

Illinois State Athletics News



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Redbird Football

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Johnson Awarded Contract Extension Through 2010

NORMAL, III. – According to Illinois State Director of Athletics Dr. Sheahon Zenger, Denver Johnson has signed a four-year contract extension to continue his tenure as the head coach of the Redbird football program.

Johnson, who arrived at Illinois State in 2000, is coming off his first-ever trip to the NCAA Division I Football Championship and the third for the Redbird football program. The 2006 Redbirds finished with a 9-4 record, which is the second-highest win total in school history, and were ranked in the top 10 nationally every week during the regular season. Johnson, a finalist for the 2006 Eddie Robinson Coach of the Year Award, owns a 62-51 (.549) career coaching record in nine seasons, including a 41-39 (.513) mark at Illinois State. Of his nine seasons, seven have resulted in six wins or more, which would have resulted in a bowl bid at the I-A level.

"Sheahon and I have been on the same page for quite some time and I'm just glad to have this deal completed so we can continue to move forward," Johnson said. "I'm extremely excited about this football program at Illinois State. I feel very blessed and fortunate to be able to continue to build a program here. I'm pleased with the direction we are going, the momentum that we are building and where this program, athletics department and institution are heading in the future.

"We are on the front end of some exciting and fun times in the history of ISU Athletics. It has been my experience that when you have an administration in place with all the positive energy and support from President (AI) Bowman, and all the vision and leadership from Dr. Zenger, it can't help but be an exciting time not only for football, but for our entire athletics department."

The Redbirds did more than advance to the quarterfinals of the NCAA Playoffs in 2006. Under Johnson the Redbirds have claimed an unprecedented five straight Gateway Football Conference Defensive Player of the Year Awards, including a record three-straight by Boomer Grigsby, while leading the league in passing offense the last three seasons. In addition, the team carried a 2.68 grade point average during the Spring 2006 semester, which was the highest team GPA since 1993, and placed 35 players on the AFNI Athletics Honor Roll. The Redbirds also contributed 1,595 community service hours during the 2005-06 academic school year.

Zenger has enjoyed the working relationship with Johnson over the last two seasons.

"It has been a true pleasure to work with Coach Johnson and his staff for two seasons," Zenger said. "Coach Johnson exemplifies the teamwork and leadership that we are asking of all of our coaches at Illinois State University. In simple terms, he has asked for little and given much in my time here at Illinois State.

"If someone were to put a blank résumé in front of me with the list of accomplishments that Coach Johnson has been able to accumulate, culminating in a second round playoff birth, top-eight finish, player awards, statistical records and then tell me that the same coach was able to motivate a team to achieve academically and in community service, I would search throughout the country for such an individual. It just so happens we have him right here in our own midst."

Having personal experience with a shift in power on the football field, Zenger sees similar things between his time at Kansas State and the current rise at Illinois State.

"Having coached college football and been an athletics administrator for close to 20 years now, I have had the good fortune to work with men like Bill Snyder and Bob Stoops. I can tell you that what Coach Johnson and his staff are building here at Illinois State reminds me of the momentum that we had at Kansas State in the late '80s and early '90s, as we built what many now call the 'greatest turnaround in college football history'," Zenger said. "I believe that under Denver Johnson's leadership we have an opportunity to add Illinois State to the list of football success stories such as Kansas State, Marshall and Boise State.

"Coach Johnson, his staff and his team took the first step in building the kind of football tradition that Illinois State University so richly deserves by accomplishing so much on and off the field these past two seasons. This contract extension is the second step and significant facility upgrades will be the third step as Illinois State commits to becoming a dominant force in the world of college football."

During Johnson's tenure, the Redbirds have earned more accolades at the conference and national levels, and broken more records than any other period in the 111-year history of Illinois State football. Since 2000, Johnson has coached 52 All-Gateway selections and 28 all-Americans, including Pierre Rembert and Cameron Siskowic this season. Both Grigsby and Brent Hawkins each were awarded national defensive player of the year honors during their careers.

Also during this era, Illinois State has become an active player in the national award race. Never before has a Redbird player been a finalist for either the Walter Payton (offense) or Buck Buchanan (defense) Awards. ISU has had a finalist for the Buchanan during each of the last five seasons, while having a Redbird on the final ballot for the last two Payton votes.

There have also been 21 All-Gateway Newcomer selections and 23 players named to the league's all-academic team. Laurent Robinson also claimed the 2005 Gateway Offensive Player of the Year honor, while Tom Nelson received the 2005 GFC's Freshman of the Year Award. In the last three seasons, Johnson has had five players participate in senior all-star games, including Hawkins, who won the Defensive MVP honor, and the Special Teams MVP Ryan Hoffman, both at the 2006 Hula Bowl.

