

Josh Whitman - Biography

Illinois alumnus Josh Whitman was hired as the University's 14th permanent director of athletics on February 17, 2016. Now in his 10th year leading the Division of Intercollegiate Athletics, Whitman owns the third-longest tenure among current Big Ten athletic directors and 11th-longest among the Autonomy 4. He has led an impressive effort to establish Fighting Illini Athletics among the nation's elite in both the competitive arena and the classroom.

Whitman has become a prominent voice in college athletics, highlighted by leadership roles in Big Ten and NCAA governance. He is currently serving a four-year term as the Big Ten representative to the NCAA Division I Council. In April 2024, Whitman was elected chair of the Council, a position he will hold until June 30, 2026. As Council chair, Whitman also is a voting member of the NCAA Division I Board of Directors, comprised primarily of presidents and chancellors from Division I institutions, and an ex officio member of the NCAA Board of Governors, the highest governing body of the NCAA.

Illinois completed the most successful year of Whitman's tenure – and arguably one of the greatest in school history – in calendar year 2024. Illinois Football won 10 games to tie the program record for wins in a season and captured the Cheez-It Citrus Bowl trophy to claim its first New Year's Bowl victory in 35 years. Head coach Bret Bielema's fourth Illini squad tied a school record with four wins over Top 25 teams and finished the year ranked No. 16, the program's highest final ranking since 2001.

The football success came on the heels of another fantastic men's basketball season. Illinois made its fourth-consecutive NCAA Tournament appearance under head coach Brad Underwood, advancing to the Elite Eight for the first time since 2005. The Illini captured its second Big Ten Tournament title in four years and totaled 29 victories to mark the third-winningest season in school history. Illinois ended the year at No. 6 in the AP poll, its second top-10 final ranking of the Underwood era, which has won three Big Ten championships in the last four years.

In women's basketball, third-year head coach Shauna Green has led a remarkable turnaround that has returned the Illini to the postseason for the first time in more than 20 years. In 2024, Illinois captured the title in the inaugural Women's Basketball Invitation Tournament, the first postseason title of any kind in program history. This followed 2023 when, in only Coach Green's first season, the team qualified for the NCAA Tournament after a two-decade absence.

In the initial December 2024 polls, the Illini football, men's basketball, and women's basketball programs appeared in the Top 25, marking the first time since January 2000 – and just the second time in school history – that Illinois' top three revenue programs were all ranked concurrently. Illinois was one of just four schools with all three programs in the Top 25, with Whitman the only current athletic director to have hired all three of the involved head coaches.

Whitman has been a regular presence in Springfield, testifying in front of various committees and working with state lawmakers on a variety of issues impacting college athletics, including name-image-likeness and sports gambling. In the summer of 2020, Whitman joined Governor J.B. Pritzker in State Farm Center while the Governor signed into law the Student-Athlete Endorsement Rights Act, the state's inaugural NIL bill.

Whitman, a former Academic All-American at Illinois, emphasizes strong performance by Fighting Illini student-athletes in the classroom as well. In each year of his tenure, student-athletes have posted a combined GPA of above 3.12. Under Whitman's leadership, the student-athlete population as a whole and individual teams have set school records for GPA, APR scores and GSR scores and carry a school-record streak of 29-consecutive semesters with a combined GPA above 3.0.

Whitman has two Illinois degrees. He graduated with Bronze Tablet honors in 2001 while earning a bachelor's degree in finance. In 2008, he graduated summa cum laude from the Illinois College of Law before serving as a judicial law clerk on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit. While attending law school from 2005 to 2008, he worked for DIA in various administrative capacities.

On the gridiron for the Fighting Illini, Whitman played in 45 games from 1997-2000, catching 52 career passes and seven touchdowns. He was a two-time First Team Academic All-American and earned Honorable Mention All-Big Ten honors his senior season. He then spent parts of four seasons as a player in the National Football League, including stints with the San Diego Chargers, Miami Dolphins, Seattle Seahawks, and Buffalo Bills.

Prior to embarking on his career in athletics administration, Whitman practiced law in Washington, D.C., with Covington & Burling LLP, a firm with a preeminent sports practice that represents, among other clients, the National Football League. Whitman remains a licensed attorney and is a member of the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics.

Whitman is married to Hope Whitman. They have two children: a daughter Tate, who is eight, and a six-year-old son, Will.