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2009 IOWA CONFERENCE FOOTBALL PREVIEW

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA . . . Defending league champion **Wartburg College**, which has five titles and four runner-up finishes in the past ten seasons, is the coaches' pick to win the 2009 IIAC football title. The Knights received five of nine first-place votes, totaling 69 points and edging perennial IIAC contender **Central College** by five markers.

Central, which looks to rebound from a .500 record in league play in 2008, received three first-place votes, along with two second-place votes and three third-place votes for a total of 64 points. **Simpson College** collected the final first-place vote and is third in the preseason poll with 58 points followed by **Buena Vista University** with 48 points. The complete 2009 IIAC football coaches' poll follows:

Rank	School (1st place votes)	Points	2008 Record
1	Wartburg (5)	69	10-3, 7-1 IIAC
2	Central (3)	64	6-4, 4-4 IIAC
3	Simpson (1)	58	7-3, 5-3 IIAC
4	Buena Vista	48	7-3, 6-2 IIAC
5	Loras	40	6-4, 5-3 IIAC
	Luther	40	5-5, 4-4 IIAC
7	Coe	33	4-6, 4-4 IIAC
8	Dubuque	28	2-8, 1-7 IIAC
9	Cornell	16	0-10, 0-8 IIAC

Preseason All-Americans/Watch Lists: Four Iowa Conference football players were named to preseason All-America Teams. Simpson senior offensive lineman **Bill Carroll** was named to the First Team Offense by Consensus Draft Services (CDS), while Coe senior linebackers **Calvin Thomas** and **Tate Harrison** were named to Second Teams by CDS and D3football.com, respectively. Dubuque junior wide receiver **Michael Zweifel** was named to the D3football.com Second Team Offense. Also, Coe junior kicker **Elliot Rausa** was named to the Preseason Watch List for the Fred Mitchell Award, given annually to the best kicker in NCAA Divisions II and III.

Preseason National Polls: Defending Conference Champion Wartburg and perennial contender Central are included in multiple preseason national polls. Wartburg was ranked sixth in *USA Today Sports Weekly*, ninth by *The Sporting News*, 14th by *Lindy's*, and 17th by D3football.com. Central ranked 13th in the *Lindy's* poll and received votes in the D3football.com poll. Buena Vista also received votes in the D3football.com preseason ranking.

New Coaches: **Stan Zweifel** is the new head coach at Dubuque, taking over for Vince Brautigam. Zweifel spent last season as Assistant Head Coach and Offensive Coordinator at Minnesota State University, Mankato, where he helped lead the Mavericks to a 9-3 record, a Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference-South Division title and a berth in the NCAA Division II Football Championship. Prior to that, he spent 16 seasons at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, where he was the Assistant Head Coach and Offensive Coordinator. He was also the Head Football Coach at Yankton College (1983-84) and Minnesota-Morris (1987-90).

Season Openers: The season begins Sept. 5 with all nine schools in non-conference action. The 2009 Iowa Conference season begins Sept. 19 with four games – Central at Dubuque, Luther at Coe, Simpson at Loras, and Wartburg at Cornell. Buena Vista has the opening weekend of league play off.

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

Buena Vista University Beavers
2008 Record: 7-3 overall, 6-2 IIAC (2nd)
Starters Returning/Lost: 5/6 offense, 6/5 defense, 1/1 special teams
Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 25/19

Buena Vista returns 12 starters and 25 letterwinners from last season's 7-3 team that finished second in the Conference with a 6-2 record, the school's best finish since placing second in 1986.

The Beavers return six to a defensive squad that led the Iowa Conference in scoring defense (14.4 points per game). Sophomore strong safety **Alan Bladt** leads the unit after posting team-highs with 72 tackles and 13 tackles for loss as a freshman in 2008. Three-year starter **Todd Schwartz** joins Bladt in the defensive secondary. Schwartz posted 36 tackles to tie for eighth on the team. Senior **Ben Hansen**, an honorable mention All-IIAC selection in 2008, anchors the BVU linebacking corps. Hansen ranked second on the team with 66 tackles.

