Former Ohio State Linebacker Pepper Johnson Named Defensive Coordinator At IMG Academy

Former Ohio State linebacker Thomas “Pepper” Johnson was named the new defensive coordinator at Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy, head coach Bobby Acosta announced on Monday afternoon. He replaces Brett Maxie, who left the program to become the safeties coach at Colorado.

> We are so excited to have Pepper Johnson join the Brotherhood as our New Defensive Coordinator @PepJ52 #brotherhood pic.twitter.com/GHTnQA9dCL
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> — □□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□□ (@CoachBA1010) July 6, 2020

Johnson recorded 379 tackles, 12 tackles for loss and five sacks during his four-year career with the Buckeyes (1982-85) and earned All-American honors as a senior. He was selected by the New York Giants in the second round of the 1986 NFL Draft and won two Super Bowls (XXI and XXV) with the franchise.

A two-time Pro Bowler, Johnson also played for the Cleveland Browns, Detroit Lions and New York Jets. He retired from the NFL in 1998, having recorded 983 tackles, 25.5 sacks, 14 interceptions and 12 forced fumbles.

Johnson began his coaching career in 2000 as an assistant linebackers coach for the New England Patriots, where he was reunited with former Browns head coach and Jets assistant Bill Belickick. He served as the Patriots’ linebackers coach or defensive line coach for the next 14 seasons, winning three Super Bowls (XXXVI, XXXVIII and XXXIX).

After short stints as the defensive line coach for the Buffalo Bills and New York Jets, Johnson moved on to the now-defunct Alliance of American Football last spring, where he was the linebackers coach for the Memphis Express. After the league suspended operations, he joined the XFL’s Los Angeles Wildcats as the defensive coordinator and linebackers coach. Johnson was fired after just one game, however, as the Wildcats allowed four passing touchdowns in a 37-17 loss. That league also folded amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Johnson’s newest venture is significant given Ohio State has signed numerous players from IMG

Academy in recent years, including four-star offensive guard Tyler Gerald and four-star defensive tackle Malik Barrow in 2016; four-star cornerback Marcus Williamson and four-star safety Isaiah Pryor in 2017; five-star defensive tackle Taron Vincent in 2018; and four-star cornerback Lejond Cavazos in 2020. The Buckeyes also hold a commitment from 2021 four-star defensive end Tunmise Adeleye.

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