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2004 IOWA CONFERENCE BASEBALL PREVIEW

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA . . . Seven-time defending Conference Champion Wartburg College is the favorite among Iowa Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (IAC) baseball coaches to win the 2004 IAC title. Seven of the eight Conference coaches that participated in the Coaches Poll picked Wartburg to finish first. Simpson, which received the other first place vote, is second in the Poll, nine points behind Wartburg (71-62). Loras (48 points), Cornell (44 points) and Buena Vista (41 points) round out the coaches' top-five. The complete 2004 IAC Baseball Coaches Poll follows.

Rank	School	Points
1st	Wartburg (7)	71
2nd	Simpson (1)	62
3rd	Loras	48
4th	Cornell	44
5th	Buena Vista	41
6th	Coe	34
7th	Dubuque	33
8th	Luther	17
9th	Central	10

Note: First-place votes in parenthesis;
Points awarded 9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1

Although Wartburg received seven first place votes, and is ranked 20th in the *Collegiate Baseball Newspaper's* preseason poll, the Iowa Conference coaches use terms like "balanced," "consistent," and "highly competitive" to describe the Conference.

"This League is so balanced that there is no such thing as an upset in our Conference," Buena Vista head coach **Steve Eddie** said. "To predict who will finish in the top-three spots is almost a waste of time. I really like this League because everyone is competitive, I don't see things being any different this year."

Cornell head coach **Frank Fishler** said, "Every game will be competitive. You need to be mentally ready to play every team in the Conference."

"Everybody has good pitching and throws their best pitchers against you," Coe head coach **Steve Cook** said. "[You] have to be consistent in winning close ball games to be successful."

"The IAC is going to be a battle again this year. A lot of teams are going to improve from last year," Loras head coach **Carl Tebon** said. "In fact, you may see a Conference Champion that may not win the tourney. It's going to come down to the team that gets hot at the right time of the year."

Luther head coach **Brian Gillogly** said, “The Iowa Conference should once again be competitive from top to bottom with many teams capable of doing well. The Champion will be determined by the team that realizes this and comes to play everyday.”

“Until someone gives Wartburg a serious challenge, they must be the clear favorite with all of the other eight teams having a legitimate shot at making the IIAC Tournament,” Simpson head coach **John Sirianni** said.

“Just like last year, it will be a shootout with most teams being highly competitive every day out,” Wartburg head coach **Joel Holst** said. “You cannot afford to have a bad performance against anyone in our League. Being consistent will be the key to this year’s Conference race.”

Under a new Conference policy adopted last spring, the Iowa Conference baseball Champion and all-sports trophy points will be determined by regular season play. The Conference Tournament will determine which school receives the automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament. Previously, Conference Tournament results were combined with regular season results with the school having the top winning percentage winning the Conference title and receiving the AQ.

The 2004 Iowa Conference baseball Tournament will be held at Veterans Memorial Stadium in Cedar Rapids on May 13-15. The top-six schools qualify.

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Buena Vista University Beavers
(15-24 Overall; 9-10, 6th place in IIAC)

Starting Position Players Returning: 7

Pitchers Returning: 3

Letterwinners Returning: 17

What the Coach is saying: “With the number of players back on this year’s team, we should expect to cut down on some mistakes that we made last year,” fourth-year coach **Steve Eddie** said. “Improving our play in close games will be the key to our success, 15 of our 19 Conference games were decided by three runs or less last year. We will be focusing our attention on executing the fundamentals a little better this year.”

The 2004 Beavers on the mound: Senior **Jeremiah Knutzen**, juniors **Adam Rath** and **Mike Soenen**, and sophomore **Ryan Brock** return on the mound for Buena Vista. Brock posted a 4-3 record with 35 strikeouts in 13 games including seven starts. His 50.2 innings pitched ranked 13th in the Conference. Soenen pitched in 11 games, all in relief and posted a 3-3 record with two saves and 25 strikeouts in 21.2 innings.

Knutzen finished with a 2-0 record in nine games last season including six starts. Rath went 2-4 in 10 games with three starts.

