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2009 IOWA CONFERENCE SOFTBALL PREVIEW

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA . . . The Iowa Conference softball coaches have placed a pair of familiar names at the top of their annual preseason poll. Luther College, IIAC champion in 2007, and Wartburg College, winners in 2006 and 2008, are tied as the coaches' choice to win the 2009 title with 65 points each. The Norse collected four first-place votes the Knights' three, but Wartburg was voted second on four ballots.

2008 NCAA qualifiers Coe College (57 points) and Simpson College (46 points) are third and fifth, respectively, with perennial league and national contender Central College (54 points) nestled in between in fourth.

Cornell College, which qualified for the Iowa Conference Tournament last season, is picked sixth (39 points), followed by Buena Vista University (26 points), University of Dubuque (23 points), and Loras College (21 points).

The complete 2009 IIAC softball Coaches' Poll follows.

Rank	School (1st place votes)	Points	2008 Record
1	Luther (4)	65	(30-12, 10-6 IIAC)
	Wartburg (3)	65	(32-8, 15-1 IIAC)
3	Coe	57	(33-16, 11-5 IIAC)
4	Central (2)	54	(24-16, 8-8 IIAC)
5	Simpson	46	(29-12, 13-3 IIAC)
6	Cornell	39	(18-17, 7-9 IIAC)
7	Buena Vista	26	(8-26, 2-14 IIAC)
8	Dubuque	23	(14-20, 1-15 IIAC)
9	Loras	21	(11-15, 5-11 IIAC)

National Rankings: Three Iowa Conference schools received votes in the National Fastpitch Coaches Association (NFCA) Preseason Poll. Luther is ranked 13th, Coe is 25th, and Wartburg received two votes.

Conference Tournament: The Fourth Annual Iowa Conference Softball Tournament will be played April 30-May 2. The Tournament's top seed will serve as the host. Wartburg has won each of the three previous tournaments, sporting a perfect 10-0 record.

New Coaches: **Heather (White) Hupke**, a four-time All-American at Buena Vista is the new head coach at her alma mater, succeeding **Marge Willadsen**, who retired after last season after nearly three decades of leading the BVU softball team. Hupke had spent the last 10 seasons as head softball coach at Briar Cliff University in Sioux City, where she guided the Chargers to a runner-up finish in the Great Plains Athletic Conference (GPAC) in 2004 - their first year in the league. She also guided the team to four straight sectional and regional titles from 1999-2003, while being named the Sectional Coach of the Year in 2001.

Team-By-Team Preview: A brief preview for each Iowa Conference team follows.

Buena Vista University Beavers
2008 Record: 8-26 overall, 2-14 IIAC (8th)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 7/2
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 1/1

Players to Watch

Morgan Darrow, So., P – Darrow appeared in 13 games a year ago, posting a 2-6 record with a 7.66 ERA and 39 strikeouts in 45 2/3 innings.

Whitney Kriz, Sr., SS – Kriz appeared in 31 games last season hitting .229 with 16 hits, 13 runs scored, and four RBI.

Amy Hasbrouck, Jr., OF – Hasbrouck played in 32 games, hitting .163 with 14 hits and 16 runs scored. She stole a team-high four bases last season and committed only one error in 19 chances defensively.

Allysa Stephens, So., OF – Stephens is the Beavers' leading returning hitter. Last season, she hit .288 in 32 games with 21 hits, 14 runs scored, five doubles, 15 RBI, and a team-high four home runs. Her .521 slugging percentage ranked second on the team.

Quote from head coach Heather Hupke

"I am excited to get back in the Iowa Conference, where it is a battle everyday you step on the field. We look to be competitive in every game this year, and consistently improve throughout the season."

Central College Dutch
2008 Record: 24-16 overall, 8-8 IIAC (5th)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 8/1
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 3/1

Players to Watch

Megan Swingen, Jr., P – Swingen, an honorable mention All-IIAC selection in 2008, appeared in 25 games last season, compiling an 8-4 record with a 3.07 ERA and 59 strikeouts in 89 innings. Swingen ranked tenth in opposing batting average (.250).

Afton Nelson, Jr., 3B – A two-time Second Team All-Conference selection, Nelson hit .309 last year with 29 RBI, 34 hits, and 13 stolen bases in 40 games last season. Nelson ranked seventh in the IIAC in stolen bases and tied for ninth in RBI.

Alysha Overturf, Sr., CF – Overturf, a First Team All-Conference selection in 2006, hit .283 a year ago with three home runs and 18 RBI. She also crossed the plate 28 times.

Hannah Weindruch, Sr., LF – Weindruch, a 2008 First Team All-Conference selection, started all 40 games for the Dutch last season, hitting .325 with 38 hits, six doubles, 19 RBI, and 11 stolen bases.

Quote from head coach George Wares

"[We are] very excited about the season with good experience back. We must overcome the loss of Kelly Harris [2008 IIAC Position Player of the Year] behind the plate, but return veterans at all other positions. We have a very athletic freshmen group that should help us right away."

