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2008 IOWA CONFERENCE WOMEN'S SOCCER PREVIEW

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA . . . Wartburg College, which finished second in the Conference with a 7-1 record, won the Iowa Conference tournament and advanced to the Sweet 16 of the NCAA Division III Championship tournament, is the coaches' pick to win the 2008 Iowa Conference Women's Soccer title, edging defending regular-season champion **Loras College** by a 69-68 margin.

The Knights received five of eight first-place votes and three second-place votes, totaling 69 points. The Duhawks received the four remaining first-place votes, as well as four second-place votes for a total of 68 points in the IIAC Women's Soccer Coaches' Poll.

Luther College, which picked up one second-place, three third-place votes, and a fourth-place vote for 50 points to rank third. The **University of Dubuque** took fourth in the poll with 45 points. The complete 2008 IIAC Women's Soccer Coaches' Poll follows.

Rank	School (1st place votes)	Points	2007 Record
1	Wartburg (5)	69	18-4-1, 7-1 IIAC
2	Loras (4)	68	14-7, 8-0 IIAC
3	Luther	50	8-12-1, 4-4 IIAC
4	Dubuque	45	13-5-2, 4-3-1 IIAC
T5	Simpson	40	5-9-1, 2-5-1 IIAC
T5	Cornell	40	7-8-1, 5-3 IIAC
7	Central	38	10-5-3, 3-3-2 IIAC
8	Coe	30	4-11-1, 1-7 IIAC
9	Buena Vista	16	2-16, 0-8 IIAC

Conference Tournament: The season begins Friday, August 29, with four teams in action. The Iowa Conference schedule begins Saturday, September 20, with one game – Central at Cornell. The top-six teams following the regular season round-robin schedule qualify for the 2007 Iowa Conference Tournament with an automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament on the line. The quarterfinal matches, played at the #3 and #4 seeds, will be November 4 or 5. The semifinals and finals are November 7-8, hosted by the top seed.

New Coaches: **Colin Kuchy** is the new head coach at Central. Kuchy, formerly an assistant with the Dutch men's program, takes over Rick Burns. **Kim Fair**, former assistant women's soccer coach at Wilkes (Pa.), is the new head coach at Luther. She replaces Doug Mello, who resigned after 18 years in Decorah to accept the head men's coaching position at Hendrix College in Conway, Ark. **T.J. Buchholz**, former head coach at Northwestern (Iowa), is the new coach at Wartburg. He replaces Jim Conlon, who resigned after eight seasons as men's and women's coach to become the head women's coach at Washington University in St. Louis.

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 2-16 team that finished ninth in the Conference with a 0-8 record. Sophomore forward **Emily Heger** will be counted on to be a scoring threat. She was the Beavers' leading scorer last year, tallying 17 points on eight goals and an assist. Sophomore midfielder **Christina Skaar**, who notched four goals as a freshman, will be a leader in the midfield. Senior defender **Jessica Cannova** will shoulder much of the responsibility in the backfield as the anchor the defense. Cannova started all 18 games last season.

Buena Vista head coach **Hunter Balmer** says, "The BVU women's soccer team will be very young again this year, with only three seniors and the bulk of the team first or second year players. However, that young core is very talented and will help us continue to raise our expectations and level of play. We did suffer some tough losses in the off-season but I think we've brought in enough quality players to more than make up for it."

Central returns six starters and 10 letterwinners from last season's 10-5-3 team that finished sixth in the Conference with a 3-3-2 record and was just an overtime shootout away from a spot in the Iowa Conference tournament final. Sophomore midfielder **Kristi Klatt**, a Second Team All-Conference selection, is back after scoring 10 points on one goal and a team-high eight assists and will anchor the midfield for the Dutch. Junior midfielder **Jenna Hindman** is the team's top returning scorer and could fill a void at forward. She had six goals and four assists in 2007. Junior defender **Jessica Steward**, an honorable mention all-IIAC selection, will be the centerpiece of the backfield and will be joined by sophomore defenders **Alyssa Brobst** and **Brianne Knutson**.

Central head coach **Colin Kuchy** says, "Our season will be marked by the return of pivotal players that will serve as not only the backbone and leaders on the field but off as well. We will look to improve on our performance and results from 2007 and set the standard for the seasons to come."

Coe returns seven starters and 10 letterwinners from last season's 4-11-1 team that finished eighth in the Conference with a 1-7 record. Senior midfielder/forward **Kristen Carpenter** is the top returning scorer from 2007. Carpenter ranked second on the team with 16 points on seven goals and two assists. Junior goalkeeper **Erin Ridley** played all 1,470 minutes in goal for the Kohawks, earning Honorable Mention All-Conference honors. Ridley posted 113 saves, a .774 save percentage and a 2.02 goals-against average. Senior defender **Laura Steele** was third on the team with six points on two goals and two assists from the backfield.

Coe head coach **Homer Screws** says, "I am excited about the incoming team and our chance of making a return to the Iowa Conference playoffs."

Cornell returns six starters and nine letterwinners from last season's 7-8-1 team that finished third in the Conference with a 5-3 record. The Rams return over 70 percent of their scoring offense from a 2007 squad that finished in the top one-third of the league in every major offensive team category. Senior midfielder **Sara Bleeker**, senior forward **Brianna Wallace** and sophomore forward **Leanne Carberry** alone account for 21 of the team's 34 goals. Carberry, a Second Team All-Conference selection, led the team in scoring 21 points on ten goals and one assist. Wallace, a three-time All-IIAC honoree who ranks fifth all-time at Cornell with 26 career goals, was second on the team with 19 points on seven goals and five assists. Bleeker, a two-time All-Conference selection and a first-teamer in 2007, was third on the team with 14 points on four goals and six assists. She ranks sixth all-time at Cornell in career goals (22) and eighth in career points (59).