The 2004 Beavers offensively and defensively: In the field, Buena Vista is led by All-Conference first baseman **Ben Lickteig**, who hit .321 with four home runs and 31 RBI last season. He tied for fourth in the Conference with 13 doubles and tied for 12th with 35 runs scored while also leading the team in doubles, triples (3) and stolen bases (8).

Sophomore third baseman **Matt Reichle** also returns after a season in which he hit .414, second in the Conference. He also ranked among the Conference leaders in RBI (t-2nd with 45), hits (5th with 58), on-base percentage (7th at .465) and slugging percentage (15th at .571).

Senior **Dan Nuehring**, junior **Brian Ricken** and sophomore **Derek Fink** also return to the infield. Ricken finished second on the team last season with a .345 batting average in 37 games. Nuehring hit .250 in 39 games and Fink hit .273 in 29 games last season.

Senior catcher **Cory Kennedy**, a 2002 All-Conference performer, returns behind the plate after a .281 season in 2003.

Soenen and sophomore **Joe Poole** will be joined by newcomer **Mike Koenecke** in the outfield. Soenen hit .315 with five home runs and 19 RBI last season. Poole hit .209 last season.

Central College Dutch
(12-24 Overall; 7-11, t-8th place in IIAC)

Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 6/4

Pitchers Returning/Lost: 3/5

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 10/10

What the Coach is saying: “Right now we’re still getting to know each other. Our guys are working hard, and hopefully that will pay dividends down the road,” first-year coach **Adam Stevens** said. “We only have one pitcher returning with a lot of varsity experience so we will need some younger guys to have big years in order for us to surprise anybody.”

The 2004 Dutch on the mound: Junior left-hander **Kent Patterson** started nine games in 11 appearances, posting a 3-4 record with a 5.79 earned run average in a team-high 42 innings. He was second on the team with 23 strikeouts.

Junior **Austin DeHoogh** and sophomore **Gavin Mitchell** saw extensive action out of the bullpen last season. DeHoogh appeared in a team-high 15 games, finishing with a 1-1 record with two saves. He struck out 14 batters in 17.1 innings and had a team-best 3.12 ERA. Mitchell appeared in 12 games, pitching 15 innings and striking out 12 batters. He lost his only decision.

The 2004 Dutch offensively and defensively: The Dutch return two starters in the infield, two in the outfield and a pair of experienced catchers. Junior shortstop **Steve Gebhart** led the team with a .369 batting average and ranked 13th in the Iowa Conference with a .573 slugging percentage. He hit four home runs and nine doubles while driving in 26 runs. Also returning to the infield is senior second baseman **Nate Landas**, who hit .222 with two home runs and 12 RBI in 30 games. Defensively, he committed one error in 35 chances (.971 fielding pct.).

Those competing for the corner infield positions include senior **Casey Olney**, junior **Matt Murphy** and sophomore **Matt Kuempel** at third base, and juniors **Alex Foell** and **Clay Mellgren** and sophomore **Tom Sheehan** at first base.

Senior **Pat Johnson** and sophomore **Shea Stamp** return to the outfield. Stamp earned Second Team All-Conference honors as a freshman after hitting .300 in 24 games. He tied for sixth in the Conference with six home runs. Johnson started all 36 contests, batting .277 with one home run and 17 RBI. He finished with a .984 fielding percentage, committing just one error in 63 chances.

Juniors **Jeremy Robinson** and **Josh Sandin**, and sophomore **Brett Delaney**, **Jim Doudna** and **Ross McFerrin** are competing for the final outfield spot.

Junior **Kody Wohlers** and sophomore **Adam Duerfeldt** shared time behind the plate and at the designated hitter position last season. Wohlers hit .362 with three home runs and 15 RBI while Duerfeldt hit .269 with one home run and 14 RBI. Duerfeldt could also see time at first base.

Coe College Kohawks
(17-21 Overall; 7-11, t-8th place in IAC)

Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 4/5

Pitchers Returning/Lost: 3/3

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 10/9

What the Coach is saying: “I think we’re going to be very strong defensively, including the pitching staff. We feel very comfortable with the experience our pitchers have and how they’ve performed at the college level,” eighth-year coach **Steve Cook** said. “We’re young and will look at the games in March to identify our team strengths. Our goal is the Conference Tournament.”