Coe College Kohawks
2008 Record: 33-16 overall 11-5 IIAC (3rd)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 7/2
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 1/1

Players to Watch

Ashley Leonard, Sr., SS – Leonard, a three-time All-Conference selection and 2008 First Team All-Region selection, started all 49 games for the Kohawks last season, hitting .425 with 65 hits, 41 runs scored, 12 doubles, six home runs and 28 RBI. She also slugged .647 and stole a team-high 17 bases. Leonard ranked among the IIAC's leaders in hits (first), runs scored (second), doubles (second), total bases (second), batting average (third), on base percentage (fourth; .486), stolen bases (fourth), and slugging percentage (sixth). She also fielded 11 double plays.

Dani Leavens, Sr., OF – Leavens, a Second Team All-IIAC and Third Team All-Region selection last season, hit .348 with 46 hits, four home runs and 37 RBI. Leavens ranked third in the IIAC in RBI, eighth in hits, and 10th in batting average.

Chelsea Zaugg, So., OF – Zaugg, another Second Team All-Conference selection, played in 29 games last season, hitting .291 with 23 hits, five doubles, one home run, and 12 RBI.

Sonja Schwenker, Sr., P/DP – Schwenker, a Second Team All-Midwest Region selection last season, hit .281 with 32 hits, 11 doubles, three home runs and 25 RBI. In the circle, she appeared in 27 games, posting a 12-6 record with 11 complete games, a 1.82 ERA, and 110 strikeouts in 123 innings. Schwenker ranked third in the IIAC in doubles, sixth in pitching wins, and seventh in ERA, opposing batting average (.211), strikeouts, and innings pitched.

Quote from head coach Bob Timmons

"We have a total of five seniors returning. I feel they need to play at a high level for Coe to be a factor. I think Central and Luther will be very strong with Wartburg and Simpson in the mix. It should be very interesting."

Cornell College Rams
2008 Record: 18-17 overall, 7-9 IIAC (6th)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 6/3
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 3/0

Players to Watch

Ashton Horn, So., P – An honorable mention All-Iowa Conference selection in 2008, Horn pitched 93 percent of Cornell's innings last season, compiling an 18-15 record with a 2.78 ERA, 27 complete games, and 123 strikeouts in 210 2/3 innings. Horn led the IIAC in innings pitched, appearances (35), and complete games, and ranked among the league leaders in pitching wins (third), strikeouts (sixth), and ERA (ninth).

Nicole Duncan, So., OF – Duncan was Cornell's leading hitter last season, starting all 35 games, hitting .386 with 44 hits, 23 runs scored, 10 doubles, two home runs, and 22 RBI. She also had a team-high .579 slugging percentage. Duncan ranked seventh in the Iowa Conference in batting average, ninth in slugging percentage, tenth in hits, fifth in doubles, and third in triples (3).

Jessica Mauser, Jr., SS – Mauser started all 35 games last season, hitting .278 with 30 hits, 10 doubles, 19 runs scored, and nine RBI. She ranked fifth in the IIAC in doubles last season.

Quote from head coach Shanda Ness

"The Iowa Conference will once again be very competitive in 2009. Our goal is to continue to build our program to a level that will allow us to compete against the top rated teams."

University of Dubuque Spartans
2008 Record: 14-20 overall, 1-15 IIAC (9th)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 5/4
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 3/1

Players to Watch

Megan Burda, Sr., CF/C – Burda, a First Team All-IIAC selection last year, was the Spartans' offensive leader, hitting .375 with 36 hits, eight doubles, two home runs, and 19 RBI. She had a .563 slugging percentage and stole 11 bases during the year. Burda ranked sixth in the IIAC in on base percentage (.483) and eighth in batting average.

Carli Lionhood, Jr., SS – Lionhood appeared in all 34 games last season, hitting .260 and ranking fourth on the team with 25 hits. She posted team-high totals of 26 runs scored and 16 stolen bases, ranking fifth in the IIAC in the latter category.

Christina Chamberlain, So., P/1B – Chamberlain started all 34 games, knocking out 21 hits with five doubles and eight RBI. She committed only two errors in 136 chances for a .985 fielding percentage, ranking ninth in the IIAC. Chamberlain made 15 in the circle, posting a 5-8 record with a 4.27 ERA and 46 strikeouts in 80 1/3 innings. She threw eight complete games.

Katie Golien, Jr., P – Golien appeared in 19 games in the circle for UD, compiling a 5-7 record with a 3.79 ERA and 88 strikeouts in 85 innings. She also threw eight complete games and recorded a save for the Spartans.

Quote from head coach Corey Parr

"Having only lost two starters from a year ago is obviously beneficial. And just like anytime you have to replace players, I hope that we've gotten stronger at those two spots. This is the first time in my short career that I will have more upperclassmen starting for me than underclassmen. I think we have a great group coming in that believes they can help turn this program around."

Loras College Duhawks
2008 Record: 11-15 overall, 5-11 IIAC (7th)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 4/4
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 1/1

Players to Watch

Michelle Bahl, Jr., 2B – Bahl, a Second Team All-Conference selection last season, was Loras' leading hitter last season, hitting .346 with 28 hits, nine doubles and eight RBI. Bahl ranked eighth in the IIAC in slugging percentage (.580) and doubles.

