

# Building the Pride

The York Region Lions Football Association  
& York University Varsity Football  
Partnership

December 2021



# Preamble

In 2016 a community non profit football organization – the York Simcoe Bucs – intervened to ensure another local community non profit football organization did not close its doors. In buying the other organization and clearing its debts, the York Simcoe Bucs had two opportunities:

1. Ensure 300+ players based in Markham, ON still had somewhere to play;
2. Bring former rivals (York Simcoe Bucs and Markham Raiders) together and;
3. Build a partnership with York University to refocus on academic AND sport, introducing at risk youth to the post secondary pathway early.....

.....the rest, as they say, is history.....

# Outline

1. Opportunities & Timing
2. Brand Alignment
3. Partnership Details & Benefits
4. About York Region Lions Football
5. Appendices

# Opportunities & Timing

# The right opportunity.....

- The community football landscape in southern Ontario is rife with issues that impact growth of the sport
  - Territory conflicts
  - Competing leagues
  - Politics
  - Sustainability
- At the same time, high school football programs are dying
- While the demand for quality football players (& excellent students) continues to grow, the community and high school football pathways are shrinking

What if we could find a way to bring the right people together and implement a sustainable, reliable, repeatable plan to address these issues?

# The right timing.....

- Early 2016 saw all the right pieces in place in both York Region and at York University, to bring organizations together

The head coach for York University Varsity Football was a volunteer house league coach with York Simcoe Bucs Football (Aurora, ON)

Markham Raiders Football were filing for bankruptcy and closing the doors on their programming

York Simcoe Bucs Football were in a financial position to pay off the Markham debt, and acquire the Markham territory

York University Varsity Football was seeking partnership with a community based organization for recruiting and coach development purposes

The ultimate goal? Provide a pathway for excellent student athletes to university in the GTA and retain talent.

# A Partnership Born.....

The Partnership, built with York University Varsity Football, York Simcoe Bucs Board and Markham Raiders Board, was designed in 2016:

1. Former community rivals had to come together and needed a new joint banner under which to operate;
2. The Partnership suggested alignment with the University, where non monetary resources & benefits would be exchanged;
3. York University & York Region Football signed a formal agreement;
4. A meeting of all members was hosted in mid 2016 where all unanimously voted to rebrand the newly joined associations to:

York Region Lions Football Association

# Brand Alignment



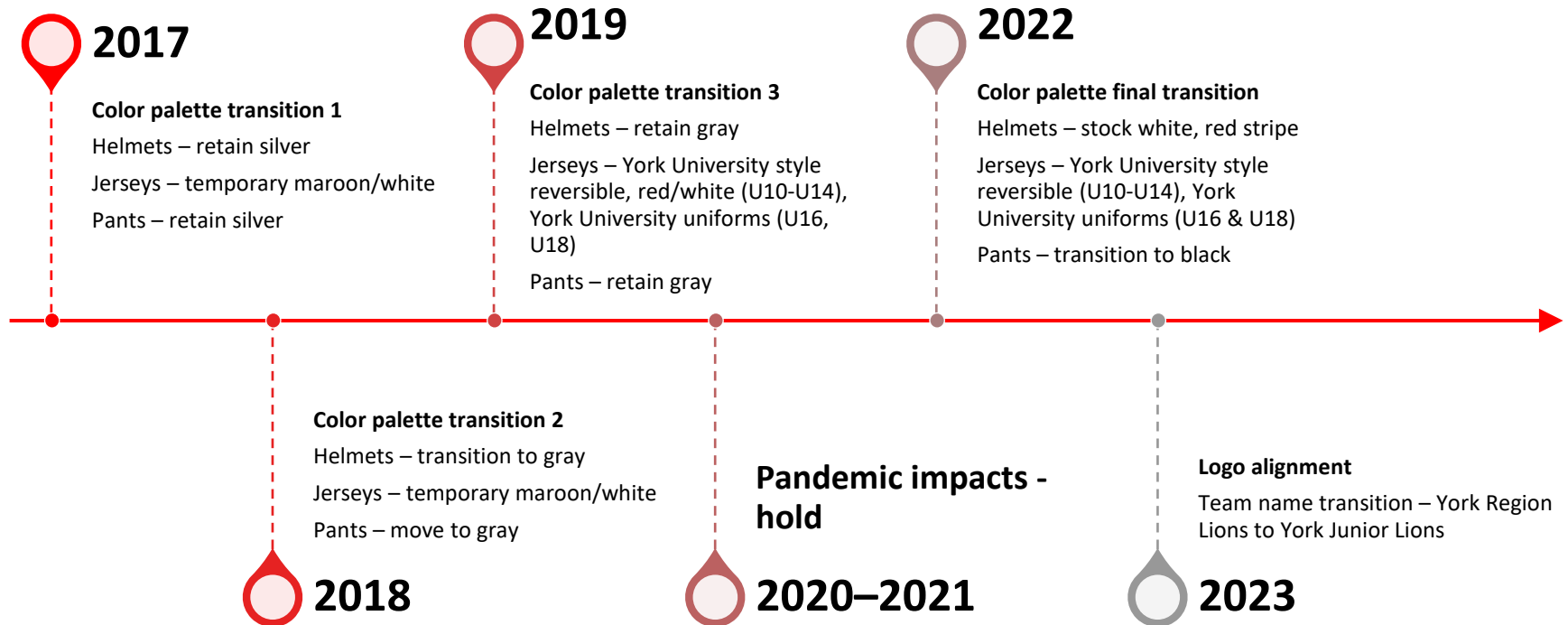
# Brand Alignment

- Renaming the non profit wasn't enough, both community football organizations needed to leave behind their colors and become something new, together
- A full alignment plan was voted on by all members at a York Region Football Annual General Meeting (2017) in order to place the association fully under the York University banner, but retain its non profit and community board benefits



# Brand Alignment Adjusted Timeline

- Timeline adjusted to reflect roll forward of 2020 & 2021 activities



# The Details

# The Partnership - Details

- Both the non profit community organization and York University Varsity Football exchange resources (non monetary)
- The real benefits are realized through the student athletes that wear red & white, and other community football organizations

## York Region Lions Football – Benefits

- Spring Coaching at U18 level
- Borrowed uniforms for U16 & U18 teams (Spring only, pants/jerseys)
- Alignment under an OUA banner
- Coaching development (coaches invited to observe during Fall training camps)
- Coaching expertise (Football IQ)
- Access to York University brand partners (order our uniforms from the YU supplier)
- Learning university playbooks early
- Annual Spring Training Camp hosted at York University (April/May)
- Full color alignment with York University (+ pathway to brand alignment)
- Volunteer board members with public sector experience

## York University Varsity Football - Benefits

- A place to develop and recruit coaches
- A place to recruit GTA student athletes
- A place to develop Y1 University players (2 spots every Spring at U18)
- Support of a community non profit & engagement with at risk communities
- Brand recognition
- Junior Lions attendance at York University football games
- Influence at the community football level
- A place to test out changes to the university playbook
- Employment opportunities for York University Football players
- Brand loyalty from a young age (Lions 4 Lions)
- Field bookings (YRFA pays)
- Volunteers (YRFA will volunteer at York University Football events when extra hands are needed)

# Benefits – Student/Athletes

- Early introduction to football as a pathway to post secondary
- A focus on athletics and academics, as demonstrated through the partnership
- Access to OUA coaching (U18)
- Brand recognition (a part of York University)
- Special guests at York University Football games
- Prestige for U16 and U18 players wearing York University uniforms in Spring
- Access as special guests to York University football games
- Opportunity to work with York University football players