The 2004 Kohawks on the mound: Three of Coe’s top-six pitchers from a year ago return including senior left-hander **Steve James** and junior right-handers **Mitch Bockenstedt** and **Tom Hauck**. All three started six games and finished with a .500 or better record. Bockenstedt ranked among the Conference leaders in appearances (10th with 13 games), earned run average (12th with a 4.50 ERA) and strikeouts (7th with 47 strikeouts). He finished with a 4-4 record.

Hauck posted a 3-1 record in 11 games and finished second on the staff with 37 strikeouts in 41.2 innings. James went 3-3 in nine games with a 4.54 ERA and 23 strikeouts.

Junior **Brandon Hunt** made seven relief appearances winning once in three decisions and recording two of the Kohawks four team saves. Sophomore **Chris Larson** also gained experience last season, pitching nine innings in four games and will join junior transfer **Jeremiah Tacker** in adding depth to the pitching staff.

The 2004 Kohawks offensively and defensively: Coe has gaps to fill up the middle as last season’s starting catcher and middle infielders have graduated and the starting center fielder transferred. Sophomore first baseman **Chad Kramer** hit .316 and drove in nine runs in 26 games last season. Defensively, he had a .982 fielding percentage, committing just three errors in 165 chances. Sophomore **Nathan Dlouhy** returns at third base. Last season he hit .250 with one home run and 10 RBI. Junior **Grant Lodden** appeared in 17 games last season and will compete with newcomers **Tim Higgins** and **Ryan Smuck** for the open infield positions.

Senior **Jon Schroeder** and junior **Eric Hemesath** return in the outfield. Schroeder will move from right to center this season after hitting .265 with two home runs and a team-high 32 RBI last season. He enters the season 21 RBI shy of the Coe career record (99). Hemesath hit .281 with 19 RBI. The duo combined for nearly a third of Coe’s 54 stolen bases with Schroeder leading the team with 10 and Hemesath finishing with seven.

Sophomore **Travis Wiltgen** appeared in three contests last season and will compete with sophomore transfer **Will Renner** and freshman **Ashton Northern** for the final outfield position. The trio should also see time as the designated hitter.

Sophomore catcher **Josh Schauf** appeared in 20 games, with nine starts, behind the plate. He threw out two of five would-be base stealers and had a .952 fielding percentage. Sophomore transfer **Andrew Roder** will compete with Schauf for the catching duties.

Cornell College Rams
(27-15 Overall; 14-7, 2nd place in IIAC)

Starters Returning/Lost: 7/4

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 17/9

What the Coach is saying: “We have the potential to be a very strong and complete team,” third-year coach **Frank Fishler** said. “The offense and defense will again be solid and the pitching staff has the makings to be very talented and deep. As this team puts everything together, it will be a very solid team in the Iowa Conference.”

The 2004 Rams on the mound: Cornell’s deep pitching staff is led by Third Team All-Region left-hander **Ryan Rosenberg**, who posted an 8-2 record with 64 strikeouts and a 3.43 ERA in 12 games as a freshman. He held opponents to an IIAC-low .214 batting average, ranked second in the IIAC in wins, fourth in strikeouts and fifth in ERA. Other returnees to the Ram staff include senior left-hander **Nate Eichmeyer** and junior right-handers **Andrew Buck** and **Ryan Williams**.

Williams led the Conference with six saves to go along with a 3-3 record with 22 strikeouts in 27.2 innings. Buck posted a 6-1 record and a 4.98 ERA in 12 games, including six starts. His tied for sixth in the Conference in wins and tied for 14th in ERA. In seven games, Eichmeyer went 1-2 with two saves and six strikeouts in 7.1 innings.

Among the newcomers looking to deepen the pitching staff are freshmen **Kyle Crawford**, **Ryan Sutzenfield** and **Kevin Van Dyke**.

