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Defending Champ Lafayette Earns Pre-Season Nod In Women's Lacrosse

American, Colgate And Villanova All Expected To Be In The Hunt For The 2003 Title

CENTER VALLEY, Pa. – Lafayette has won three-straight Patriot League women's lacrosse championships and 10 in the 12-year history of the League. But according to the 2003 pre-season poll of PL coaches and sports information directors, the Leopards will have to overcome strong challenges from American, Colgate and Villanova to take the trophy back to Easton.

The coaches and sports information directors, who were not allowed to vote for their own team, awarded Lafayette 62 points, including six out of 14 first-place votes to finish on top of the pre-season standings.

However, American (59 points, 3 first-place votes), Colgate (54 pts., 3 firsts) and Villanova (53 pts., 2 firsts) all finished within nine points of Lafayette in the pre-season poll and figure to be strong contenders for the title. Rounding out the 2003 pre-season poll are Bucknell (29 pts.) in fifth place, Holy Cross (24 pts.) and Lehigh (13 pts.).

Lafayette (13-6, 5-1 PL in 2002) graduated **Heather McClelland** and **Stephanie Tierney**, who were the Offensive and Defensive Players of the Year, respectively, in the PL the last two seasons. Defender **Emily Hoffman** and keeper **Leela Strong** were also two-time All-League players who graduated from the Leopards lineup.

Coach **Rebecca Joseph** returns two All-League players to the lineup this season, including junior attack **Jennifer Stone** (Newtown, Pa.) and senior defender **Ansley Cox** (Cornwall, N.Y.). Stone finished third in the PL in assists last year and fifth in scoring with 36 goals, 21 assists and 57 points in 19 games. Cox helped the LC defense limit opponents to just 8.95 goals per outing, which ranked second in the League.

American (4), Villanova (3) and Colgate (2) also have strong returning contingents from the 2002 PL all-star squad, setting up possibly the most competitive season in League history. AU topped Villanova in overtime, 10-9, in the PL Tournament semifinals last year before falling to the Leopards in the championship match, 11-6.

The Eagles (10-8, 5-1 PL), who tied Lafayette for the regular-season title, return two All-League midfielders in junior **Nicole McCarthy** (Flourtown, Pa.) and sophomore **Gina Riitano** (Schenechtady, N.Y.) along with senior attack **Nadia Harmsen** (Buzzards Bay, Mass.) and senior defender **Robyn Mincher** (Washington, D.C.).

Harmsen led the AU attack last year with 25 goals and 29 points. McCarthy and Riitano are strong two-way players for the Eagles and assist Mincher and the defense in surrendering a League-leading 8.60 goals per game.

Colgate (6-11, 3-3 PL), which lost to Lafayette by a 9-8 count in the 2002 PL Tournament semifinals, returns a pair of first-team all-stars, including junior midfielder **Jane Manning** (Minnetonka, Minn.) and sophomore **Rebecca Sandler** (Baltimore, Md.).

Manning picked up her second All-League award last year after topping the Raiders in goals (32) and finishing second in points (37). Sandler, the 2002 PL Rookie of the Year, led CU in points (43), assists (13) and finished second in goals (30).

Back in the Villanova lineup for the 2003 campaign are senior midfielder **Meghan Carolan** (Hicksville, N.Y.), and junior defender **Lauren Ferrara** (Tabernackle, N.J.). Carolan earned her second-straight first-team all-star nod after leading the PL in goals (49) and points (64). The Wildcats (9-8, 4-2 PL) are led by 2002 PL Coach of the Year **Shannon O'Neill**, who has a 15-19 two-year record on the Main Line.

(more)

American * Army * Bucknell * Colgate * Holy Cross * Lafayette * Lehigh * Navy

Bucknell seniors **Suzanne Raffaele** (Springfield, Pa.) and **Nicole Kallis** (Stevensville, Md.) also return from the 2002 All-League squad. Raffaele ranked third in the PL in goals (37) and fourth in points (47). Kallis had the League's best goals per game average (8.54) and save percentage (.604) for the Bison (6-9, 1-5 PL).

Returning to the lineup this season for Holy Cross (6-12, 2-4 PL) are seniors **Erin Rowse** (Baltimore, Md.) and **Susan Roth** (Wilbraham, Mass.). Rowse earned All-League honors for the third-straight year while Roth forced a League-leading 59 opponent turnovers.

Lehigh, which finished with a 4-11 overall record last year (1-5 PL), take the field this season under coach **Judy Baxter**, who returns for her second tour of duty with the Mountain Hawks. Baxter coached the LU field hockey and lacrosse teams from 1977 to 1985, compiling a 75-33-1 record (69.3%) during the spring season. Her teams won one East Coast Conference title in 1985 and twice advanced to the NCAA Tournament quarterfinals (1984 and '85).

The 2003 season opened Saturday (2/22) when Holy Cross suffered a 10-5 loss to Massachusetts. Tuesday, Lehigh opened with an 8-4 triumph over visiting Mount Saint Mary's. Colgate opens its season today at home against LeMoyne and Lehigh returns to action Thursday at home against Manhattan.

Saturday, all seven League teams are scheduled to compete, including season-opening games for American (at Old Dominion), Bucknell (vs. Wagner), Lafayette (at James Madison) and Villanova (at Temple).

The Patriot League, an NCAA Division I athletics conference founded on the principle of admitting athletes who are academically representative of their class, is in its second decade of academic and athletic excellence. Participation in intercollegiate athletics at Patriot League institutions is viewed as an important component of the undergraduate experience. A successful Division I-AA football conference since 1986 and an all-sport conference since 1990, membership includes American, Army, Bucknell, Colgate, Holy Cross, Lafayette, Lehigh and Navy, while seven additional institutions hold associate membership. Patriot League member institutions are among the oldest and most prestigious in the nation, graduating alumni who are well prepared for life with the ability to make meaningful contributions to their community and society in general. In the most recent NCAA Graduation Rate Report of student-athletes, the Patriot League ranked FIRST among NCAA Division I conferences.

More information may be obtained by contacting Tom Byrnes (tbyrnes@patriotleague.com) at the Patriot League Office at (610) 289-1957 or the League website at www.patriotleague.com.

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2003 Patriot League Women's Lacrosse Pre-Season Poll

	<u>Team (1st Place)</u>	<u>2002 Record</u>	<u>Points</u>
1.	Lafayette (6)	13-6, 5-1 PL	62
2.	American (3)	10-8, 5-1 PL	59
3.	Colgate (3)	6-11, 3-3 PL	54
4.	Villanova (2)	9-8, 4-2 PL	33
5.	Bucknell	6-9, 1-5 PL	29
6.	Holy Cross	6-12, 2-4 PL	24
7.	Lehigh	4-11, 1-5 PL	13