The offense returns five starters, including junior running back **Cory Donscheski**. Donscheski, the league's top returning rusher, ranked third in the IIAC with 913 yards on 183 carries and 12 touchdowns and caught 17 passes for 161 yards. He was a Second Team All-Iowa Conference selection. Senior wide receiver **Eric Bertelsen**, a two-time national champion in the long jump for the Beavers track & field squad last year, ranked third on the team with 22 receptions and 422 receiving yards, but averaged 19.2 yards per catch and scored five touchdowns en route to First Team All-IIAC honors. Junior offensive lineman **Ricky Lueders**, a two-year starter, will anchor a front five for an offense that ranked second in the league in pass offense (201.2 ypg) and third in both total offense (343.6) and rushing offense (142.4).

Buena Vista head coach **Jay Anderson** says, "We are excited to get started (with the season). The IIAC race should be exciting to watch this Fall."

Central College Dutch
2008 Record: 6-4 overall, 4-4 IIAC (tie 5th)
Starters Returning/Lost: 4/7 offense, 7/4 defense, 3/3 special teams
Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 38/18

Central returns 14 starters and 38 letterwinners from last season's 6-4 team that finished tied for fifth in the Conference with a 4-4 record. Only four starters return offensively, however, one is leading rusher **David Zachary**. A senior, Zachary ran for a team-high 407 yards on 99 carries. Junior tackle **Lee Schroeder** is one of three returning starters on the offensive line. Although there will be a number of new faces in the starting receiving corps, junior **Kurtis Brondyke** should provide some stability. In addition to his punting duties, he finished third on the team with 16 receptions for 247 yards and two touchdowns.

The defense returns seven starters, including sophomore defensive end **Shane Wong**, an honorable mention all-conference selection last season. Wong ranked third on the team with 64 tackles, including a team-high 13.5 tackles for loss and a league-high 10.0 sacks. He also posted two quarterback hurries and recovered a fumble. Behind Wong are senior linebacker **Zach Van Arkel** and senior defensive back **Kevin Good**. Van Arkel made 26 tackles in five games last season, while Good posted 22 tackles and two pass break-ups in six games. Possibly the biggest defensive asset the Dutch have is Brondyke, a two-time First Team All-Conference selection who averaged 40.6 yards per punt and placed 17 kicks inside the opponent's 20-yard line.

Central head coach **Jeff McMartin** says, "We are looking forward to the 2009 season. The entire conference continues to improve and we are excited about the opportunities in front of us. Our goal is to have fun and get better every week."

Coe College Kohawks

2008 Record: 4-6 overall, 4-4 IIAC (tie 5th)

Starters Returning/Lost: 5/6 offense, 4/7 defense, 1/1 special teams

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 27/25

Coe returns 10 starters and 27 letterwinners from last season's 4-6 team that finished in a tie for fifth in the Conference with a 4-4 record. While the Kohawks return only four starters on defense, all four played significant roles on last year's team. The trio of senior linebackers – **Tate Harrison**, **Calvin Thomas**, and **Ross Yeast** – each started all 10 games last season. Harrison, a First Team All-Conference and a D3football.com Second Team All-West Region selection in 2008, registered a team-high 120 tackles, including four sacks and a team-high 17 tackles for loss. Thomas, an honorable mention All-Conference selection and a D3football.com Third Team All-West Region honoree, tied Harrison for the team lead in tackles, a mark that ranked second in the Iowa Conference. Yeast ranked third on the team with 77 tackles, including 6.5 for loss. Senior defensive back **Kyle Polich** played in all 10 games last season, posting 37 tackles and two interceptions.

Senior running back **Sam Hammes** is an all-purpose threat. A First Team All-Conference selection last season, Hammes led the Kohawks in both rushing and receptions. He picked up 870 yards on 194 carries with five touchdowns, ranking fourth in the Conference in rushing. Hammes also hauled in a team-high 39 receptions for 333 yards and three scores. Junior wide receiver **Nick Ratchford** led Coe in receiving yards in 2008, catching 37 balls for 416 yards and two touchdowns. The Kohawks will also benefit from the return of junior placekicker **Elliot Rausa**, a Second Team All-Conference kicker last season. Rausa hit 10 of 16 field goals and 20 of 22 extra points to finish seventh in the IIAC in scoring and second among kickers.

Coe head coach **Steve Staker** says, "The Kohawks have some big holes to fill in both the offensive and defensive line. Our success will be based on the leadership we get from our returning seniors, and how quickly our young guys will mature as we try to replace five offensive linemen and three defensive linemen. I feel we have three outstanding linebackers, led by all-conference performer Tate Harrison, that will help solidify our defense, and our skilled players on offense with all-conference returner Sam Hammes in the backfield look to be very solid as well. Wartburg has the inside track; however, several teams will line up to challenge them in this tough league."