The 2004 Rams offensively and defensively: Cornell’s offense lost three First Team All-Conference performers but five of the six returning starters hit over .299. The Rams’ offense led the IIAC with a .514 slugging percentage and 38 home runs. It finished second in batting average (.342), on-base percentage (.403), runs scored (.298) and hits (427).

Cornell’s double-play combination of senior second baseman **Justin Mashburn** and junior shortstop **Danny Love** return. Love finished 10th in the Conference with a .387 batting average and sixth with 55 hits. Mashburn hit .211 in 41 games. Crawford, freshman **Kyle Noesen** and sophomore **Cameron Wendt** will compete for playing time around the infield.

Senior **Drew Simonis** and juniors **Pat Block** and **Adam Hadenfeldt** return from right to left in the outfield. Block led the trio with a .356 average and 27 RBI but Hadenfeldt (.348 average, 2 HR, 14 RBI) and Simonis (.327 average, 1 HR, 15 RBI) weren’t far behind. Defensively, Simonis led the group with a .983 fielding percentage, committing just one error in 58 chances. Block committed two errors in 65 chances (.969 fielding pct.). Wendt, Van Dyke and freshman **Josh Beebe** will compete for playing time in the outfield.

Eichmeyer hit .299 with seven home runs and 40 RBI as the Rams’ designated hitter. He ranked fifth in the Conference in home runs and sixth in RBI. Junior **Todd Reichart** and Sutzenfield will compete for catching duties.

University of Dubuque Spartans
(16-23 Overall; 10-10, 5th place in IIAC)

Starters Returning/Lost: 9/5

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 15/7

What the Coach is saying: “We surprised a number of teams in the IIAC last year and look to do the same this season,” first-year coach **Shane Schellsmidt** said. “Graduation took a number of key players from last year’s fifth-place team but we return four position players and three members of the starting rotation. A number of new players have shown promise and the ability to step-in and earn a starting spot.”

The 2004 Spartans on the mound: Senior **Joshua Knoll**, junior **Adam Busch** and sophomore **Tim Kinney** are Dubuque’s most experienced pitchers. The trio all finished with 3-5 records in 2003. Busch and Knoll both appeared in 12 games with seven and 10 starts, respectively. Kinney appeared in 11 games with 10 starts. Knoll’s 59.2 innings pitched were seventh most in the IIAC and Kinney’s 50.1 innings pitched were 14th in IIAC.

Juniors **Mike Blavat** (five games) and **Justin Shepard** (2 games) both saw limited action on the mound last season, and will be joined by newcomers **Joe Hapanionek**, **Jeremy Rannals** and **Jamey Rannals** to add depth to the pitching staff.

The 2004 Spartans offensively and defensively: Dubuque hit .307 as a team last season, fourth in the Conference and return four of its top-five hitters, all of whom hit over .320. Junior catcher **Justin Shepard** finished seventh in the Conference with a .393 batting average and earned Second Team All-Conference honors. He led the Conference with a .497 on-base percentage and ranked 11th with a .590 slugging percentage. He hit three home runs, 12 doubles and drove in 31 runs.

The left side of the Spartan infield returns. Sophomore third baseman **Cole Lyons** hit .359 in 28 games while senior shortstop **Keith Bernard** hit .323 with two home runs in 39 contests.

Senior First Team All-Conference outfielder **Tim Griffith**, who hit .392 with a team-high five home runs, returns.

Travis Lyons (outfield), **Jason Crane** (short stop), Hapanionek (first base), Jeremy Rannals (outfield) and Jamey Rannals (catcher) are all expected to see playing time.

Loras College Duhawks
(25-17 Overall; 11-10, 4th place in IIAC)

Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 4/5

Pitchers Returning/Lost: 3/3

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 14/8

What the Coach is saying: “We should be a lot better hitting team this year than in the last couple of years. We have good young talent that should only get better,” ninth-year coach **Carl Tebon** said. “Our pitching is still very solid this year, even though we lost a lot. We will have five great starters.”

