallied in the second half and defeated York pushing their record to 3-2 and providing the spark needed to run the table and not look back for the rest of the season.

The Gryphons finished the 96 season with a record of 6-2. A far cry from the 1-7 record from the year before. The momentum heading into the playoffs was amazing and there was a 1984 like buzz surrounding this team. In the playoffs Western was the 1st round opponent on the road, the Gryphons didn't even blink and ran through the Mustangs on their own turf, leaving many of Western's seniors in tears. Next stop Waterloo and the Yates Cup Championship.

November 9th, 1996, in front of a sold-out crowd at Seagram's Stadium in Waterloo the Gryphons and Yates Cup MVP Gerrit Stam ran over the Warriors to win their third Yates Cup 23-13.

This was a dream season for the Gryphons. Finishing 1-7 a year before. The Gryphons had turned things around finishing 6-2 and winning the Yates Cup. With Coach McNally being named CIS Coach of the Year, an honour Coach shared with each of his players. In a selfless act, Coach McNally had his trophy modified and inscribed with the name of each of his players from that special team on the base of the trophy. He also donated this trophy to the program where you can find it today displayed in the pavilion. McNally understood the importance of team first and this selfless act cemented his legacy along with the men who played for him during this magical season. The 96 Gryphons were the definition of team, a team we will never forget.

Thanks to the staff of the Ontarion for allowing us access to every issue beginning in 1951 with the OAC Aggies then Redmen and right up to today's Gryphons. I hope you enjoy this retrospective and for some of you I hope you enjoy seeing some of these great moments you were a part of. Enjoy.

Gryphons Gone Pro

This month's Gryphon Gone Pro is [Kosi Onyeka](#). After playing football as a defensive back for the Guelph Gryphons, Kosi went on to play for the Saskatchewan Roughriders in the CFL.

Kosi wears #31 for the Roughriders. Originally from Brampton Ontario, Kosi studied sociology while at the University of Guelph.

Congratulations to Kosi on his leap to the pros! Your Gryphon family is so proud of your accomplishments.

Did You Know

Did you know that Gryphon alumnus Curtis Rukavina is now the Director of Professional Scouting for the Buffalo Bills?

Check out this image of Curtis on December 10 in the offensive coordinators booth during the Bills' win versus the Kansas City Chiefs.

Save the Date

Thursday, January 25th, 2024 - Gathering of the HERD @ Montana's in Guelph (7-9 pm)

Saturday, January 27th, 2024 - Wildman Awards @Delta Hotel in Guelph

April, 2024 (TBD) - FOGF Poker Tournament

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

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

PICTURE OF CLUFF GOLFING

Pictured: FOGF members enjoying the golf tournament (left to right: Stu Lang, Dan Tocher, Teo Jean-Gaston, Brian Cluff putting, Peri Ceci).

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

**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**



Clothing: Stay tuned this month for the 2024 release of the FOGF swag. An online store is being set up and details will be sent to each member when it is activated.

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 for any celebrations, announcements, or bereavements that you would like us to share.

Looking forward to the 2024 year with all of you,

Bill Brown YCC '96 '15
FOGF Membership Coordinator
Proud FOGF Gold Member since 2017
Gryphon Football