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2004 IOWA CONFERENCE SOFTBALL PREVIEW

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA . . . Defending Conference and National Champion Central College is the preseason favorite among Iowa Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (IAC) head softball coaches. Central (65 points) received four first-place votes in the IAC Coaches Poll to edge Coe, Simpson and Wartburg which all finished tied for second in the Poll with 58 points. Coe received three first-place votes and Simpson received one first-place vote from the eight coaches that participated in the Poll. The complete 2004 IAC Softball Coaches Poll follows.

Rank	School	Points
1st	Central (4)	65
T-2nd	Coe (3)	58
T-2nd	Simpson (1)	58
T-2nd	Wartburg	58
5th	Luther	36
6th	Cornell	28
7th	Buena Vista	27
8th	Loras	24
9th	Dubuque	8

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

National Preseason Poll: The Conference coaches' top-four picks are also ranked in the National Fastpitch Coaches Association's (NFCA) preseason top-25. Central is ranked second, Wartburg is ranked eighth, Simpson is ranked 22nd and Coe is ranked 24th by the national coaches.

Iowa Conference coaches see a tough season ahead in which all teams must come to play every day.

"As usual, I expect Central, Simpson and Coe to be in the upper tier. Wartburg should also be in contention but it may take a while for the players adjust to a new coaching style," Buena Vista coach **Marge Willadsen** said. "I expect BV to be a contender with this group and Luther may be the surprise of the League as I understand they have a good recruiting class. It will be a tight race as usual."

"As shown by the preseason poll, the Iowa Conference will again be the best Conference in the country from top to bottom. Four teams ranked, but others not far back," Central coach **George Wares** said. "What we and Wartburg did last year again showed the strength of the League, and a group of others from our Conference would have also done very well in postseason play."

"The Iowa Conference will be tough as usual," Cornell coach **Lori Moss** said. "Everyone gets better and better every year from top to bottom and anyone of the teams, if things go right, could rise to the top."

“The teams that play consistent one out, one inning, and one game at a time will find themselves at the top,” Luther coach **Renaë Hartl** said. “With the reigning National Champion and three other preseason ranked teams, it will be a very competitive and exciting year for all nine teams.”

“The Conference, as usual, should be a ‘dog-fight’ as every school seems to improve each year and I don’t expect this year will be any exception,” Simpson coach **Henry Christowski** said. “Undoubtedly with two national qualifiers and a defending National Champion among them, we can expect the bar to be raised a little higher.”

“Once again the quality of softball in the Iowa Conference will be outstanding. Several teams have the potential to compete at the national level,” Wartburg coach **Kara Kehe** said.

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Buena Vista University Beavers
(7-22 Overall; 4-11, 9th place in IIAC)

Starters Returning/Lost: 8/3

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 12/3

What the Coach is saying: “We are definitely improved over last year. The experience and leadership of five seniors and two juniors will play an important role for us,” Coach **Marge Willadsen**, in her 25th year, said. “Pitching should be stronger as **Sarah Dirks** and **Lindsay Siemonsma** have one year of IIAC play and senior **Kara Rea** will provide a strong staff. Hitting is still a question mark come game time. We will have to find a way to get that extra run or two that eluded us in about ten games last year.”

The 2004 Beavers on the mound: The pitching trio of Dirks, Siemonsma and Rea will look to improve on last season in which the trio combined for a 2.82 ERA. Dirks finished eighth in the Conference in ERA (1.39) and strikeouts (79) and seventh in opponents’ batting average (.206). She posted a 4-8 record in 20 games, including 13 starts. She also recorded both of the Beavers saves.

Rea posted a 3-12 record in 21 games including 14 starts. She had a 3.76 ERA in 93.0 innings (12th in IIAC). Siemonsma struck out six batters in nine innings over four games but lost both of her decisions.

The 2004 Beavers offensively and defensively: Sophomore outfielder **Krystal Cary** returns as Buena Vista’s top offensive threat. She ranked eight in the Conference with a .359 batting average, fifth with a .461 on-base percentage and tied for ninth with 10 stolen bases.

Senior **Holli Protexter** and sophomore **Tricia Porter** also return to the outfield. Protexter appeared in 25 games with 16 starts while Porter appeared in 17 games splitting time in the infield, outfield and on the mound. Newcomers competing for time in the outfield include **Jennifer Schnoes**, **Greta Lichtenberg**, **Krista Wynia**, **Amy Kamies**, **Susie Doolittle** and **Miranda Podoll**.

