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2003 IOWA CONFERENCE VOLLEYBALL PREVIEW

MOUNT VERNON, IOWA . . . Defending co-Iowa Conference Champions Central and Wartburg are again picked as the Conference favorites in a preseason poll of the IIAC head coaches. Both schools received 67 points with Wartburg garnering four first-place votes and Central three first-place votes. Central also received five second-place votes while Wartburg received three second-place and a third-place vote. Simpson finished third in the Coaches Poll with 56 points and one first-place vote. The complete 2003 IIAC coaches poll follows.

Rank	School	Points
T-1 st	Wartburg (4)	67
T-1 st	Central (3)	67
3 rd	Simpson (1)	56
4 th	Dubuque	45
5 th	Loras	41
6 th	Coe	32
7 th	Buena Vista	20
8 th	Cornell	17
9 th	Luther	15
Note: First-place votes in parenthesis. Nine points awarded for first-place vote, Eight points awarded for second-place vote		

In the American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA) preseason poll released on Wednesday, Central is ranked 13th and Wartburg is ranked 15th. Central ranked 19th in the final 2002 poll and Wartburg ranked 13th.

Most of the coaches agree there is a balance in the Conference competition while seeing its national competitiveness to be on the rise.

"I see the Conference continuing to progress into a more and more competitive Conference on the national scale. We've had great models in the Minnesota and Wisconsin Conference's and I see us establishing ourselves as a Conference of national prominence as we continually grow deeper and deeper," first-year Central head coach **Kent Clayberg** said. "The list of 'tough places to play' seems to be growing, which is great!"

Luther coach **Ellen Drewes-Stoen** echoes Clayberg. "The IIAC, once again, is very strong, perhaps among the strongest Conferences in the nation. The quality of competition is wonderful to see, as we no longer have to travel out of our region to face ranked competition – the IIAC is loaded with strong, competitive teams."

Under a new Conference policy adopted last season, the Iowa Conference volleyball Champion and all-sports trophy points will be determined by the regular season round-robin schedule. The Conference Tournament will be used to determine which school receives the automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament. Previously, the regular season and Conference Tournament each counted as 50 percent in determining the Conference volleyball Champion. The 2003 IIAC Tournament, an eight-team single elimination format, will be at Wartburg College on November 7-8.

Buena Vista University Beavers **(12-23, 3-6 7th in IIAC)**

Starters Returning/Lost: 5/2

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 14/3

About the 2003 Beavers: Buena Vista returns an experienced squad with 14 letterwinners including five seniors, four juniors and four sophomores. However, only five of those 14 players appeared in over 25 matches.

“We hope to improve on our Conference and overall record from a year ago,” fifth-year coach **Amy Sander** said. “It is also our goal to be more competitive within the Iowa Conference.”

The most experienced returnees include middle hitter **Alison Olberding** (35 matches, 123 games), middle hitter **Jess Grigg** (33 matches, 121 games), outside hitter **Jess Griggs** (33 matches, 114 games), defensive specialist **Becky Spangler** (35 matches, 107 games) and setter **Laura Reuter** (31 matches, 109 games).

Griggs led the team with 2.55 kills and 2.34 digs per game to go along with 38 aces and 48 blocks while hitting .161. Grigg had a team-high 0.79 blocks per match while Olberding led the Beavers with 44 aces to go along with 96 blocks and 2.44 kills per game. Reuter had a team-high 852 assists and was second on the team with 39 aces.

Other returnees include outside hitters **Alison Veak**, **Brooke Bousum** and **Sam Taggart**; middle hitter **Mindy Buscher**; outside hitter/middle hitter **Lindsey Langel**, outside hitter/setter **Jodi Lukowski**, setter **Rena Guikema** and defensive specialist **Sara Mraz**.