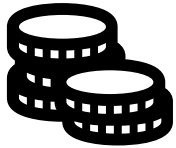
# Benefits – Community Engagement

- Access – approximately 30% of YRFA members are considered at risk. These athletes have an opportunity to SEE themselves in post secondary from an early age, as a result of the close alignment.
- A viable model for partnership between a community non profit and a University, that paths student athletes to post secondary
- A learning space for other York University staff who are interested in community non profit work
- Opportunities for York University to engage closely with meeting institutional SDGs (access, health & wellness)

# York Region Lions Now

# York Region Football - By the Numbers

\$5300/season in funded players



3 Annual Community Events



797 members



34% year over year growth in membership



3 High School Co-op placements/year



493 Families



87% of U18 graduates go to post secondary



47 Coaches



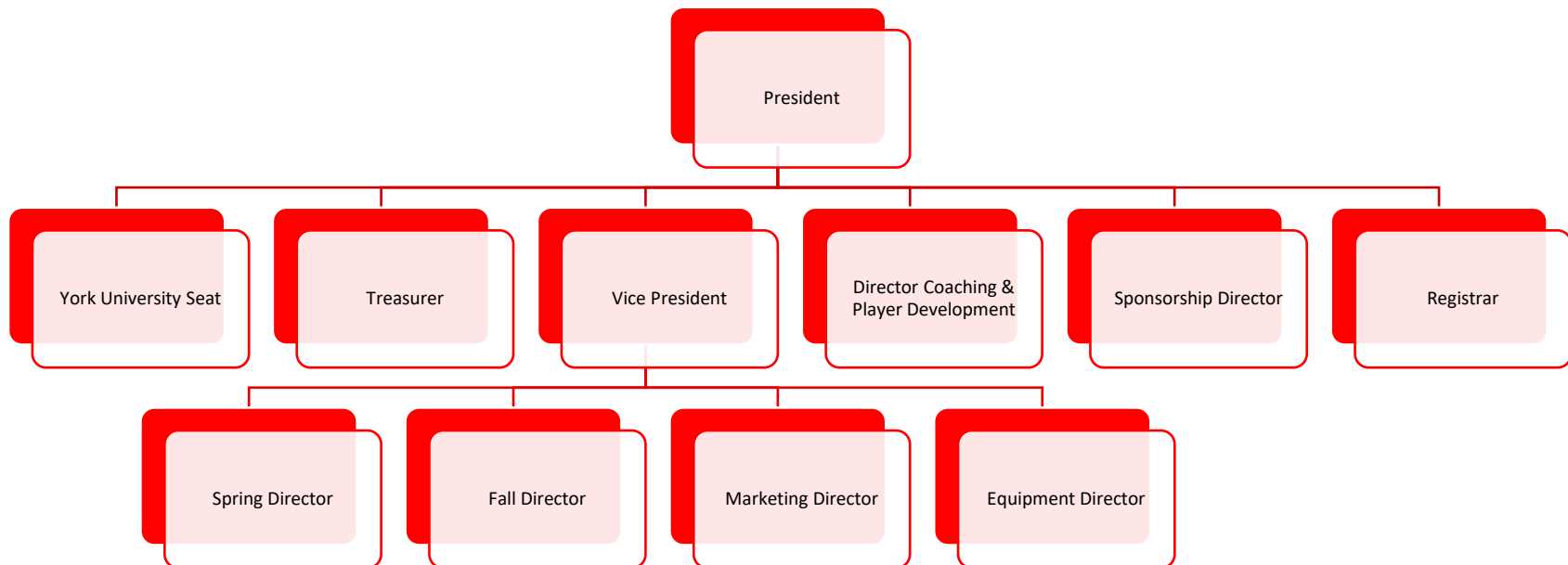
100+ community volunteers





# York Region Lions Football Association - Details

- Non profit status (number 1599353)
- Community run volunteer board
- Full constitution ([www.yrfa.ca](http://www.yrfa.ca))



# Appendices

Updated December 2021

# Community Football – Current State (2021)