Junior second baseman **Katie Onken** hit .253 in 29 games last season and is the most experienced returning infielder. Utility player **Gelene Bousum** returns after hitting .288, second on the team. Newcomers challenging for playing time around the infield include **Ali Bahlmann** (first base), Wynia (first base), **Lesley Salton** (third base), **Ali Gunderson** (first base), **Erin Kies** (shortstop) and **Amanda Kies** (third base).

Senior **Lindsey Roberts** returns behind the plate. Last season she hit .271 in 28 games and drove in a team-high 11 runs. Senior **Katie Richardson** spent most of last season as the designated player, hitting .274 in 25 contests.

Central College Dutch
(41-5-1 Overall; 14-2-1, 1st place in IIAC)

Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 7/1

Pitchers Returning/Lost: 2/2

Letterwinners Returning: 12

What the Coach is saying: “Our team will again rely on pitching and defense, trying to manufacture some runs on offense,” Coach **George Wares**, in his 19th season, said. “We have a very good group back and believe some of our freshmen can help right away.”

The 2004 Dutch on the mound: The defending National Champion Dutch must replace two All-American pitchers but return junior **Corrie Schmidt**, who ranked among the Conference leaders in several categories. Schmidt posted a 9-4 record in 27 games with six starts. She led the IIAC with five saves, ranked 11th in the Conference in victories and her 1.07 ERA was sixth in the Conference. She also ranked sixth in opponents’ batting average (.204) and 12th in strikeouts (62).

Sophomore **Amanda Wilson** went 1-0 in four games last season and did not surrender an earned run in 7.1 innings. Freshman **Emily Vaughn** should also see time on the mound.

The 2004 Dutch offensively and defensively: Seven of the eight position players return led by third baseman **Katy Lien** and first baseman **Anne Legg**, who both ranked among the Conference batting leaders, and earned All-Conference and All-Region honors. Lien hit .363, seventh in the Conference. She had 49 hits (2nd in IIAC), 28 RBI (t-3rd), 13 doubles (2nd in IIAC) and a .412 on-base percentage (13th in IIAC).

Legg hit .356 (10th in IIAC) with five home runs (t-5th). She led the Conference with 31 walks, had a .479 on-base percentage (4th in IIAC) and a .568 slugging percentage (10th). Sophomore second baseman **Kristin Wares** and junior shortstop **Beth Peterson** return to the middle infield, after committing just 13 errors combined in 316 chances (.959 fielding pct.)

Junior center fielder **Bri Kuyper** scored a Conference-high 35 runs and stole a Conference-best 30 bases. She hit .273 and drove in 10 runs. Joining her in the outfield is junior leftfielder **Holly Edwards**.

Catcher **Stef Miller** started 46 games, the only starter that did not start all 47 games. She drove in 15 runs and ranked second in the IIAC with 15 stolen bases. Defensively, Miller committed just four errors in 360 chances (.989 fielding pct.).

Coe College Kohawks
(27-9 Overall; 12-3, 3rd place in IIAC)

Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 6/3

Pitchers Returning/Lost: 3/0

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 10/5

What the Coach is saying: “Experience and pitching will be our strengths this year,” seventh-year coach **Bob Timmons** said. “Our defense should be improved.”

The 2004 Kohawks on the mound: Coe returns three experienced pitchers led by junior **Amy Ernst**, a Second Team All-Conference selection. She posted a 12-4 record with a 1.03 ERA and 88 strikeouts in 21 games last season. She ranked eighth in the Conference in wins, fifth in ERA, seventh in strikeouts, sixth in innings pitched (122.1) and 11th in opponents’ batting average (.226).

Senior **Lindsay Chase** posted an 11-3 record with a 1.41 ERA and 55 strikeouts. She ranked ninth in the Conference in wins, ninth in ERA, 14th in strikeouts, 10th in innings pitched (104.0) and fifth in opponents’ batting average (.188).

Sophomore **Sarah Marting** went 4-2 in 11 games as a freshman. She had a 1.15 ERA and struck out 19 batters in 30.1 innings.

The 2004 Kohawks offensively and defensively: Three All-Conference and two All-Region selections are among the six returning position players. First Team All-Conference and All-Region shortstop **Leah Fuhrman** leads the infield. She finished third in the Conference with a .397 batting average while also ranking among the Conference leaders in hits (t-5th with 46), runs scored (5th with 28), slugging percentage (7th with a .586) and on-base percentage (9th with a .433).

