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2008 IOWA CONFERENCE VOLLEYBALL PREVIEW

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA . . . Coe College, which tied for second place in the Iowa Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (IIAC) volleyball standings in 2007, is the coaches' pick to win the 2008 IIAC title. The Kohawks received four first-place votes, three second-place votes and a third-place vote, totaling 67 points in the IIAC volleyball Coaches' Poll.

Central College, which has won or shared each of the past 12 IIAC volleyball titles, and **Simpson College**, a seven-time IIAC champion which tied the Dutch for their most recent title in 2006, tied for second place with 64 points apiece. Central garnered two first-place votes, four second-place votes, and two third-place votes, while Simpson picked up three first-place votes, two second-place votes, and three third-place votes. The complete 2008 IIAC Volleyball Coaches' Poll follows.

Rank	School (1st place votes)	Points	2007 Record
1	Coe (4)	67	19-11, 6-2 IIAC
T2	Simpson (3)	64	20-14, 4-4 IIAC
T2	Central (2)	64	27-9, 8-0 IIAC
4	Luther	43	15-15, 3-5 IIAC
5	Cornell	41	13-20, 3-5 IIAC
6	Wartburg	35	17-18, 6-2 IIAC
7	Buena Vista	34	9-21, 3-5 IIAC
8	Loras	38	15-18, 1-7 IIAC
9	Dubuque	20	18-17, 2-6 IIAC

New Coaches: **Heather Noll** is the new coach at Buena Vista. Noll comes to BVU following a two-year stint as a graduate assistant coach at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater where the team was the Division III National Runner-up in 2007 after placing third in 2006. She replaces **Lindsey Kruse**.

National Rankings: **Central** opens the 2008 campaign ranked 22nd in the CBS College Sports Network/AVCA Division III volleyball poll. It's the 126th time the Dutch have appeared in the national rankings. Juniata (Pa.) is ranked No. 1, edging out defending NCAA Division III champion Washington-St. Louis (Mo.). No other Iowa Conference schools are rated but **Simpson** is among those receiving votes.

Conference Tournament: The top six teams following the regular season round-robin schedule qualify for the 2008 Iowa Conference Tournament with an automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament on the line. The IIAC Tournament is November 7-8, hosted by the top seed.

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

Buena Vista returns five starters and seven letterwinners from last season's 9-21 team that finished tied for fifth in the Conference with a 3-5 record. The Beavers will be led by junior middle blocker **Kelli Luitjens** and sophomore middle blocker **Katie Vondrak**, both Second Team All-Iowa Conference selections in 2007. Luitjens led the team with 396 kills and 138 blocks. Her 1.42 blocks per game in league play ranked second, while her .295 hitting percentage ranked fifth and 115 kills ranked eighth. Vondrak ranked second on the team with 377 kills and 119 blocks. Her 1.23 blocks per game average in IIAC play ranked fourth, while her 126 kills ranked fifth, and her .276 hitting percentage ranked seventh. Senior setter **Molly Reuter** led the team with 1148 assists and her 11.10 assist per game average in IIAC matches ranked fifth. Senior outside hitter **Kayla Dekker** ranked third on the team in kills with 185.

Buena Vista head coach **Heather Noll** says, "This year is going to be the start to a building process at Buena Vista. BVU has some outstanding returners and talented freshman coming in. We hope to compete respectfully in the conference this year."

Central returns two starters (plus the libero) and 10 letterwinners from last season's 27-9 team that finished with a perfect 8-0 mark in league play, giving the Dutch a share of its twelfth consecutive Iowa Conference title. Senior outside hitter **Miranda Kouba**, a Second Team All-Conference pick last year, will lead the charge for number 13. She was third on the team in kills with 274 while posting a .224 attack percentage. Kouba also ranked second on the team with 440 digs. Senior libero **Maggie Nowicki**, an Honorable Mention All-Iowa Conference selection, ranked fourth in the league in digs with a 5.31 per game average. Her season total of 663 digs was a team high. Nowicki also posted 34 service aces. The Dutch offense will run through senior setter **Megan Callahan** who posted 131 assists, 238 digs, and a team-high 45 service aces in 102 games last year. Junior **Lindsay Jennings** also returns at the middle hitter position. Jennings ranked second on the team with 122 total blocks and fourth in kills with 242. Her .242 attack percentage in league play ranked tenth.