Cornell College Rams

2008 Record: 0-10 overall, 0-8 IIAC (9th)

Starters Returning/Lost: 5/6 offense, 5/6 defense, 1/1 special teams

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 29/28

Cornell returns 11 starters and 29 letterwinners from last year's 0-10 team that finished ninth in the Conference with a 0-8 record. The Rams enter 2009 riding losing streaks of 18 games overall and 28 games in league play, the latter mark sitting six shy of the league record of 34 consecutive league losses set by Simpson from 1958 to 1962.

Senior tight end **Alex Macey**, an Honorable Mention All-Conference selection in 2008, led the team in receptions (37) and receiving yards (433), averaging 54.1 yards per game and 11.7 yards per catch. He ranked third in the IIAC with 4.3 receptions per game and had four games with at least 75 receiving yards. Junior split end **Kyle Tierney** started all 10 games in 2008, ranking second on the team with 34 receptions for 330 yards and a touchdown. Sophomore wide receiver **Thomas Connor** hauled in 17 passes for 94 yards in 2008. Connor also saw time at quarterback last season, completing 18 of 25 passes for 177 yards and a touchdown.

A trio of seniors will lead Cornell's defense. Free safety **Don Blatt**, an Honorable Mention All-Conference selection, is the Rams' top returning tackler with 83 stops. He also had two interceptions, 2.0 tackles for loss, two fumble recoveries, and a six pass breakups. Defensive tackle **Zach Zasada** started all 10 games last season, posting 27 tackles, 2.5 tackles for loss, 2.0 sacks, and two quarterback hurries. Linebacker **Brian King**, finished third on the team with 64 tackles, including 4.5 for a loss and a sack. Junior strong safety **Joe Barlow** was fourth on the team with 49 tackles, including 4.0 for loss and two interceptions.

Cornell head coach **Matt Dillon** says, "We will be extremely young in 2009. With only five seniors on the roster, experience, or lack thereof, will play a huge role in the success of the Rams. The seniors we have are outstanding, all of them potential All-Conference or, in Alex Macey's case, potential All-American. We had major contributions from last year's freshmen group as 20 out of 26 freshmen lettered. We expect the same type of contributions from an outstanding freshmen class this year. We will need the freshmen and sophomores to grow up in a hurry for us to continue to climb the ladder in this league."

University of Dubuque Spartans

2008 Record: 2-8 overall, 1-7 IIAC (8th)

Starters Returning/Lost: 5/6 offense, 5/6 defense, 5/2 special teams

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 45/19

Dubuque returns 17 starters and 45 letterwinners from last season's 2-8 team that finished eighth in the Conference with a 1-7 record. The Spartans will benefit from a mix of returning players and transfers in 2009. Senior **Matt Fort** will anchor an offensive line that ranked third in the IIAC in pass offense (195.1 ypg) last season. Senior quarterback **Colton Hansen** earned Honorable Mention All-Conference honors last season, ranking second in the league in total offense (245.7 ypg) and third in passing (185.2 ypg), but will have to adjust to a new offensive system under first-year coach Stan Zweifel. Hansen was also Dubuque's leading rusher last season with 605 yards on 168 attempts. He will also have a more-than-capable target in junior transfer **Michael Zweifel**. In two seasons at Wisconsin-River Falls Zweifel caught 176 passes for 2,030 yards, earning All-Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference honors both seasons. The Spartans' running attack should be bolstered by the addition of sophomore transfer **Justin Spaulding** from Wisconsin-Whitewater. In eight games for the Division III runners-up, Spaulding carried the ball 17 times for 52 yards.

Defensively, the Spartans will be led by junior defensive backs **Jujuan Burton** and senior defensive end **Karl Grant**. Burton finished 2008 ranked fourth on the team in tackles with 71, while adding 5.5 tackles for loss, 0.5 sacks, one interception and seven pass break-ups. Grant posted 31 tackles, 6.0 for loss, with 3.5 sacks. The defense should also be bolstered by the additions of transfers **Demetrius Spearman** (So., CB, Jackson State) and **James Larabee** (Jr., DL, Iowa Central CC).

