

Samba Johnson

Associate Head Coach

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Biography

Bringing more than 20 years of experience coaching at all different levels, Samba Johnson is in his fifth season with the Cal Poly women's basketball team after being hired in the spring of 2022. Prior to the 2024-25 season, Johnson was promoted to Associate Head Coach.

In his first year, Johnson was part of a staff that tripled the win total from the previous year and coached Oumou Toure to an All-Big West selection. In his second year, he helped the Mustangs end the season with a 17-14 overall season record. They were 13-7 in the Big West Conference. He helped coach three Mustangs to All-Big West accolades with Natalia Ackerman receiving First Team All-Big West and All-Defensive Team, Mary Carter taking home the All-Freshmen Team and Annika Shah with an Honorable Mention award. Ackerman also earned her first Big West All-Academic selection. The Mustangs had a banner season with 17 wins for the first time since the 2017-18 season, along with sending them to the WNIT Postseason Tournament for the first time since 2014.

"Coach Johnson is one of the most influential people that I have had the pleasure of working with over my 20-year coaching career," head coach Shanele Stires said. "Early in my career, he mentored me and taught me a lot about being a great assistant, and in turn, a better person of great character. He seamlessly fits into our team-first culture and has unwavering faith in all that we do in our program. He is a winner on all levels: coaching, mentoring, and developing young people on and off the court."

Johnson came to Cal Poly with a vast array of experience and knowledge of coaching both men's and women's basketball over the last 25 years. Prior to arriving in San Luis Obispo, he spent five years coaching high school basketball in Indiana and Florida.

Prior to that, he was an assistant at the college level with stops at Division III Lynchburg College and Longwood University, both in Virginia for their men's programs. He spent the four years before those stops as the director of basketball operations for the men's basketball team at Cleveland State where he coached such players as Norris Cole and Bryn Forbes, both of whom went on to play in the NBA.

Some of Johnson's other stops include being an assistant coach on the women's basketball staff at Stetson in 2008-09, the men's staff at NAIA Friends University (Kansas) in 2007-08, the men's staff at Casper Community College (Wyoming) in 2006-07, the women's staff at Ohio University from 2003-06 and the men's staff at Division II University of Charleston. He was the recruiting coordinator for the Stetson and Ohio women and the Charleston men.

Johnson began his coaching career as an assistant coach at McCook Community College in 1996. He went on to earn a head coaching position at Penn State-New Kensington from 1997-2000 where he was named the Penn State Commonwealth Campus's West Division Coach of the Year in 1999 and 2000 as well as the WPCC Coach of the Year in 1999.

He parlayed that success into his first Division I job as director of basketball operations at Duquesne in 2000-01. He then went on to be an assistant for the University of Charleston's men's team in 2001-02 where he helped guide the program to a 25-7 record and a second-round appearance in the NCAA Division II National Tournament.

Following his one-year stint at Charleston, Johnson was named head coach of the women's basketball

program at Division III La Roche College in 2002-03.

“His wealth of experience and infectious energy make him the perfect fit for Cal Poly, and the young ladies’ lives that he will invaluable impact in our program,” Stires added. “He truly embodies the ‘Mustang Way’, a trusted servant-leader. We are thrilled to be on this incredible journey together as we build a program of national distinction. It is an honor to have him as a part of our family.”

A native of Pittsburgh, Pa., Johnson played at Chaminade University in Honolulu where he received his Bachelor’s of Business Administration in marketing in 1996 following a decorated basketball career that included Pac-West second team and Hawaii Intercollegiate Athletic Conference All-Conference honors. He earned his Master of Arts in early childhood education from Cleveland State in 2013.