Central head coach **Kent Clayberg** says, "The Central volleyball team is looking forward to an exciting year. We graduated several great players, but we have a talented group ready to step in and compete. With only two returning starters plus the libero, we'll look a bit different, but the identity and the purpose of Central Volleyball remains the same. This group has talent, and will get stronger with experience as the season progresses.

"Iowa Conference play will continue to be extremely challenging. Seven teams return at least four players from last year's starting lineups. The league is full of very good coaches with experienced squads – every night will be a battle. Simpson should probably get the favorite's nod with every starter returning. BV, Cornell, Coe, and Luther have the bulk of their offenses back, Wartburg returns a talented pair of outside hitters, and both Loras and Dubuque should be greatly improved. It should be a fascinating race."

Coe returns two starters and three letterwinners from last season's 19-11 team that finished tied for second in the Conference with a 6-2 record. The Kohawks led the IIAC in kills (15.19/game) and assists (13.97/game) in 2007. Senior outside hitter **Shayla Chalker**, a First Team All-Conference selection last season, led the league with a .313 attack percentage and was fourth in kills with a 4.19 per game average. She also posted a team-high 435 kills, ranked second on the team with 124.0 total blocks and fifth with 284 digs. Sophomore middle blocker **Taylor Coots** was third on the team in total blocks (117.0) and fourth in kills (222) and service aces (29). Sophomore defensive specialist **Leah Koelker** made 91 digs in 45 games last season.

Coe head coach **DeAnn Woodin** says, "This year is going to be as competitive as ever in the Iowa Conference, as several teams are returning experienced players and gaining talented freshman. We also have some great leaders on our squad and will use their abilities to build on the success of our program. It's going to be an exciting season!"

Cornell returns five starters and seven letterwinners from last season's 13-20 team that finished tied for fifth in the Conference with a 3-5 record. The Rams will be led up front by juniors **Kristin Paczosa** and **Laura Dudgeon**. Paczosa, an outside hitter who earned Second Team All-Conference honors last year, led the team in kills (445), was second in service aces (52) and total blocks (66.0), and ranked third in digs (372). Dudgeon, an honorable mention all-league selection as a middle hitter, led the team in attack percentage (.264) and total blocks (92.0) and ranked second in kills (311). She also made 107 digs and served up 25 aces. Sophomore **Hannah Boehmer**, a setter/defensive specialist, set a single-season school record with 82 services aces and ranked second on the team in assists with 531. She also had 209 digs. Sophomore outside hitter **Alissa Benjamin** posted a .210 attack percentage with 225 kills, 70 digs, and 49 blocks in 103 games last season.

Cornell head coach **Jeff Meeker** says, "It should be another interesting and exciting year in the Iowa Conference. We are excited about the 2008 season and our opportunity to be a much improved team. Our returners worked hard in the off-season, we enjoyed productive spring practices and we will be a more athletic team than in previous years."

Dubuque returns two starters and one letterwinners from last season's 18-17 team that finished seventh in the Conference with a 2-6 record. The Spartans will be led a trio of returning players. Senior libero **Stephanie Parsons** ranked third on the team in digs with 342 and fifth on the team in aces 49. Sophomore libero/back row specialist **Tashia Love** posted the Spartans' fifth-highest digs total with 256. Up front, junior middle blocker **Katelyn Hermann** returns after ranking third on the team in kills (317), fourth in blocks (55), and sixth in aces (31). Sophomore outside hitters **Whitley Phillips** and **Lilly Gors** saw limited playing time last season, but will be looked upon to step up for the Spartans in 2008.

Dubuque head coach **Cole Tallman** says, "We hope the Spartans will be tall, talented and tenacious this season. That outcome will need to come from dedicated upperclassmen, and enthusiastic newcomers. With one of the largest teams in school history, there should be depth at almost every position and the productive practice gym needed to pursue excellence."