The 2004 Duhawks on the mound: Loras’ pitching staff returns three senior pitchers but must overcome the loss of Conference MVP **Cory Schultz**. **Jon Ludovissy** posted a 6-1 record in 12 games last season and ranked among Conference leaders in opponents’ batting average (9th, .269) and innings pitched (9th, 58.1). **David Fischer**, who despite a 2-5 record, ranked 13th in the Conference with a 4.96 ERA and 13th in opponents’ batting average (.293).

Tim Cundiff posted a 4-2 record with a 3.67 ERA in 12 games last season.

The 2004 Duhawks offensively and defensively: Two .400 hitters and two .300 hitters return to the Duhawks’ line-up this season. Senior right fielder **Tom Andrews**, sophomore short stop **Dustin Roth** and junior left fielder **Chet Medinger** all ranked among the top-15 in batting in the Conference. Andrews, a First Team All-Conference selection, hit a Conference-best .419, ranked second with a .762 slugging percentage and tied for second with eight home runs.

Roth, a Second Team All-Conference selection, hit .408 (4th in IIAC). He ranked among the Conference leaders with 53 hits (t-8th) and a .451 on-base percentage (13th). Medinger ranked 13th in batting average (.383), fourth in hits (59), first in triples (7) and ninth in runs scored (38).

Senior first baseman **Eric Gold** hit .309 and ranked among Conference leaders with 33 RBI (13th) and 12 doubles (7th).

Luther College Norse
(13-24 Overall; 5-12, 10th place in IIAC)

Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 7/1

Pitchers Returning/Lost: 5/4

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 15/12

What the Coach is saying: “We will be a team that can be difficult to play against. Our key will be how consistent a good core group of returnees and first-year players perform throughout the season,” third-year coach **Brian Gillogly** said. “At the end of the year we will be as good as our pitching and defense proves to be.”

The 2004 Norse on the mound: Luther has five experienced pitchers, four juniors and a sophomore, led by All-Conference performer **Brad Paulsrud**. He led the Conference with a 2.92 earned run average and held opponents to a .265 batting average (5th in IIAC). Righties **Justin Patnode** and **John Jaeger** along with southpaws **Ben Furbish** and **Jon Fry** join Paulsrud on the mound.

Patnode posted a 3-2 record with a 3.98 ERA (9th in IIAC) and 27 strikeouts in seven games, six starts. Jaeger ranked ninth in the Conference with 43 strikeouts and he walked just nine batters in 47 innings over 10 games, eight starts.

Fry was used predominately out of the bullpen, just three starts in 10 appearances. He posted a 2-0 record and struck out 18 batters in 27.2 innings. Furbish was used solely out of the bullpen as a freshman, posting a 1-1 record in 9.2 innings over six games.

Junior **Bill Planton** and freshman **Kyle Pearson** should also see time on mound this season.

The 2004 Norse offensively and defensively: Like the pitching staff, Luther’s defense is stocked with underclassmen. Centerfielder **Brock Reed** is the lone senior among the eight returnees. He hit .211 and drove in 11 RBI in 37 games. Defensively, he had a .945 fielding percentage (four errors in 73 chances).

A pair of sophomores join Reed in the outfield – **Steve Lunn** in right and **Matt Cessna** in left. Cessna finished second on the team and 15th in the Conference with a .379 batting average. He walked 18 times and had a .471 on-base percentage (5th in IIAC). Lunn hit .239 with 16 RBI in 37 games.

Paulsrud and Jaeger will play the corner infield positions when not on the mound. From his first base position, Paulsrud hit .291 and drove in 21 RBI. Jaeger hit a team-high .389 (9th in IIAC) and drove in a team-high 25 runs. Junior second baseman **David Zelinkas** also returns from last season in which he hit .287 and played defense at a .963 clip.

Freshmen **Tim Carroll**, **Ryan Klein**, **Troy Peterson** and **Tom Swenson** will compete for playing time in the outfield while Carroll, Peterson, Pearson, Swenson and **Erik Matth** will compete for playing time around the infield.

Sophomore **Mike Schmalfeldt** returns as the number one catcher after playing flawless defense in 110 chances behind the plate. He hit .277 and drove in 18 runs in 27 games. Freshman **Kyle Schroeder** will back him up.

