

# Dakota grad named track and field coach at OU

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Tanisha Johnson

ROCHESTER — When a Macomb Dakota track and field athlete garners the team’s annual MVP distinction, he or she earns an award named after Tanisha Johnson.

A 2006 Dakota graduate, Johnson was a five-time All-State honoree setting numerous school records, with several still standing today. The former Cougars standout is returning to the area to continue to work in the sport she loves, being named the Oakland University track and field coach Nov. 1.

“I’m thrilled for this opportunity,” Johnson said. “Oakland is building a fantastic program, and to be chosen to help with that is an honor.”

Oakland restructured its staff, moving longtime coach Paul Rice to the new position of Director of Track and Field. Rice had served as head coach since the program began in 2006 and called Johnson an excellent replacement for himself.

“I look forward to seeing her lead the track and field athletes and coaches on a day-to-day basis,” Rice said. “It will be a pleasure to work with and to support her through this process. We have a very bright future, and this new

structure, along with the support we receive from our administration, will allow us to continue to grow our success within the Horizon League, regionally and even nationally.”

After graduating from Dakota, Johnson attended Grand Valley State University for two years, garnering All-Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference honors. She then transferred to Central Michigan University where she earned All-Mid-American Conference honors in the high jump.

Johnson obtained a master’s degree at Indiana University, helping coach track and field there and a nearby high school in Bloomington. Following that, she was an assistant at Indiana-Purdue Fort Wayne.

“Oakland is growing so much. The track program was just starting when I graduated high school,” Johnson remarked. “I have many former teammates and friends that went to OU and praised everything about the school. As an outsider, it’s been great to see the growth for both the athletic program and the university as a whole. I take a sense of pride in it, and I’m excited to help continue that.”

Johnson said one of the biggest draws of the new gig was to return to her old stomping grounds.

“This is home for me. I’m so excited to share this all with my wife and son” Johnson said. “My mom is from Macomb, my family is from the greater Detroit area. I’m thrilled to be back here, I would absolutely adore every chance I got to go back home, and now I’m here to stay.”

Additionally, Johnson plans to frequently return to the place where she made a name for herself.

“Of course I’ll try to make it out to Dakota as much as I can,” Johnson explained. “I plan to go to football and basketball games. I love catching up with my former coaches out there.”

Johnson cited her former coach, Michael Timpa, as a key mentor in her development. Timpa still serves in that role at Dakota and was one of the first people she called when she was hired.

“I’m so glad to have her back in the state, and it’s really not surprising she’s already made it to this level,” Timpa said. “I couldn’t be happier for her, and when she called me, I was thrilled.”

Timpa said that, without question, Johnson is one of the best athletes he’s ever coached at Dakota.

“It became a situation here where everyone that came after her was compared to her,” Timpa explained. “She’s a tremendous athlete and an even better young lady that’s honest with kids. When you have a kid like that go into coaching, it always makes me proud.”

Johnson said she hopes to use some of the same style and techniques that Timpa did with her over a decade ago that helped her find success.

“I’m very much like him in the way I coach, and he certainly helped shape me into the kind of coach I am,” Johnson said. “He and the other coaches gave 100 percent of themselves, and seeing the time and effort they put in really stayed with me.”

At the end of her prep career, Johnson held school records in the high jump, long jump, 100-meter dash, 200 and 800 relay. Her long jump mark of 18 feet, 2 3/4 inches resulted in a runner-up finish at the state meet during her senior year.

“It is quite a legacy she left behind,” Timpa said. “We’ve had some athletes come after that have started to break some of her records, but she is one of the best all-around sprinters and jumpers to ever come through here.”

Johnson said she is extremely thankful for her time at Dakota, and she believes the Macomb area as a whole will be an excellent place to recruit for the Golden Grizzlies. “There’s a lot of talent out there and plenty of great athletes,” she said. “I have lots of contacts still here, and I’m excited to look for some of the best to represent OU.”