Loras returns five starters and nine letterwinners from last season's 15-18 team that finished ninth in the Conference with a 1-7 record. Senior setter **Jenny Dziubla**, a two-time First Team All-Iowa Conference selection, returns to distribute the ball after dishing out 1,269 assists, an average of 10.66 per game. Her 11.37 assist per game average in league play ranked second. She also posted 65 blocks, 35 aces and 252 digs. Offensively, the Duhawks will be led by sophomore outside hitter **Julianne Lord** and senior outside hitter **Betsy Neverman**. Lord registered a team-high 373 kills with 28 aces and 355 digs, while Neverman tallied 158 kills, 19 aces and 61 blocks. Junior libero **Michelle Bahl** led the team with 456 digs. Her 4.77 dig per game average in league play ranked sixth.

Loras head coach **Teresa Kehe** says, "The Iowa Conference should once again prove to be very competitive and help to bring out the best in our student athletes. Here at Loras we hope to rise to the challenge and continuing improving our program."

Luther returns three starters and nine letterwinners from last season's 15-15 team that finished tied for fifth in the Conference with a 3-5 record. The Norse will be led offensively by senior middle hitter **Ally Czechowicz**. Czechowicz saw action in 114 games recording 245 kills and a team-best 92 blocks. Junior libero **Grayce Hamlin**, an Honorable Mention All-IIAC honoree, ranked third in the league in digs with a 5.53 per game average. Her season total of 576 digs was a team-best. Junior defensive specialist **Anna Simonson** tallied 355 digs and 27 service aces in 111 games last season. Sophomore setter Molly Morrissey also returns after an outstanding freshman campaign that saw her post team-highs with 709 assists and 59 service aces. She also tallied 158 digs.

Luther head coach **Jane Gibbs** says, "I am very excited for another year of competitive volleyball! Luther will have a very young team and we are looking forward to being challenged at every conference match."

Simpson returns all six starters and 13 letterwinners from last season's 20-14 team that finished fourth in the Conference with a 4-4 record. The Storm will be led by junior setter **Tara Christensen**, a First Team All-Conference selection who recorded 1,318 assists, 281 digs, 143 kills, 45 service aces, and 40 blocks last season. Her 11.13 assist per game average ranked fourth in the IIAC. Upfront, Simpson returns **Amy Schuster**, **Amanda Norelius**, and **Whitney Oviatt**. Schuster, a sophomore outside hitter was named Second Team All-Conference in 2007 and ranked eight in the Conference with a .264 attack percentage. She led the team in kills (351) and services aces (58), posted 39 blocks and made 151 digs. Norelius, an Honorable Mention All-Conference selection in 2007, ranked third in the Conference with a .296 attack percentage. She was third on the team with 305 kills and 71 blocks. Oviatt ranked fourth in the IIAC in service aces (0.48/game) and eighth in blocks (0.97/game). She led the team with 114 total blocks and her 323 kills and 55 service aces ranked second on the team.

Simpson head coach **Lana Smith** says, "We are excited for the 2008 season. The race for the IIAC championship will be extremely competitive throughout the league. We will have to be ready to compete every night we take the floor. We return a core of players that will provide experience for us. I believe we will be a team that will improve and build momentum as the season progresses. Our competitive schedule will test our experience and make us better. This will be another exciting year for the Iowa Conference."

Wartburg returns three starters and three letterwinners from last season's 17-18 team that finished tied for second in the Conference with a 6-2 record, its eleventh top-three Conference finish in the last 12 years. The Knights, which led the IIAC in blocks per game in 2007 (2.77 in 30 games), will be led by senior outside hitter **Kelsey Steffens**. Steffens, an honorable mention All-Iowa Conference selection in 2007, ranked second on the team in digs with 406 while also posting 143 digs and 49 blocks. Senior outside hitter **Lindsay Schneider** posted 256 kills and 23 service aces in 97 games. She also posted triple-digits in digs with 142. Senior setter **Rachel Pirkel** appeared in only 46 games last season but still ranked second on the team with 446 assists at setter.

Wartburg head coach **Jennifer Walker** says, "We are going to be very young this year but I believe we can use that to our advantage. We've got athletes who love to compete and will fight to get the win in every match. We also have great leaders in our upper classmen and I anticipate a strong team chemistry will be developed as the season progresses."