Simpson College Storm **(24-19 Overall; 12-9, 3rd place in IIAC)**

Starters Returning/Lost: 6/3

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 20/4

What the Coach is saying: “I am very pleased with our depth and the quality of our pitching staff,” Coach **John Sirianni**, in his 20th season, said. “However, we will need to gain quality experience quickly in the middle to give us a chance to be competitive.”

The 2004 Storm on the mound: Simpson returns four of its top pitchers from last season’s staff that led the Conference with a 4.68 ERA and a .280 opponents’ batting average. Seniors **Mike Donnenwerth** and **JD Hews**, and junior **Shawn Parker** all ranked among the top-15 in the Conference in ERA. Parker ranked seventh in the IIAC with a 3.83 ERA to go along with a 6-4 record in 10 games. His six wins tied for third in the Conference and his 54 innings ranked 11th.

Donnenwerth, a First Team All-Conference utility player and a Second Team All-Region Selection, started 10 games finishing with a 5-2 record and a 4.10 ERA (10th in IIAC). He struck out 35 batters in 52.2 innings and held opponents to a .267 batting average (8th in IIAC). Hews ranked 15th in the IIAC with a 4.98 ERA and tied for 11th with 41 strikeouts in 12 games (five starts).

Junior **Wade Samo** returns as the team’s top reliever. He went 2-1 with 3 saves and a 3.76 ERA in 26.1 innings. Others returning to the Storm staff include seniors **Ben Ramsay** (1-2 in 13 games), **Josh August** (1-2 in 10 games) and **David Isaacson** (3-4 in 8 games), and sophomore **Terry Beavers** (0-1, 2 saves in 9 games).

The 2004 Storm offensively and defensively: Two All-Conference performers and four .300 hitters return. Junior catcher **Jon Clanton** returns behind the plate, a year after tying for 14th in the Conference in batting average (.379), ranking fourth in slugging percentage (.647), tying for sixth in home runs (6), and ranking 14th in on-base percentage (.450) to earn Second Team All-Conference honors.

Donnenwerth, when not pitching, hit .372 from his designated hitter position. He tied for sixth in the Conference with six home runs and ranked eighth in the Conference with a .612 slugging percentage.

Around the infield, senior first baseman **Brett Murphy** and junior third baseman **Joey Young** return. Murphy hit .333 with two home runs and 17 RBI in 36 games. Defensively, he made just one error in 232 chances (.996 fielding pct.). Young hit .337 with six home runs and 32 RBI. He was tied for sixth in the IIAC in home runs, tied for 15th in RBI, and ranked third in slugging percentage (.674) and on-base percentage (.484). Senior **Grant Fjetland** was second on the team with 10 stolen bases and hit .281 as a reserve infielder last season.

Junior **Dan Rieck** and sophomore **Dusty Kain** return to the corner outfield positions. Rieck hit .317 with two home runs and 25 RBI last season. Kain hit .253 with 10 RBI. Senior **David Isaacson** appeared in 24 games as a reserve outfielder last season. Junior transfer **Troy Hatten** will look to crack the Storm line-up this year.

Upper Iowa University Peacocks
(14-22-1 Overall; 7-10, 7th place in IIAC)

Starters Returning/Lost: 2/7

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 8/17

What the Coach is saying: “We are going to be young. There isn’t much experience back from last year,” fifth-year coach **Mark Danker** said. “The strength of the team will be the infield defense. The pitching staff will be solid, but not deep. We’ll have to manufacture some runs and play good defense.”

The 2004 Peacocks on the mound: Senior **Justin Eichelberger** is the most experienced pitcher on the Upper Iowa staff. Last season, in eight games, he posted a 4-3 record with a 3.68 ERA and 39 strikeouts in 36.2 innings. Junior **Brandon Bowling** saw action in five games, posting a 1-1 record and striking out 12 batters in 17.2 innings.

Among the newcomers that will round-out the Peacocks staff are juniors **Joe Huedepohl**, **Phil Makowski** and **Ryan Pennebaker**, sophomores **Mike Gordon** and **Joey Witte**, and freshmen **Steve Anderson**, **Tyler Crandall**, **Chris Gaidzik**, **Ryan Hunter**, **Steve Posey** and **Montez Rankins**.