In addition to winning honors and national accolades, Johnson's players have been rewriting the Redbird record book. Since 2000, the Redbirds have set the standards for rushing, passing, receiving, scoring, kicking, punting and defense. There was also a record season at the box office. ISU drew a pair of capacity crowds in 2006 for the first time since 1970, while ranking No. 17 nationally in per game attendance.

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ILLINOIS STATE – Head football coach Denver Johnson signs a four-year contract extension.

What the players are saying about Johnson:

Boomer Grigsby, former Illinois State linebacker and current member of the Kansas City Chiefs

"I think this is a great thing for the Redbird football program. Coach Johnson and his staff have laid a great foundation and now they are just going to build on it. He has really laid the ground work in recruiting. Coach is so good at speaking with the kids and going into their home. Now, with a trip to the second round of the playoffs, he will continue to build the program for years to come."

Laurént Robinson, Illinois State senior wide receiver

"The players have so much respect for Coach Johnson and his staff. Coach J is so approachable, I've always been able to go and visit him in his office and talk. I tried to get him fired up before practice and we just liked to have fun together. There is a great family atmosphere right now at Illinois State and with the recruiting classes Coach J and his staff continue to sign, there will continue to be great times at ISU."

Luke Drone, Illinois State junior quarterback

"The program is where it is because of what Coach Johnson and his staff have done. I know personally, Coach (Justin) Fuente has helped me a lot and every guy on the team feels that way about their coach. You can tell by all the individual honors and awards won by the program and that is just a testament to work by the coaching staff. This is a program that is on the rise and we hope to continue to bring it to new heights."

Milestones in the Denver Johnson era:

I. Career

Rushing Records

- Four of the top 20 career leading rushers in total yards in ISU history
- Five of the top 20 career rushing attempts leaders in school history
- Six of the top 20 career rushing TDs leaders in school history
- Five of the top 20 in average yards/rush for a career (min. 200 attempts), including the best in school history (**Demetrus Johnson**, 5.58, 2003-04)
- Three of the top five in rushing yards per game for a career

Passing Records

- Four of the top 20 in career pass attempts in school history
- Four of the top 20 in career pass completions
- Four of the top 20 in career passing yards
- Three of the top 20 in career passing TDs
- Three of the top 10 in career pass completion percentage (min 300 attempts), including the best in school history (**Luke Drone**, 61.2, 2004-present)
- Three of the top 10 in career pass efficiency (min. 300 attempts), including the best in school history (**Luke Drone**, 147.2, 2004-present)
- Three of the top six in average yards/pass (min. 300 attempts), including the best in school history (**Luke Drone**, 8.6, 2004- present)
- Three of the top 10 in average yards/completion, including the top two spots. (1. **Luke Drone**, 14.1, 2004-present, 2. **Mike Souza**, 12.5, 2002-03)
- Three of the top 20 in passing yards/game

Receiving Records

- Six of the top 20 in pass reception yards, including the best mark in school history (**Laurént Robinson**, 3007, 2003-present)
- Five of the top 20 in pass receptions, including the best in school history (**Laurént Robinson**, 192, 2003- present)
- Seven of the top 20 in career pass reception TDs, including the best in ISU history (**Laurént Robinson**, 29, 2003-present)
- Eight of the top 20 in average yards/catch (min 520 recept.), including the highest mark in school history (**Vito Golson**, 17.82, 1999-2002)
- Seven of the top 20 in receptions/game (min 20 games)

Total Offense Records

- Five of the top 20 in total offensive yards, including the top in school history
 - Coached four of the top six
- Eight of the top 20 in TDs responsible for, including the best in ISU history
- The top four in total offense/game average in school history, and five of the top 10
- Six of the top 10 in total offense/play and eight of the top 15
- Three of the top 10 players in all purpose yards
- Three of the top six in all purpose yards/game

Scoring Records

- Three of the top 10 scorers of all-time, including the best scorer in ISU history (**Stephen Carroll**, 271, 2001-04)
- Three of the top four touchdown scorers of all time, including two Redbirds who completed eligibility in 2006 (**Pierre Rembert**, 29, and **Laurént Robinson**, 29)
- Two of the top six kickers with PAT's made, attempted and percentage

- Two of the top 10 field goal kickers of all-time
- The No. 1 field goal percentage leader (**Stephen Carroll**, 71.6%)

Punting/Return Records

- The top average yards/punt leader in history (**Ryan Hoffman**, 42.17)
- The fourth highest in punting yards and fifth in punt attempts (**Ryan Hoffman**)
- Five of the top 15 punt return yards in history
- The top kick return yardage leader (**Dennis Butler**, 1145, 2001-02) and most kick returned (**Dennis Butler**, 50, 2001-02)

