



Johnson happy to join Buff staff

Hawkins says new O-line coach a 'great fit'

By Kyle Ringo

Wednesday, February 18, 2009

New Colorado offensive line coach Denver Johnson will have a familiar face greeting him after practices this spring and an old friend to sit next to on the team buses and chartered planes next fall.

The 50-year-old coach hired by Dan Hawkins on Wednesday spent the past nine seasons as head coach at Illinois State, where he developed a friendship with CU radio play-by-play man Mark Johnson, who spent four years as the voice of the Redbirds early in Johnson's tenure at the school.

When former offensive line coach Jeff Grimes left for Auburn last month, Mark Johnson suggested Hawkins interview his old friend. Denver Johnson was one of at least four candidates known to have been interviewed for the position.

"He's very highly respected, and is a great man and a great coach," Hawkins said in a statement. "He has experience coaching with and against Big 12 competition and has recruiting ties in the Big 12 region, especially Texas. I think he's a great fit for our staff and for our team. When we started looking for someone, his name kept cropping up and from a lot of different sources. And even more so, he really wanted to be a Buff."

Johnson is the third offensive line coach in the program under Hawkins. Grimes replaced Chris Strausser, who came to CU from Boise State along with Hawkins but coached the Buffs for only one year (2006).

The offensive line position is the only one on Hawkins staff to change during his tenure, and he's hoping he has found a coach who will provide some long-term stability there.

"I have been a head coach for 12 years, but I'm an offensive line coach by trade," Johnson said. "That's my passion, so I am excited to be here at such a critical time and am looking forward to settling in and getting down to business."

During the interview process, Johnson met with a handful of the players he will coach. Starters such as Ryan Miller, Nate Solder and Devin Head said they felt comfortable with him because he was "down to earth."

Johnson inherits a large group of youthful blockers. Eleven of the 15 returning players he will coach are freshmen or sophomores. He also will welcome three true freshmen to the program this summer.

"They are very much still in the developmental stage," Johnson said. "They are a young, talented, good looking bunch with some length and athletic ability."

Johnson's teams at Illinois State went 48-54 during his tenure and finished the 2006 season ranked No. 8 in the Football Championship Subdivision. He resigned from Illinois State at the end of last season after the Redbirds finished a disappointing 3-8. Johnson also spent three years as the head coach at Murray State, where his teams went 21-12.

After playing four seasons at Tulsa and graduating in 1981, Johnson was drafted in the eighth round by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. He played two seasons for the team and later played for two franchises in the United States Football League. He began his coaching career at Tennessee-Martin in 1986 and later spent one season at Oklahoma State, a fellow Big 12 school, then in the Big Eight.



© 2006 Daily Camera and Boulder Publishing, LLC.

denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST

It's official: CU adds O-line coach

The Denver Post

Posted: 02/18/2009 04:08:10 PM MST

Updated: 02/18/2009 04:09:27 PM MST

Colorado coach Dan Hawkins on Wednesday introduced former Illinois State head coach Denver Johnson as the Buffaloes' offensive line coach.

"He's very highly respected, and is a great man and a great coach," Hawkins said of Johnson.

"He has experience coaching with and against Big 12 competition and has recruiting ties in the Big 12 region, especially Texas. I think he's a great fit for our staff and for our team. When we started looking for someone, his name kept cropping up and from a lot of different sources. And even more so, he really wanted to be a Buff."

Johnson is a former lineman at Tulsa and in the NFL. He last had an assistant coaching job in 1996, at Oklahoma.

As first reported Tuesday in the Bloomington (Ill.) Pantagraph, Johnson will join CU after compiling a 69-66 record over 12 years as a college head coach, the first three at Murray

State and the past nine at Illinois State.

Johnson, 50, retired as Redbirds coach after last season with a 48-54 career record there.

"I was impressed by the vision and leadership of Hawk and this is an exciting time for Colorado football and I am glad to become part of it," Johnson said.

Advertisement



A bright idea in online advertising.

PrinterStitial® ads by Format Dynamics.



FormatDynamics®

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™



Denver
Partly cloudy
65°

[Site](#) [Web](#)

[Search](#)

[Home](#) [News](#) [Business Sports](#) [Entertainment](#) [Living](#) [Outdoors Opinion](#) [Multimedia](#) [Jobs](#) [Autos](#) [Real Estate](#) [Classifieds](#) [Shop](#)
[Broncos](#) [Avalanche](#) [Nuggets](#) [Rockies](#) [Rapids](#) [College](#) [Fun & Fantasy](#) [More Sports](#) [Rocky Preps](#) [Drew Litton](#) [Sam Adams](#) [Columns & Blogs](#) [Special Reports](#)

BREAKING NEWS: [Sweep nets 3 teen prostitutes, 2 pimps in metro Denver](#)

By B.G. Brooks, Rocky Mountain News (Contact)

Published February 18, 2009 at 5:07 p.m.

Updated February 18, 2009 at 9:26 p.m.

Text size [+](#) [-](#)

[0 Comments](#)

[Email](#)

[Print](#)

Denver Johnson is moving to Colorado to return to his first love.

Johnson, announced as the University of Colorado's new offensive line coach Wednesday, is a former coach who becomes a position coach with no reluctance.

In fact, the only reluctance he might have experienced in a 23-year coaching career was stepping out of his much-loved niche as an offensive-line boss. But his move up the ladder partially was because of circumstances well beyond his control.

In 1996, when Johnson was an assistant at Oklahoma, his daughter, Kelsey, then 4, was diagnosed with cancer. To be nearer nationally renowned cancer hospital St. Jude's in Memphis, Tenn., Johnson applied for the coaching vacancy at Murray State in Kentucky and was hired.

Three years later, with Kelsey recovering (she's now a high school senior bound for the University of Mississippi), Johnson was hired by Illinois State, where he stayed for nine seasons before stepping down last season (48-54 record, 69-66 in career) and opening the way for CU coach Dan Hawkins to hire him as Jeff Grimes' replacement.

"All I've really wanted to do is be an offensive line coach . . . there will only be a little transition," Johnson said, adding he will not assume Grimes' title of running game coordinator.

Joining a mostly youthful staff, Johnson, 50, believes he can mentor some of CU's assistants: "I think I've got a unique background, working for different guys.

"I've got something to contribute to the kids and offer to the staff. We're all products of our cumulative experiences."

Johnson met several of CU's linemen when he interviewed with Hawkins and was impressed by their overall size and speed. He saw a number of "youthful plays" on game tapes but noted, "It's a positive and healthy situation. There are talented, young players here; there's a huge upside."

Share

What is this?

Featured