Cornell head coach **Mike Joyce**, the 2007 Iowa Conference Coach of the Year, says, "We return most of our offense from 2007 but have lost some key players in the back. We'll be looking for new and returning players to step up and fill those voids to keep us competitive. The competition in the IIAC is very tight, so every conference match will be important."

Dubuque returns 10 starters and 18 letterwinners from last season's 13-5-2 team that finished fourth in the Conference with a 4-3-1 record. Sophomore forward **Chelsea Kittleson**, a 2007 Second Team All-Iowa Conference selection, looks to be the Spartans' best offensive threat. In 20 games, Kittleson led the team in scoring with 33 points on 11 goals and an IIAC-high 11 assists. Her 33 points in all games also ranked second in the IIAC. Sophomore midfielder **Maddy Mobile**, another Second Team All-IIAC honoree, was fourth on the team in scoring with 20 points on seven goals and six assists. Sophomore goalkeeper **Natalie Baker** posted a 9-4-2 record with a 1.45 goals-against average, 75 saves, and two shutouts last season.

Dubuque head coach **Jason Berna** says, "Last year we achieved many of our team goals with the youngest team in the conference. This year we will look to build upon last years success with a more experienced team that is driven to keep moving up the conference ladder."

Loras returns seven starters and 16 letterwinners from last season's 14-7 team that finished won the Conference title for the fifth time in seven years, but took second in the IIAC Tournament and missed the NCAA field for the first time during that stretch. The Duhawks finished with the league's best offense in 2007. Senior forward **Alex Clesen**, a Second Team All-Conference selection, is the Duhawks' top returning goal-scoring threat. She scored two goals and two assists. Junior midfielder **Sam Messacar**, another Second Team selection, is the team's top-returning scorer from last season when she ranked third on the team with 13 points on five goals and three assists. **Morgan Spencer**, also named to the Second Team, scored a goal and three assists last season and will bear a larger load of the midfield responsibilities in 2008. Senior goalkeeper **Torey Murray**, an honorable mention All-IIAC selection, posted a 1.18 goals-against average with 10 wins and allowed only two goals in seven IIAC games. Senior defender **Jenna Kosek**, a mainstay in the Loras defense in her first three seasons, is capable of playing anywhere in the defense or midfield.

Loras head coach **Dan Rothert** says, "After winning the IIAC regular season in 2007, but failing to advance to the NCAA tournament for the first time in 7 years, we are motivated to get back on the national scene. We know the road will be difficult, but with a good group of returners, a solid first-year class and our pre-season trip to Costa Rica, we are excited to see where the season will take us – with the ultimate goals of winning another IIAC title and making it back to the NCAA tournament."

Luther returns eight starters and 30 letterwinners from last season's 8-12-1 team that finished fifth in the Conference with a 4-4 record. Two-time First Team All-Conference selection **Emily Ironside**, a senior forward, was second in the team in total points with 23, recording nine goals and five assists. Sophomore forward/midfielder **Kelsey Balk** led the Norse in virtually every offensive category last season, tallying team-highs in points (26), goals (10), and assists (6) to earn honorable mention All-Conference honors. Sophomore forward/midfielder **Anna Grinde** finished fifth in scoring last season recording three goals and four assists for 10 points after starting 14 of 20 matches last season. Junior defender **Jill Nerka**, a Second Team All-Conference selection, has started 29 of 35 career matches. The Norse also return junior midfielders **Ashley Meirick** and **Lisa Torgerson**, both Second Team All-Conference selections in 2007.

Luther head coach **Kim Fair** says, "The players and coaching staff of this Luther women's soccer team have an energy and enthusiasm that will spark a fire within. This will be present on and off the field; and we believe this will bring added success to an already accomplished program."

Simpson returns 10 starters and 13 letterwinners from last season's 5-9-1 team that finished seventh in the Conference with a 2-5-1 record. Senior goalkeeper **Whitney Franker**, a 2006 First Team All-Conference selection, is a three-year starter who has started every match of her Simpson career. She collected a 1.79 goals-against average last season and looks to increase her school record total for career shutouts which currently sits at 16 entering the season. Junior defender **Heather Akes** will anchor the back line. A two-time All-IIAC honoree, Akes scored a pair of goals in 15 games last season. Joining Akes will be senior **Johnna Kripal**. Kripal, a three-year starter, scored a goal and an assist last season. Junior forward **Kellie Whitney** led Simpson in points (16), goals (7), and shots (36) in 2007.

Simpson head coach **Cory Chapman** said, "With the new coaches in the league and a few schools separating their men's and women's programs the competitiveness of the IIAC is going to improve a great deal."

Wartburg returns six starters and 13 letterwinners from last season's 18-4-1 team that finished second in the Conference with a 7-1 record, won the Iowa Conference tournament and advanced to the Sweet 16 of the NCAA Division III Championship tournament. Four of the team's top six scorers from 2007 return, led by senior forward **Rachel Oswald**, a three-time All-Conference selection and the 2007 Iowa Conference MVP. Oswald led the Knights in scoring for the third consecutive year with 34 points on 14 goals and six assists. Junior defender **Logan Webb** and sophomore defender **Amber Bennett** were both First Team All-Conference players last year. Bennett scored four goals and seven assists, while Webb started 21 of 22 games and scored the game-winning goal against Carthage in the NCAA Tournament. Junior goalkeeper **Rachel Coleman**, another First Team All-Conference selection, posted an 11-4-1 record with 53 saves, an 0.90 goals-against average and three shutouts to help lead one of the region's best defenses.

Wartburg head coach **T.J. Buchholz** says, "We are excited to return a core group of girls that are coming off a great 2007 season. We hope to get the team to continue to move forward this season"

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