Tracy Sullivan, So., C – Sullivan played in 12 games last year, hitting .323 with 10 hits, seven RBI, and five hits.

Michelle Sabatini, So., P – Sabatini appeared in eight games last season, posting an 0-3 record with a 7.00 ERA, nine strikeouts, one complete game, and 21 innings pitched.

Quote from head coach Katie Koopmann

"We are very excited about the season. I am looking for the players to compete to the best of their ability at every game and practice. Team leadership and fundamentals are going to be our focus this year. We need to control the situations we can and play hard."

Luther College Norse
2008 Record: 30-12 overall, 10-6 IIAC (4th)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 7/2
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 5/1

Players to Watch

Kim Hess, Sr., CF – A two-time All-Iowa Conference selection and a Third Team All-Region selection last year, Hess hit started all 42 games for the Norse hitting .345, with 50 hits, 25 runs scored, 12 RBI, and a league-high 20 stolen bases. Hess ranked sixth in the IIAC in hits.

BreAnn VanDeer, Sr., P – VanDeer, a Second Team All-IIAC selection, appeared in 22 games last season, posting a 10-4 record with a 1.28 ERA, 94 strikeouts, and two saves in 92 2/3 innings. She was fourth in the league in ERA, sixth in opponents' batting average (.204), eighth in strikeouts, and tenth in innings pitched.

Kim Lambert, Jr., P – Lambert appeared in 23 games in 2008, recording an 11-5 record with a 1.63 ERA and 137 strikeouts in 90 1/3 innings. Lambert led the league in opponents batting average (.141) and ranked among the IIAC's leaders in strikeouts (fourth), and ERA (sixth).

Tiffany Kruse, Jr., C – A Second Team All-Iowa Conference and All-Midwest Region honoree in 2008, Kruse started all 42 games, hitting .333 with 41 hits, 13 doubles, nine home runs, and 39 RBI. She also had a .659 slugging percentage. She led the IIAC in doubles and ranked second in RBI, third in home runs, fifth in slugging percentage, and sixth in runs scored (32).

Quote from head coach Renae Hartl

"Our team, 12 returners and 12 newcomers, has worked hard to become a unit and our five seniors have led that charge in every way. I am very excited about our pitching staff and I am expecting all of them to contribute significantly to our success this spring. I am anxious to see how the conference spreads out this year with five or six teams capable of winning the title. We hope to be in the mix in late April."

Simpson College Storm
2008 Record: 29-12 overall, 13-3 IIAC (2nd)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 5/4
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 4/1

Players to Watch

Kelsie Host, Jr., OF – Host, a First Team NFCA All-American in 2008, started all 41 games hitting .456 with 57 hits, a league-leading 11 triples, two home runs and 18 RBI. She also posted a .712 slugging percentage and stole nine bases. Host ranked second in the IIAC in batting average, hits, and on base percentage (.500), third in slugging percentage and sacrifice bunts (10), and eighth in runs scored (31).

Whitney Oviatt, Jr., P – Oviatt, a Third Team NFCA All-Midwest Region selection last year, appeared in 22 games in the circle for the Storm, compiling a 13-5 record, a 1.47 ERA, and 92 strikeouts in 100 1/3 innings. Oviatt ranked fifth in the league in wins, ERA, and opposing batting average (.186), eighth in innings pitched, and ninth in strikeouts.

Carlye Owens, Sr., 1B – Owens, a First Team All-IIAC selection in 2007, started all 41 games, hitting .263 with 31 hits, five doubles, three home runs, and 26 RBI. She ranked third in the IIAC with 10 sacrifice bunts.

Allie Hock, So., C – Hock hit .357 with two doubles, one triple, one home run, and 12 RBI in 31 games last season. Hock committed only two errors in 210 chances, ranking eighth in the IIAC among qualified players.

Quote from head coach Henry Christowski

"With only one senior, we could be considered a young team with quite a bit of experience as several members of our team did gain postseason experience last season. I feel we will again be quite competitive in the very tough Iowa Conference."

Wartburg College Knights
2008 Record: 32-8 overall, 15-1 IIAC (1st)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 1/8
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 1/2

Players to Watch

Angela Hartwig, Sr., P – Hartwig, the 2008 Iowa Conference Pitcher of the Year and a First Team NFCA Division III All-American, finished 20-2 with a 0.86 ERA in 18 starts with 14 complete games. She figured in nine shutouts (six solo), firing 164 strikeouts in 138 2/3 while surrendering only 31 walks. Hartwig led the IIAC in ERA, wins, and saves, ranked second in strikeouts and opposing batting average (.150) and sixth in innings pitched.

Amy Daniels, Sr., 3B – Daniels, a First Team All-IIAC selection at designated player last season, hit .286 in 27 games with 21 hits, six doubles, two home runs, and 12 RBI.

Quote from head coach Kara Kehe

"Our student-athletes have worked hard during the first few weeks of practices and are looking forward to getting the Southern portion of our schedule underway."

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