The 2004 Peacocks offensively and defensively: Although Upper Iowa returns just two starters, several players gained experience last season in limited playing time. Junior **Brad Baker** hit .330 with two home runs and 17 RBI in 29 games as the designated hitter. Sophomore **Jacob Naumann** hit .300 with 12 RBI in 27 games at shortstop.

Among those that saw limited action last season are senior outfielder **Adam Sires** (.160 avg. in 18 games), junior outfielder/second baseman **Tom Ammon** (.270 avg. 7 RBI in 16 games), senior first baseman **Mike Cordero** (.231 avg. in 17 games), senior third baseman **Bryan Grewe** (.283 avg., 7 RBI in 17 games), junior catcher **Steve Higgins** (.750 avg., in 2 games), junior outfielder **Jade Knippel** (.214 avg. in 6 games), infielder **Dave Manion** (6 games), and sophomore third baseman/outfielder **Curt Schulte** (.467 avg. in 8 games).

Wartburg College Knights
(33-12-1 Overall; 14-6, 1st place in IIAC)

Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 6/6

Pitchers Returning/Lost: 4/2

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 14/6

What the Coach is saying: “I feel we will put a strong team on the field in 2004. We have six of our top offensive performers back that hit .360 as a team. We have 12 seniors on this year’s team, so we have guys that know what it takes,” ninth-year coach **Joel Holst** said. “We have a mix of veteran and young pitchers that have as much natural talent as any group of pitchers we have had at Wartburg. That said, our top-three starters will be sophomores, this will no doubt lead to some growing pains early in the season. We are very experienced in the relief core. I feel we should play great defense throughout the season.”

The 2004 Knights on the mound: Wartburg’s pitching staff suffered the loss of two All-Region and All-Conference pitchers but return five experienced members of the staff led by sophomore **Ryan Moorman**, who was a First Team All-Conference selection last season. Moorman finished with a 6-3 record and ranked among the Conference leaders in wins (t-4th), innings (t-2nd, 73.2 IP), opponents’ batting average (2nd, .252), strikeouts (3rd, 65) and earned run average (6th, 3.67).

Other returning members of the staff include seniors **Steve Domino** and **Ash Larsen**, and sophomore **Grant Finley**. Domino finished second in the Conference with five saves in 16 relief appearances. In 17 innings he struck out 14. Larsen went 2-2 with one save and 11 strikeouts in 16 games. Finley posted a 2-0 record with one save and 10 strikeouts in eight games last season.

Senior **Caleb Klein**, who did not pitch in 2003 due to an arm injury, is expected to return to action on the mound this season. He went 4-2 with one save in 2002. Junior transfer **Matt Scherbring** is the Knights’ top newcomer on the mound.

The 2004 Knights offensively and defensively: Two All-Conference performers and five .300 hitters return to the Wartburg line-up that led the Iowa Conference in batting average (.356), runs (417), hits (525) and on-base percentage (.440) last season.. Klein earned All-Conference honors as a designated hitter last season, batting .385 with five home runs and 45 RBI. He ranked 11th in the Conference batting average, seventh in slugging percentage (.615), and fourth in RBI. He will split time on the mound, in the outfield and at DH this season.

Junior shortstop **Joel Reynolds** was a Second Team All-Conference and All-Central Region selection at third base last season. He hit .371 with six home runs (t-6th in IIAC) and 45 RBI (2nd in IIAC). Also returning to the infield is senior second baseman **Casey Toops**, who hit .350 with two home runs and 30 RBI, and senior **Chris Winter**, who missed last season due to injury and can play first or third base. He stole 15 bases and scored 22 runs in 2002.

Senior **Brian Pins** split time in the infield and outfield last season, hitting .333 with 15 RBI in the dual role. Sophomore catcher **Brian Greiner** was an All-Region selection last season after hitting .398 (6th in IIAC) with a Conference-high 51 RBI.

Transfers **Tito Romero** (catcher) and **Tom Kersbergen** (third base) along with freshman **Mark Nuemendahl** (infield) will compete for playing time.