Veak averaged 1.75 digs and 1.04 kills in 24 matches. Langel hit .192 and averaged 1.77 kills and 1.16 digs per game in 15 matches last season. Lukowski averaged 1.33 digs and 1.04 kills per game in 20 matches. Bousum averaged 2.07 digs and 2.0 kills per game in five matches. Guikema had 237 assists.

Central College Dutch
(22-15, 9-0 T-1st in IIAC)

Starters Returning/Lost: 6/0

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 13/4

About the 2003 Dutch: Despite an injury plagued season in 2002, Central still earned a share of its seventh straight Conference Championship. The team's streak of seven straight NCAA postseason berths did end.

"We were worn down mentally and physically last fall, struggling through inexperience and constant injuries. We should be much stronger this year," first-year coach **Kent Clayberg** said. "The upside to a year like that is that we gained lots and lots of experience. We're deep in several positions, bolstered by some very talented freshmen."

All six starters return from 2002 including AVCA Central Region Freshman of the Year **Kristin Hancock**. An outside hitter, Hancock averaged 3.24 kills, 0.32 aces and 3.61 digs in 111 games while hitting .246. **Catie Ruefer**, an All-Region selection, returns at right-side hitter. She hit a team-best .347 and averaged 3.02 kills in 125 games. **Jamie Stark** returns in the middle after hitting .239 and averaging 2.08 kills and 0.56 blocks in 131 games last season.

Tara Rabe joins Hancock on the outside. A Second Team All-Conference selection, she averaged 2.0 kills and 3.71 digs last season. If injuries limit her, she might be moved to the libero position this season and compete with **Alex Costigan**, **Libby Jennings** and **Tiffany Pruss**.

Lindsay Schultz (.251 hitting pct., 1.93 kills) should see action on the outside along with Costigan and **Lisa Kirby**. Kirby, **Raegan Schultz**, **Katie Pederson** and **Dana Wilkerson** will compete for playing time in the middle.

Setter **Steph Bearden** battled through an injury-plagued season to average 7.92 assists, 1.98 digs and 1.18 kills last season. **Jodi Taute** saw action in 26 matches last season and averaged 3.17 assists and 2.71 digs.

Coe College Kohawks
(14-25, 4-5 6th in IIAC)

Starters Returning/Lost: 0/6

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 4/9

About the 2003 Kohawks: Only four players return from last season for second-year coach **Heather Schmidt**. But that does not mean low numbers as over 25 newcomers will vie for playing time.

“One word that can describe the 2003 Coe volleyball team is young. By young I mean full of energy, open-minded, determined and ready to make a mark in the Iowa Conference,” Schmidt said. “It is going to be a battle everyday in practice to earn a varsity spot.”

Without a senior on the team and just three juniors, finding leadership could be hard to come by. Middle blocker **Tonya Keefer** will have plenty to offer. She played in 70 games as a freshman and started five matches last year before a knee injury kept her out for most of the season. In limited action, she recorded 62 digs and 25 kills.

Also returning are defensive specialist **Lindsey Ramaekers**, and outside hitters **Cassie Gillin** and **Caroline Capper**. Ramaekers was fifth on the team in digs last year with 198. She added 27 service aces in 105 games.

Gillin had 86 digs, 15 service aces and six kills in 67 games. Capper had 53 digs, 33 kills and 14 blocks in 40 games.

Among the newcomers expected to make the biggest impact are **Cassidy Brandt**, **Chelsea Dirks** and **Sara Kopp**.

Cornell College Rams
(12-18, 1-8 9th in IIAC)

Starters Returning/Lost: 5/1

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 11/7

About the 2003 Rams: Second-year coach **Jeff Meeker** returns five of six starters from last season's 12-18 season.

"We hope to be much more competitive this season. We have a great group of returnees who have been working hard, and a solid incoming class," Meeker said. "With much hard work and steady improvement throughout the season, we hope to improve upon our 2002 Conference showing."

Leading the group of returnees are middle hitters **Sarah Wille** and **Kori Simms**. Wille led the team with 328 kills and 113 blocks while ranking third with 34 service aces and tying for fourth with a .228 attack percentage. Simms finished second on the team last season in kills (252), attack percentage (.252) and blocks (89).