Defensive Records

- Two of the top 20 interception leaders
- Two of the top six interception return for touchdown leaders, including two current players (**Kye Stewart and Jarek Thomas**)
- Three of the top four fumble return yards leaders, including the top player (**Jesse Caesar**, 102, 2003-06)
- The top-three leaders in fumbles returned, including **James Temple** who leads with three
- Six players who have returned a fumble for a TD
- Four of the top six tacklers in school history, including the all-time leader (**Boomer Grigsby**, 580, 2001-04)
- Four of the top 10 in unassisted tackles, including the all-time leader (**Galen Scott**, 328, 1997-00)
- Six of the top ten in assisted tackles
- The top six in tackles for loss
- Three of the top six in quarterback sacks, including the leader (**Ray Robinson**, 25.5, 2000-03)

II. Single-Season

Rushing Records

- The single-season rushing leader in school history (**Pierre Rembert**, 1743, 2006) and five of the top 10
- Five of the top 10 rushing touchdown leaders
- Four of the top seven yards/carry leaders, including the leader (**Demetrus Johnson**, 6.26, 2004)
- Six of the top 10 rushing yards/game leaders

Passing Records

- Four of the top seven pass attempts leaders
- Two of the top four pass completion leaders
- Four of the top six passing yards leaders
- Three of the top five touchdown passes leaders
- Three of the top seven pass completion percentage leaders, including current quarterback **Luke Drone**, who has the best percentage in school history (64.5%, 2005) and the No. 6 spot (58.2%, 2006)
- The top two spots in season pass efficiency, both by **Luke Drone** (No. 1, 153.2, 2005 and No.2, 141.8, 2006)
- Four of the top six average yards/pass leaders, including **Luke Drone**, who owns the top two spots
- Four of the top five average yards/completion leaders, including leader **Kevin Glenn** (15.5, 2000)
- Four of the top five passing yards/game leaders, including **Luke Drone** at No. 1 (266.4, 2005)

Receiving Records

- The top receiver in yards (**Laurént Robinson**, 1465, 2005)
- The top pass receptions leader (**Laurént Robinson**, 86, 2005)
- Four of the top seven TD reception leaders
- Three of top six average yards/catch leaders, including the top average (**Vito Golson**, 23.7, 2000)
- The top receptions/game average leader (**Laurént Robinson**, 7.82, 2005)

Total Offense Records

- Four of the top five performers
- Three of the top five TD passers
- Five of the top seven total offense/game players, including **Luke Drone** (277.8, 2005)
- Five of the top 10 total offense/play leaders
- Three of the top seven all-purpose yards leaders
- Four of the top eight all-purpose yards/game leaders

Scoring Records

- Three of the top ten scorers all-time
- Two of the top four players with the most touchdowns scored
- Five of the top six PAT's made leaders
- **Stephen Carroll** was perfect in PAT percentage in 2002 (30-30) and in 2003 (35-35)
- Four of the top 10 field goals made leaders
- **Stephen Carroll** also ranks No. 2 in field goal percentage (78.9%, 2003) and No. 6 (68.4%, 2002)

Punting/Return Records

- **Ryan Hoffman** ranks No. 2 (43.87%), No. 3 (43.61%) and No. 4 (42.17%) in average yards/punt
- **Ryan Szokola** leads all-time in punt return yards (438, 2000) and punt returns (50)
- Two players returned a punt for a TD
- Two of the top 10 average yards/punt return leaders
- Three of the top eight kick return yardage leaders
- Two of the top six kick return leaders
- Had one player return a kick for a touchdown
- Three of the top 10 average yards/kick return leaders

Defensive Records

- Two players with four interceptions in a season
- Two players with interception returns for touchdowns
- Six of the top 10 fumble return yards leaders
- Seven of the top 11 fumble return leaders, including **Kye Stewart** who is tied for the lead with 2
- Six players who have returned fumbles for touchdowns
- Four of the top nine total tackle leaders
- **Boomer Grigsby** is No. 2 (109, 2003) and No. 3 (108, 2002) in unassisted tackles
- Six of the top 11 assisted tackles leaders
- The top two tackles for loss leaders
 - No. 1 – **Brent Hawkins** (26.5, 2005)
 - No. 2 – **Jonathan Friend** (25.0, 2002)
- The top two sack leaders
 - No. 1 – **Brent Hawkins** (17, 2005)
 - No. 2 – **Ray Robinson** (14, 2003)

II. Single-Season Team Records

Team Rushing Statistics

- The Redbirds have had four of the top six all-time rushing seasons in ISU history under head coach Denver Johnson, including the No. 1 season in 2003 (2,908).
- Under coach Johnson, the 'Birds have made it a habit to score running the football. Johnson's teams own three of the top eight season touchdown marks in ISU history, including the school record 31 in 2005.