Dubuque head coach **Stan Zweifel** says, "I expect us to be a very physical football team as we make the transition from a spread offensive team to a two-back running power team. Our success will lie in our ability to take care of the football and play a tough physical brand of football."

Loras College Duhawks

2008 Record: 6-4 overall, 5-3 IIAC (tie 3rd)

Starters Returning/Lost: 8/3 offense, 7/4 defense, 2/3 special teams

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 34/13

Loras returns 17 starters and 34 letterwinners from last season's 6-4 team that tied for third in the Conference with a 5-3 record. The Duhawks will need to fill the void at running back left by the graduation of 2008 Iowa Conference MVP **Alex McGrew**, but whoever steps in to the position will have an experienced offensive line to run behind and a tested quarterback giving them the ball. Four starters, including seniors **Mike Schaefer** and **Matt Maginot**, return to anchor an offense that ranked second in both rushing offense and scoring offense a year ago. Schaefer was a 2008 Second Team All-Conference selection, while Maginot was an honorable mention pick. Sophomore quarterback **Vaughn Gesing** played in all 10 games in 2008, completing 108 of 207 attempts for 1,355 yards and 10 touchdowns. Along with an experienced line to work behind, Gesing will also have an experienced tight end in junior **John Blesz**. Blesz finished third on the team with 10 receptions for 84 yards.

Second Team All-IIAC defensive lineman **Kenny Kikilas** and **Kyle McCormick** provide experience up front defensively for a unit that led the league in rushing defense and ranked second in total defense last season. Kikilas, a senior, was fourth on the team with 47 tackles with a team-high 15.0 tackles for loss and six sacks. He also broke up five passes and recovered a fumble. McCormick, also a senior, posted 42 tackles with 13.5 tackles for loss and six sacks. Sophomore linebacker **Zach Myers** should fill a hole in the middle of the Duhawk defense after making 21 tackles and 2.5 tackles for loss. Junior safety **Joe Gruben** is Loras' top returning tackler after ranking third on the 2008 squad with 53 tackles and three interceptions.

Loras head coach **Steve Osterberger** says, "The league is going to be a battle every week, just like it is every year. We're a strong conference that returns a lot of talented athletes on both side of the ball. What I'm most excited about offensively is the fact that we return eight of eleven starters. Vaughn (Gesing) will benefit from a year under his belt, a full ten games. We've also got an awesome core returning to a very good defensive unit. The guys on the line will be strong again. I think Kenny (Kikilas) will provide some leadership there and in the locker room."

Luther College Norse

2008 Record: 5-5 overall, 4-4 IIAC (tie fifth)

Starters Returning/Lost: 6/5 offense, 5/6 defense, 1/1 special teams

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 29/27

Luther returns 12 starters and 29 letterwinners from last season's 5-5 team that finished tied for fifth in the Conference with a 4-4 record. The Norse return six starters on offense from last season, including Second Team All-IIAC selection **John Stoltenberg** at center. He will anchor a rebuilt offensive line that will protect dual-threat quarterback **Chris Reynolds**. Reynolds, who started all 10 games as a freshman last season, completed 152 of 319 pass attempts for 1,608 yards and 10 touchdowns. His five interceptions were the least of any regular IIAC starting quarterback last season. He ended the season ranked third in total offense (208.3 ypg), fourth in passing (160.8 ypg), and seventh in rushing (47.5 ypg). Senior wide receiver **Darren Oxtan** is the Norse's top returning receiving threat, hauling in 32 balls for 260 yards in 2008.

Defensively, five starters are back, including three in the Norse's five-man defensive secondary. Senior defensive back **Trevor Theobald**, a Second Team All-IIAC honoree in 2008, ranked fourth on the team with 54 tackles, 1.5 tackles for loss, and two interceptions. Junior left cornerback **Josh Patterson**, an Honorable Mention All-Conference selection, made 44 tackles, including 1.5 for loss, an interception and eight pass break-ups. Patterson also blocked a pair of kicks against Wartburg and Loras. Up front, senior defensive end **Bobby Kuennen** leads the way. Kuennen, who made 48 stops with nine for loss, was also a Second Team All-Conference pick last season.

Luther head coach **Mike Durnin** says, "The IIAC will again be strong top to bottom and, for Luther to be in the hunt, we need to come together as a team, ready for the opportunities that present themselves on any given Saturday. It will take a total effort from coaches & players alike and we feel confident those individuals are in place. Entering year two, we are as excited as ever to continue on our vision for a 'championship' level of play week in and week out. We believe great strides were made last season and we are confident our players will continue, with a great effort, to move forward with our plan."