Wille, Simms and setter **Jenny Chamberlain** were the only Cornell players to play in over 100 games (of the team's 112). Chamberlain led the team with 110 games played, 48 service aces and 882 assists. She also tied Wille with a .228 attack percentage.

Outside hitter **Jamie Wallace** and right side hitter **Jennifer Martin** round out the returning starters. Wallace ranked second on the team with 191 digs and third with 163 kills. She also had 46 blocks in 82 games. Martin had 58 kills, 48 assists, 32 blocks and 29 digs in 64 games.

Other returnees included defensive specialist **Dana Serafini** (team-high 234 digs in 62 games), middle hitter **Melanie Manz** (team-best .292 attack percentage), middle hitter **Melissa Wille** (.249 attack percentage, 89 kills in 39 games), outside hitter **Shasta Swacina** (30 kills, 61 digs and 13 blocks in 22 games) and setter **Carol Cochran** (117 assists in 46 games).

University of Dubuque Spartans (17-19, 4-5 5th in IIAC)

Starters Returning/Lost: 5/1

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 10/2

About the 2003 Spartans: Third-year coach **Stacey Ruff** has a veteran team that looks to improve on its fifth place Conference finish last season.

“Our expectation is to finish in one of the top-four spots in the Conference,” Ruff said.

Leading the returnees include middle blocker **Jodi Thomas**, libero **Nicole Essman** and setter **J Browning**. Thomas, a second team All-Conference selection last season, led the Spartans with 411 kills, a .296 attack percentage and 107 blocks. She also tied for the team lead with 46 service aces.

Essman led the team with 438 digs including 138 in Conference competition to lead the IIAC with 4.76 digs per game. Browning saw action at right side and outside hitter last season, and tied for the team lead with 46 service aces, was second with 259 kills and 266 assists and fourth with 388 digs.

Also back are middle blocker **Taylor Foltz**, outside hitter **Michele Barkley**, opposite **Kylie Mostaert** and outside hitter/defensive specialist **Jillian Bouchey**. Foltz ranked second on the team with 65 blocks and also had 152 kills and 30 service aces. Barkley ranked second on the team with 414 digs and third with 212 kills in 32 matches. Mostaert had 206 kills, 143 digs and 43 blocks (3rd on team) in 36 matches last season. Bouchey had 163 kills, 403 digs (3rd on team) and 44 aces in 35 matches.

Other returnees that saw limited action in 2002 include outside hitter **Lauren Sandrik** (11 kills, 6 digs in 8 games), libero **Elizabeth Meents** (4 digs in 1 game), setter **Katie Kozlowski** (1 assist in 1 game), opposite **Marci Bouchey** (22 digs in 32 games) and middle blocker **Luci Welles** (4 digs in nine games).

Among the newcomers expected to make an immediate impact are outside hitter/middle blocker **Jody Klepinger**, outside hitters **Sarah Driscoll** and **Laura Tietz**, and defensive specialist **Natalie Howard**.

Loras College Duhawks
(32-7, 6-3 3rd in IIAC)

Starters Returning/Lost: 4/2

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 11/2

About the 2003 Duhawks: First-year coach **Brian Meeter** inherits a program that won 32 of its 39 matches last season and expects to challenge for the top of the Conference again in 2003.

Loras graduated Conference MVP **Shannon Leonard** and First Team All-Conference performer **Alicia Nosbisch**, but all other letterwinners return. Leading the group of returnees is Second Team All-Conference setter **Kristin Anderson**. Anderson led the team with 1,584 assists and a .413 attack percentage. She also contributed 226 digs (6th on team), 117 kills (5th on team) and 52 service aces (3rd on team).