- The commitment to the run is obvious in the Denver Johnson era. When it comes to rushing yards per game, Johnson led teams own three of the school's top six marks. Redbird backs have also teamed with their offensive line to have three of the top five seasons in the average yards per rush statistic under Johnson, including the No. 1 (5.11, 2003) and No. 2 (4.73, 2000) seasons, respectively.

Team Passing Statistics

- The 'Birds have had an equally impressive passing attack under Denver Johnson. Johnson's Redbirds have three seasons that rank in the top five all-time in passing yards and touchdowns thrown.
- In 2005, the 'Birds averaged 268.7 yards passing per game, the best in school history, and recorded the highest average yards per pass mark at 8.7.

Team Receiving Statistics

- Three of the school's top five seasons for yards receiving have come under the tutelage of Denver Johnson. Since Johnson took over at ISU, the 'Birds have also had three of their top five seasons for touchdown passes caught.

Total Offense Statistics

- Six of the top eight offensive yardage seasons in ISU history have come under Denver Johnson. The offense's best season under Johnson, 2005, saw the Birds amass 5,253 total yards, the third highest all-time mark.
- In Johnson's first season, the 'Birds set the school record for all purpose yard per game with 579.1. All total, Johnson led teams account for five of the top seven seasons in the all purpose yards per game category.
- In the last seven seasons, the 'Birds have rewritten the scoring record book. Johnson's seven teams are all in the top 12 all-time in ISU scoring. Three teams are in the top five, including 2005 which ranks No. 2 (431 points scored).

IV. Overall Awards

- 52 All-Gateway Football Conference Selection
- 21 All-Gateway Newcomer Team selections
- 50 Gateway Player of the Week selections
- 23 Gateway All-Academic Team selections
- Three President's Academic Excellence Award recipients
 - **Adam Waugh** (2000)
 - **Aaron Peterson** (2002)
 - **Jim Ferguson** (2003)
- Two NACDA NCAA I-AA Academic All-Star selections
 - **Adam Waugh** (2001)
 - **Stephen Carroll** (2004)
- Seven First-Team All-Americans
- Ten Second-Team All-Americans
- Five Third-Team All-Americans
- Six Honorable Mention All-Americans
- Four Walter Camp Football Foundation All-Americans
 - Defense – **Boomer Grigsby** (2004)
 - Defense- **Brent Hawkins** (2005)
 - Offense – **Laurént Robinson** (2005)
 - Defense - **Cameron Siskowic** (2006)
- Four Gateway Football Conference Players of the Year
 - Defense – **Boomer Grigsby** (2002-2004)
 - Defense – **Brent Hawkins** (2005)
 - Offense – **Laurént Robinson** (2005)
 - Defense - **Cameron Siskowic** (2006)

- One Gateway Football Conference Freshman of the Year
 - **Tom Nelson** (2005)
- One I-AA.org National Defensive Player of the Year
 - **Boomer Grigsby** (2003 and 2004)
- One CollegeSportsReport.com NCAA I-AA National Defensive Player of the Year
 - **Brent Hawkins** (2005)
- Four Hula Bowl participants
 - **Brent Hawkins** (2006)
 - **Ryan Hoffman** (2006)
 - **Laurént Robinson** (2007)
 - **Jake Weber** (2007)
- Two Hula Bowl MVP's
 - Defense – **Brent Hawkins** (2006)
 - Special Teams – **Ryan Hoffman** (2006)
- One EAST-WEST Shrine Bowl participant
 - **Boomer Grigsby** (2004)
- Three Buck Buchanan Award finalists
 - **Boomer Grigsby** (2003-04)
 - **Brent Hawkins** (2006)
 - **Cameron Siskowic** (2005-06)
- Two Walter Payton Award finalists
 - **Laurént Robinson** (2005)
 - **Pierre Rembert** (2006)
- Two Illinois State Male Athletes of the Year
 - **Boomer Grigsby** (2004-05)
 - **Stafford Davis** (2005-06)
- Two Illinois State Male Scholar-Athletes of the Year
 - **Adam Waugh** (2000-2001)
 - **Stephen Carroll** (2004-05)
- Posted a 2.68 team GPA in the Spring of 2006, the highest team GPA since the Spring of 1993
- Contributed 1,595 hours of community service during the 2005-06 school year
- During Johnson's tenure, the Scholar Baller™ program was started and during the 2005-06 school year, 62 members qualified as Scholar Baller™ with a 2.75 GPA or higher