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University of North Dakota • University of South Dakota • Southern Utah (Football) • Texas-Pan American • Utah Valley

North Dakota Selected as Top Choice to Win Inaugural Great West Women's Basketball Championship

Utah Valley's Julie Smith Chosen as Preseason Player of the Year

NAPERVILLE, Ill. -- North Dakota has been chosen to win the inaugural Great West Conference Women's Basketball Championship by a vote of league coaches.

The Sioux received 42 points and two first-place votes as the top choice in the vote by conference coaches. The Sioux, who posted an 18-11 record last season, return three starters and seven letterwinners, including 60 percent of their scoring from a year ago. Coach Gene Roebuck enters his 23rd season at UND and has 662 career victories, including 575 at UND, and will count on Kayla Bagaason, who scored 10.3 points per game last season, Whitney Ledger (9.1 ppg, 5.7 rebounds) and Mallory Youngblut (7.8 ppg).

Chicago State finished tied with Utah Valley for second in the voting with 40 points apiece. South Dakota was voted fourth with 28 points, while Texas-Pan American (17 points), Houston Baptist (16 points) and NJIT (13 points) rounded out the poll. UND and CSU each received two first-place votes while USD garnered one.

Utah Valley's Julie McMurray Smith was chosen Preseason Player of the Year. The 6-0 senior recorded 18.3 points and 6.4 rebounds for the Wolverines last season.

Joining Smith on the preseason first team were North Dakota's Bagaason, NJIT's Jessica Gerald and Chicago State's Alyssa Waldon and Courtney Waldon.

The preseason second team was Chicago State's Caila Desroches, North Dakota's Ledger, South Dakota's Jasmine Mosley and Annie Roche and Youngblut from North Dakota.

Great West Conference Women's Basketball Preseason Coaches' Poll

Team (First-Place Votes)	Points
1. North Dakota (2)	42
2. Chicago State (2)	40
Utah Valley (2)	40
4. South Dakota (1)	28
5. Texas-Pan American	17
6. Houston Baptist	16
7. NJIT	13

Preseason All-Great West Conference

First Team

Kayla Begaason, UND
Jessica Gerald, NJIT
Julie Smith, UVU
Alyssa Waldon, CSU
Courtney Waldon, CSU

Second Team

Caila Desroches, CSU
Whitney Ledger, UND
Jasmine Mosley, USD
Annie Roche, USD
Mallory Youngblut, UND

Honorable Mention: Tressa Beckel, CSU; Jossy Bergan, UND; Aleeya Grigsby, UTPA; Amber Hegge, USD; Rose Esther Jean, UTPA; Raquel Jones, HBU; Asumi Nakayama, UVU; Kahinde Oyelola, NJIT; Taiwo Oyelola, NJIT; Jamie Spriggs, HBU; Elana Wroten, CSU.

Honorable mention selections were CSU's Tressa Beckel, UND's Jossy Bergan, UTPA's Aleeya Grigsby, USD's Amber Hegge, UTPA's Rose Esther Jean, HBU's Raquel Jones, Asumi Nakayama from UVU, Kahinde and Taiwo Oyelola from NJIT, HBU's Jamie Spriggs and Elana Wroten from Chicago State.

Coach Angela Jackson leads Chicago State in her seventh season. The Cougars, who were 16-13 last year, will open their season at Bowling Green in the opening round of the WNIT. First-team selections Alyssa Waldon and her sister, Courtney, return 11.9 points and 10.9 points per game, respectively, from 2008-09.

Including Smith, Utah Valley returns three starters and six letter winners from its 17-10 team of a year ago. Coach Cathy Nixon brings her 264 career wins into her 15th season at the helm and will travel to all five of Utah's in-state Division I programs to play in 2009-10.

South Dakota is led by Ryun Williams in his second season after an 18-11 year in his first campaign with the Coyotes.

USD ended last year with a near miss at North Carolina, falling to the Tar Heels 75-69. The Coyotes hope to build on that behind the play of second-team selections Mosley (9.4 ppg) and Roche (9.2 ppg). Honorable mention selection Hegge (7.9 ppg in 2008-09) returns for her sophomore season after sitting out last year.

Texas-Pan American welcomes new head coach Denny Downing. The Lady Broncs return starters Grigsby (4.9 ppg) and Jean (6.7 ppg) from last year's 14-16 team.

HBU returns three starters and five letterwinners from an 8-21 team and will tip off the 2009-10 season by hosting Duke at Sharp Gym. The Huskies welcome 10 newcomers and coach Todd Buchanan, in his fifth season, will rely on honorable mention selections Jones (8.0 ppg) and Spriggs (6.6 ppg) who will both return for their sophomore season.

Eight letterwinners will return for NJIT and coach Margaret McKeon in her third season with the Highlanders. She will look to first-team selection Gerald (16.7 ppg) and twins, Kahinde (9.8) and Taiwo (9.2) Oyelola to improve on last season's 8-21 mark.