Allison Naddy, Kourtney Kelso, Jamie Bahr and **Ashley Zimmerman** will compete for playing time at outside hitter. Naddy led the team with 364 digs, finished second with 57 service aces and third with 429 kills. Zimmerman had 59 kills, 45 digs and 11 service aces in 61 games.

Zimmerman will compete with **Abby Dunsworth, Tamara Dutton** and **Sara Langel** for time at middle hitter. Dunsworth was fourth on the team with a .241 attack percentage and third with 63 blocks. In 50 games, Langel had 46 kills and 36 blocks.

Jen Wernimont and **Stephanie Price**, who is recovering from off-season surgery, will compete for playing time at right-side hitter. Wernimont, who recorded 284 digs last season, will also see time at libero with **Dana Dinello** (238 digs), **Linda Huemann** (51 digs in 19 games) and **Rachel Weber**.

Luther College Norse
(10-17, 3-6 8th in IIAC)

Starters Returning/Lost: 4/2

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 7/5

About the 2003 Norse: Coming off just its seventh sub-.500 season in the last 24 years, Luther will look to a young but experienced team in 2003 behind coach **Ellen Drewes-Stoen**, who enters her 25th season with the Norse. Stoen ranks 20th among active Division III head coaches with 438 career victories.

“We experienced growing pains last year, but found those experiences to be both challenging and rewarding. Going through that process has motivated us to perform at a higher level and we expect some very positive things to happen on the court,” Stoen said. “Our goal is to strive for excellence, both on the court and off. We are building our team around a very experienced and talented senior setter. We have sound, positive leadership in our captains and seniors, and look forward to another exciting season.”

The senior setter Stoen refers to is **Katie Kuhlman** who ranks second on Luther’s all-time career assist list with 3,064. She enters the season needing just 237 assists to become the school’s all-time leader in the category. Last season she had 946 assists. Kuhlman also ranks ninth on the schools all-time digs list with 547.

Joining Kuhlman as returnees in the starting line-up are middle hitters **Megan Santjer** and **Katie Hopp**. Santjer led the team last season with a .277 attack percentage, ranked second with 54 blocks and finished fourth with 126 kills. Hopp played in all 102 games last season, led the team with 57 blocks, ranked second on the team with 27 aces and third on the team with 158 kills.

Outside hitter **Amanda Stratton**, libero **Molly Ness**, middle hitter **Katie Willenborg** and defensive specialist **Heidi Berg** also return for the Norse. In 95 games, Stratton had 304 kills and had a .262 attack percentage, ranking second on the team in both categories. Ness had 346 digs in 99 games and Willenborg had 34 kills, 15 blocks and 14 digs in 29 games. Berg had 52 digs in 31 games.

Simpson College Storm **(21-15, 6-3 4th in IIAC)**

Starters Returning/Lost: 3/3

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 7/3

About the 2003 Storm: Simpson will embark on one of the toughest schedules in Division III playing seven teams ranked in the final AVCA Top-25. The Storm must do so without middle hitter **Jessica Nauman** who graduated after becoming the second IIAC player to be named First Team All-Conference four times.

“With a fairly young team we hope to gain momentum as the season progresses,” fifth-year coach **Lana Smith** said. “Continuing to improve our play will be key for us. We will be complimented by newcomers that have potential to make positive impacts on our performance.”

Outside hitters **Shannon Stewart** and **Rachael Spree** will be asked to take larger roles for the Storm. Stewart, a Second Team All-Conference selection, ranked second in the Conference with 0.64 aces per game and led Simpson in hitting (.220) and aces (72) while placing second on the team with 138 blocks, 341 kills and 407 digs.

Spree led the team with 597 digs and ranked fifth in the Conference with 3.58 digs per game. Spree also added 56 aces, 307 kills and 75 blocks.

Setter **Liz Whims** had 1,019 assists, marking the seventh time in school history a Simpson setter surpassed the 1,000 assist mark in a season.

