Paul Rhoads

Paul Rhoads, who was born 10 minutes from Jack Trice Stadium and went to high school 20 minutes from Iowa State’s home field, has proven to be the perfect leader of the Iowa State football program.

Born in Nevada, Iowa, Rhoads came back to Iowa State after a year as defensive coordinator at Auburn. His stellar track record complements his Iowa roots. The man who was valedictorian at Ankeny High School, one of the largest schools in the state, Rhoads was the ideal individual to take control of the ISU football program.

Rhoads coordinated the Pittsburgh defense for eight seasons (2000-07) before moving to Auburn in the same role in 2008. His resume includes a 2004 Big East Conference championship with the Panthers. Five of the defenses he coordinated ranked in the nation’s Top 30 for scoring and three in the NCAA’s Top 12 for fewest yards allowed. His aggressive philosophy allowed Pitt to score 10 defensive touchdowns from 2004-06.

Rhoads' last two defenses (Auburn in 2008 and Pitt in 2007) before coming to Ames ranked 15th nationally in scoring defense and fifth in total defense, respectively. The Sporting News named him the best defensive coordinator in the Big East Conference.

Rhoads coordinated defenses for both Walt Harris and Dave Wannstedt at Pittsburgh. He was approached by Auburn’s Tommy Tuberville to move to Auburn in 2002 after two spectacular seasons at Pitt but turned down the offer. Tuberville again offered Rhoads his top defensive coaching position prior to the 2008 season and he accepted.

Through hard work, determination and fiery passion, Rhoads has catapulted Iowa State football into the national spotlight. The personable Rhoads has led the Cyclones to three bowl game appearances and multiple “signature” wins in his first five years as the Cyclone mentor.

Setting new standards in Cyclone football has become the norm for Rhoads. In his short period in Ames, Rhoads has recorded three victories over ranked opponents on the road, half of the school’s all-time total of road triumphs over rated teams (six). In all, Rhoads has registered four wins over ranked opponents in his five seasons.

Perhaps Rhoads’ greatest accomplishment as the Cyclone head coach is his ability to energize an entire fan base. This was no more evident than the nearly 30,000 Iowa State football fans which swarmed Memphis, Tenn., leading up to the Cyclones’ 2012 AutoZone Liberty Bowl game on New Year’s Eve. The massive gathering of Cardinal and Gold affirms that Iowa State football is flying at an all-time high, piloted by a head coach whose popularity in his home state transcends the program’s fan base and has earned the Cyclones national recognition. Iowa Staters know that Paul Rhoads is one of their own.

Rhoads’ enormous popularity has made Jack Trice Stadium the place to be in the fall. Eight of the top-10 most attended games in school history have occurred in the last two seasons (2012 and...
2013). ISU’s top-three single-season attendance figures occurred in the last three seasons, including a school-record season attendance average mark of 55,361 set in 2013.

Rhoads and the Cyclones capped off his fifth season (2013) with a pair of Big 12 victories, marking the first time since 2000 where ISU ended the season with back-to-back league wins. ISU blanked Kansas (34-0), the first shutout involving a pair of Big 12 opponents since 2011 and the fourth-largest shutout over a conference opponent in school history.

The Cyclones then went on the road to defeat West Virginia in a triple overtime thriller (52-44). ISU was down 24 points in the game, staging the biggest come-from-behind win in school history and the largest comeback among all FBS teams in 2013.

Rhoads’ familiarity with Iowa State goes back to his youth growing up in central Iowa but also includes a five-year stint as inside linebackers (1995) and secondary (1996-99) coach with the Cyclones. He was a member of Dan McCarney’s first staff at Iowa State.

The Iowa State head coach lettered three seasons (1986-88) as a defensive back at Missouri Western. Rhoads earned a bachelor’s degree in economics in 1989 at Missouri Western and was the recipient of the Chris Faros Scholarship, which honors the football team’s top senior student-athlete. Rhoads added a master’s degree from Utah State in 1991.

Rhoads’ father, Cecil, was a high school coach for more than three decades and has been inducted into the Iowa High School Football Coaches Hall of Fame. His mother, Mary, was a teacher and homemaker. Rhoads is the youngest of five children. Paul and his wife, Vickie, a former basketball player at Missouri Western, have two boys, Jake and Wyatt. Jake is a member of the Iowa State football team.

Rhoads has been active in the Central Iowa community and has participated in the work of the Alzheimer’s Association of Greater Iowa, Children and Families of Iowa and the Iowa Caregivers Association.