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From Consett to Canada – football coach honoured by Northumbria University

The man who led the Canadian men's national football team to their first World Cup in 36 years has been awarded an honorary degree of Doctor of Science by Northumbria University in Newcastle.

Having grown up in Consett, County Durham, John Herdman first discovered his passion for football coaching while lecturing in Sport Science at Northumbria University in the 1990s.

He went on to work as Development Coach at Sunderland AFC's youth

academy, but it was a move to New Zealand in 2001 which really kick-started his career.

Having joined the country's national association football programme, initially as Coach Education Manager and later as the Director of Football Development, John went on to become head coach for the New Zealand women's national football team in 2006 – a position he held for five years.

In 2011 he made his next big move – this time to Canada, where he took over the Canadian women's national football team, leading them to a gold medal finish at the 2011 Pan American Games.

He secured the team a place in the London Olympic Games, where they won a bronze medal, which was later retained at the 2016 Olympic Games.

In 2018, John was named Head Coach of the Canada men's national football team and became men's National Director, with responsibility for all age groups from under-14s upwards.

Under his guidance the team rose up the FIFA World Rankings from 72nd to 40th, going on to qualify for the 2022 FIFA World Cup – the first time Canada had been represented at a world cup for 36 years.

In doing so, he became the first manager to have successfully led both the national women's and men's teams of a nation to qualify for a World Cup.

Despite his success, John has never forgotten his North East roots. Growing up in Consett following the closure of the town's steelworks, he witnessed unemployment and addiction, which led to a fascination with psychology and a conviction that, "football is played as much in the head as with the feet".

His mantra throughout his career has been, "If you don't understand the brain, you can't understand coaching".

Speaking about his honorary degree from Northumbria, which was presented during winter graduation ceremonies held at the University's Newcastle City Campus, John said: "It's quite emotional to think about coming back to my roots and being recognised in this way. Northumbria University and Paul Potrac created an opportunity for me early in my career to follow my passion

for teaching, little did I know those beginnings would lead to this.

“I’m thankful and grateful for the great support of my family who have been unwavering throughout the highest highs and the inevitable lows of elite level sport, and I hope this recognition can inspire others to keep pushing beyond the limits of their potential and expectations of others”.

Northumbria University awards honorary degrees to individuals who have obtained the very highest standards of scholarship, outstanding achievement, or distinction worthy of national or international recognition in their academic or professional field.

[Find out more about Northumbria University’s Honorary Graduates.](#)

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