Middle hitter **Jamie Cusick**, outside hitter/libero **Amanda Chizek** and outside hitter **Jen Gergen** should contend for starting spots this season. Cusick started and saw extensive varsity time as a freshman but had her role reduced as a sophomore. She finished last season with 115 kills, 79 digs, 58 blocks and 44 assists.

Chizek split time as a hitter and at libero last season, her first after injuring her shoulder as a freshman. She finished with 222 digs. Injuries limited Gergen to 17 matches last season, posting 97 digs and 59 kills.

Other returning letterwinners are defensive specialists **Ranae Grinstead**, **Tia Glandorf**, and **Natalie Hirota**. All three could also move to setter if called upon.

Upper Iowa University Peacocks (3-24, 1-8 10th in IIAC)

Starters Returning/Lost: 3/3

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 7/7

About the 2003 Peacocks: Upper Iowa will compete in a full Iowa Conference schedule but as a non-Conference team after reclassifying to Division II.

“Success from the 2003 Upper Iowa University Volleyball Team will not be measured in wins and losses, but in the gradual progression of skill, along with an increase in athletic maturity – both in level of play and understanding of the game. It will take diligence and discipline from all members and supporters of the program,” first-year coach **Julia Fielder** said. “I’ve seen a renewed energy in the returning players and a definite commitment from each incoming athlete. I’m excited about every one of these young women – not only as volleyball players, but as students and individuals with character and integrity. We look forward to a challenging and rewarding season.”

Returning to Upper Iowa’s starting line-up are middle hitter **Sheena Henrichs**, setter **Lisa Piotrowski** and right side hitter **Renee Reuter**.

Henrichs led Upper Iowa with 192 kills, a .302 attack percentage and 83 blocks while playing in all 95 games. Piotrowski had a team-high 495 assists, ranked third on the team with 24 service aces and fourth with 145 digs in 94 games. Right side hitter **Renee Reuter** had 140 kills, 97 digs and 44 blocks last season in 87 games.

Other experienced players for the Peacocks include outside hitter/setter **Anissa Evans**, outside hitter/libero **Marcy Esparza** and middle hitter **Amy Josephsen**. Evans had 286 assists, 34 kills and 69 digs in 91 games. Esparza saw action in 36 games and recorded 25 digs while Josephsen had three kills and two aces in 13 games.

Right side hitter **Gloria Magana**, outside hitter/defensive specialist **Nikki Henry**, outside hitter **Stephanie Horstman**, defensive specialist **Tera Myers** and middle hitter **Jessica Thurnau** are the newcomers looking to make an immediate impact in the Upper Iowa line-up.

Wartburg College Knights (30-10, 8-1 T-1st in IIAC)

Starters Returning/Lost: 3/3

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 6/6

About the 2003 Knights: Wartburg enters the season with three consecutive 28-or-more win seasons and ended Central's string of six straight outright Conference titles by defeating the Dutch in the IIAC Tournament and earning a share of the Conference title, the school's first.

"Our squad will be young this year so we will be looking to our seniors for leadership and experience in the early weeks of the season," fifth-year coach **Jennifer Walker** said. "I anticipate some good additions from our class of first-year student-athletes that will help build some depth in the program.

Two-time All-Region outside hitter **Dia Dohlman**, the school record-holder in career kills (1,354), and two-time All-Conference right side hitter **Amy Kueker**, the school's second all-time leading ace server (166) lead the Knights as they look to get back the NCAA postseason for the third straight season.

Amanda Nelson and **Renae Grafft** will compete for the middle of the front row. Nelson averaged 0.97 blocks per game last season, tops on the team. Grafft was fifth on the team in the same category with 0.48 blocks per game.

Sarah Olsen will be called upon to replace school record-holding setter **Angie Hulse**. Olsen had 191 assists in 43 games last season. **Erica Slack** saw action late last season up front, averaging 2.17 kills and 1.27 digs in 41 games. **Jolissa Ohrt** and **Shelby Schneider** will compete for the libero position. Schneider can also play the outside and right side.