Head Coach Steve Johnson

Head football coach Steve Johnson just completed his 23rd year at Bethel University. Under Johnson’s leadership, Bethel’s football program has risen to national prominence and has become a perennial contender for the MIAC championship.

In 1989 Coach Johnson took over a program that was 13-87 in the 1980’s. In his first year he was awarded MIAC Coach of the Year honors and the turn-around was under way. With 164 career wins, Johnson has been the MIAC Coach of the Year five times and the West Region Coach of the Year three times. In the last decade, the Royals have won four MIAC championships, advanced to the NCAA Division III playoffs six times and have been the NCAA West Region champions two times. Bethel has had 19 consecutive winning seasons.

In 2010, Bethel began the season unranked but ended the season in the nation’s top four. After reaching the playoffs as a sixth seed in their region, they became West Region Champions with road wins over #3 Wartburg, #2 Wheaton, and #1 St. Thomas.

Coach Johnson annually teaches a Bethel leadership class called The Band of Brothers and follows the steps of Easy Company (101st Airborne). The class takes place in Europe on the World War II battlefields where these men trained and fought.

In addition to his work at Bethel, Johnson is a frequent speaker and clinician for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes huddles and camps, a volunteer for the Union Gospel Mission summer football camp, a motivational speaker and spiritual mentor for leadership conferences and coaching clinics and recruits for the Church of the Open Door’s mentoring program.

Johnson says, “At Bethel University, we have a very distinct football program philosophy, one that is consistent with the mission of the institution as a whole. The cornerstone of our program and school is a real and intelligent faith in Jesus Christ. This faith manifests itself not in contrived or superficial ways, but in very real ways that are evidenced by our attitudes and behaviors.”

“We believe Christian faith lends direct and natural strength to our team. Filled with love from Christ, we strive more than anything to love one another. This love is evidenced by, among other things, our commitment to other members of the team. Because we are committed to one another, we hold each other accountable for great effort toward spiritual, academic, and athletic growth. Toughness and self-discipline are a result of accepting this correction and encouragement from our football family members over a period of time. At Bethel University, it is our intense goal to win each football game we play. Our goal is to win, but our focus is on one another and on the unity and growth we may achieve.”

Prior to coming to Bethel University in 1989, Johnson served as the head coach at St. Cloud Cathedral High School and as an assistant at St. Cloud State University, the University of Minnesota and Montana State University.

Johnson and his wife, Susan, have three children, Cornell and twin daughters, Katie and Maddie.