

York9 FC hires director of on-field analytics

York9 FC continues to bolster their office staff with the hiring 27-year-old Kingston native Sam Gregory as the club's new Director of On-Field Analytics.

Gregory will be reporting to Angus McNab directly as well as the coaching staff.

"Sam is a great addition to the team," said McNab in a statement. This will be the third time I've worked with him, having worked with him very briefly at Opta and much more extensively during my time at Sport Logiq. His primary remit will be to support me and supply opposition analysis and then turn his attention to recruitment later in the year."

In an area where there is seemingly a lot of work to be done, Gregory is most excited to be a part of the groundwork of data analysts within the club and with the Canadian Premier League.

"To be at a club in this league and set the groundwork for how the analytics department should look like or how analytics should affect on-field performance is really exciting to me. We're at such a ground stage at York9 and around the league in general. I'm really excited to build things and take analytics within York9 and within the Canadian Premier League overall."

Gregory took to Twitter to announce his arrival with the Nine Stripes. He tweeted he was most thrilled to join one of the most forward-thinking clubs in the league.

Gregory praised York9 FC's personable approach, commending the club for changing home matches to Friday nights avoiding Toronto FC and York9 FC's effective use of social media, connecting with patrons and fans.

A lifetime football fan, Gregory has avidly loved the sport since a young age. He has played the sport, coached and refereed, all while closely following Canadian soccer and his boyhood club, Manchester United.

With a Masters in Economics from the London School of Economics, Gregory first began an analytics role with Sportsnet while in school, as a consultant, blogger and co-host on the Analytics FC Podcast.

Further strengthening his profound interest, Gregory ventured out to London to join Opta once he finished school, working with McNab for the first time and earning most of his experience with youth clubs and coaches.

In 2018, Gregory returned to Canada to work with Sportlogiq based out of Montreal.

Having recently left Sportlogiq, Gregory is currently enrolled at Victoria University, pursuing his Masters in Sports Science while also now, working with York9 FC.

In what might come as a surprise to many, Gregory says data is fairly new in soccer. It will require a learning curve on both ends.

"As a data analyst, my job is to learn as much about the sport as possible and take what coaches say and transfer that into a data problem. Talking to a coach and talking to a video analyst, how can I use data to better answer those questions? There's a lot of learning I think on both sides," Gregory explained.

Coaches with tactical enquiries might have an answer using data. For instance, Gregory explains one of the most prominent findings in his data analysis is looking at shot locations.

"In the past few years, there's been a lot of data on where teams shoot from and where teams score from. And this data has been reflected in a drastic change on how teams play," Gregory explained.

?If you look at where teams are shooting from, they shoot from much higher percentage positions now than they did three or four years ago.?

In developing a working relationship with the front office and the coaching staff, Gregory will also be studying York9 FC's players and others in the league.

In some cases, he said, numbers can be misleading, depending on the player's role within a match and what the coach requested.

Further examining those numbers with the coach's requests would clarify if the player has completed his task.

Gregory says he is excited to join York9 FC and the Canadian Premier League. His blogs and recent academic journals, can be found on his website www.samgregory.me.

By Robert Belardi