Simpson College Storm

2008 Record: 7-3 overall, 5-3 IIAC (tie third)

Starters Returning/Lost: 7/4 offense, 6/5 defense, 2/2 special teams

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 33/26

Simpson returns 15 starters and 33 letterwinners from last season's 7-3 team that tied for third in the Conference with a 5-3 record. Of those 15 returning starters, seven are back on offense, including the entire offensive line for a Storm squad that led the IIAC in total offense (353.0 ypg) and rushing offense (218.5 ypg) and was third in scoring offense (24.7 ppg). Senior tackle **Bill Carroll** was a First Team All-Conference pick last season, while senior guard **Ryan Laffey** was a Second Team selection. That number also includes senior quarterback **Tyson Unkrich**, who started the final two games of last season. Unkrich played in six games overall, completing 25 of 57 passes for 346 yards, four touchdowns, and two interceptions. However, the number does not include senior wide receiver **Legrand Bien-Aime**. Bien-Aime played in all 10 games last season, starting four, catching 12 passes for 188 yards and a touchdown.

The Storm defense returns six, including a pair at each level of the base 4-3 scheme that led the Conference in total defense (269.6 ypg) and ranked second in rushing defense (99.1 ypg). Up front, seniors **Jason Courtney** and **Ben Reutzel** return. Courtney made 30 tackles with nine tackles for loss and 5.5 sacks. Reutzel ranked sixth on the team with 55 tackles, 11.5 tackles for loss, and 3.5 sacks. Senior linebacker **Cody Jensen** was fifth on the team with 58 tackles, six tackles for loss, 2.5 sacks, and three pass break-ups. Sophomore linebacker **Chad Onstot** also returns. Onstot was Simpson's second-leading tackler a year ago, making 81 stops with five tackles for loss, one interception and two pass break-ups. The defensive secondary will be led by senior strong safety **John Wolfe**, who had a team-high four interceptions and made 42 tackles.

Simpson head coach **Jim Glogowski** says, "I am excited about the upcoming season and look for us to improve each week. We have an experienced group of seniors that we will count on for leadership. I look for a very competitive conference race – you better be ready to go each and every Saturday."

Wartburg College Knights

2008 Record: 10-3 overall, 7-1 IIAC (champion)

Starters Returning/Lost: 5/6 offense, 4/7 defense, 1/2 special teams

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 32/23

Wartburg returns 10 starters and 32 letterwinners from last season's 10-3 team that won the school's 11th Iowa Conference title with a 7-1 record and advanced to the quarterfinal round of the 2008 NCAA Division III Football Championship before falling to eventual national runner-up Wisconsin-Whitewater. Senior quarterback **Nick Yordi**, a First Team All-Iowa Conference selection in 2008, set single-season school records for passing yardage (3,037), total offense (3,289), and pass completions (231), leading the Iowa Conference in all three categories. Junior center **Morgan O'Connor** picked up First Team All-Iowa Conference honors in his first year as a starter, leading an offensive front that led the Iowa Conference in pass offense (233.5 ypg) and scoring offense (25.8 ppg) and ranked second in total offense (349.9 ypg). Junior wide receiver **Matt Gustafson** had a strong sophomore campaign, ranking second on the team with 45 catches for 409 yards and two touchdowns.

The Knights' defense will be led by linebackers **Blake Suckow** and **Tyson Sulzberger**. Suckow, a junior, is top returning tackler, ranking sixth on the team last season with 60 tackles, including 1.5 for loss, with an interception and four pass break-ups. Sulzberger, a senior, made 42 stops. In the defensive secondary, sophomore **Josh VanDenHul** picked up 25 tackles with one interception and three pass break-ups in a starting role. VanDenHul also earned First Team All-Conference honors as a return specialist in 2008. He ranked among the nation's leaders in both punt returns (22nd, 11.2 yards/return) and kick returns (52nd, 24.3 yards/return).

Wartburg head coach **Rick Willis** says, "There is as much parity in the Iowa Conference as there has ever been. We feel we have a nice group of returning players, many who will be playing more prominent roles than they have in the past. The level of our success will be determined by how well this group adapts to their new roles and how they step up to meet the challenges of the Iowa Conference."

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