A pair of sophomores return to the right side of the infield, first baseman **Chris Engel** and second baseman **Jana Bradley**. Engle hit .286 with a team-high five home runs and 20 RBI (tied for team lead). Bradley hit .280 with four home runs and 13 RBI.

Senior **Abby Kite**, a Second Team All-Conference and All-Region selection, returns behind the plate. She hit .321 with three home runs and tied for the team lead with 20 RBI.

Junior right fielder **Beth Rohlena**, a Second Team All-Conference selection, is the lone returning outfielder. She hit .284 and tied for second on the team with four home runs. Newcomers **Rachel Brinkman** and **Jenna Miller** should fill the two open outfield spots.

Sophomore **Ashley Wagner** will handle the designated player duties. Last season she hit .320 in 33 games.

Cornell College Rams
(14-18 Overall; 8-9, 5th place in IIAC)

Starters Returning/Lost: 6/5

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 8/5

What the Coach is saying: “I expect we will be very competitive,” eighth-year coach **Lori Moss** said. “We have had very good practices and we are excited to test our talents against the other Iowa Conference schools.”

The 2004 Rams on the mound: Sophomore **Becky Roberg** is the lone returning pitcher. She posted a 1-3 record last season with one save in 10 games, including four starts. She struck out 15 batters in 30 innings and had a 2.57 ERA.

Junior transfer **Traci Finke** will also contribute from the mound.

The 2004 Rams offensively and defensively: All-Conference designated player **Sarah Wille** leads the group of six returning starters. She hit .315 last season with two home runs and 14 RBI. She ranked 14th in the Conference with a .511 slugging percentage and tied for fourth with three triples.

Juniors **Alex Myers** and **Megan Draeger** return in center field and right field, respectively. Myers hit .241 and drove in eight runs in 32 games. Draeger hit .222 and drove in two runs in 21 games. Freshman **Jill Hopper** should see playing time as the third outfielder.

Senior first baseman **Lisa Henze** and junior **Amy Pitlik** return around the infield. Pitlik hit .269 with a home run and 13 RBI last season. Henze struggled offensively, hitting just .115, but played .968 defense (6 errors in 188 chances).

Senior **Sarah Klingaman** returns behind the plate. She hit .270 with 11 RBI in 31 games.

University of Dubuque Spartans
(9-23 Overall; 2-14, 10th place in IIAC)

What the Coach is saying: “This will be a solid rebuilding year. With the addition of added depth and talent across the board, especially in pitching, the future looks very bright,” second-year coach **Todd Huffman** said.

The 2004 Spartans on the mound: Senior **B.J. Duwa** recorded seven of Dubuque’s nine victories. She finished fourth in the Iowa Conference in innings pitched (124.0) and struck out 64 batters (11th in IIAC) in 21 games.

Junior transfer **Crista Swift** and freshmen **A.J. Harrow** and **Samantha Dundee** will add depth to the Dubuque pitching staff that saw only two pitchers take the mound in 2003.

The 2004 Spartans offensively and defensively: The Spartans will be young this season with three of the four returning starters just sophomores. Second baseman **Nichol Essman** is the lone senior among the group. She hit .240 in 25 games last season. Joining Essman in the infield is shortstop **Erin Semke**, who led the team with a .308 batting average and 11 RBI last season. She hit the team’s lone home run and was second on the team with seven stolen bases. Freshman **Brooke Russell** is expected to take over at first base but could also see time behind the plate.

Left fielder **Katie Kozlowski** is the lone returning outfielder. In 30 games last season, she hit .163 but played strong defensively, committing just one error in 48 chances (.979 fielding pct.). Newcomers **Andria Koch** and **Jaymee Terry** expect to join Kozlowski in the outfield.

Catcher **Laurie Steinback** returns behind the plate. She hit .234 in 31 games last season. She stole a team-high nine bases (13th in IIAC) and finished second on the team with 10 RBI (10).

Loras College Duhawks
(13-25 Overall; 6-12, 7th place in IIAC)

Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 6/3

Pitchers Returning/Lost: 3/0

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 12/5

What the Coach is saying: “We will have a good mix of returning starters and new players this year,” first-year coach **Sarah Anderson** said. “We have some big holes to fill because of last year’s graduation however we are looking forward to putting more of our close games in the win column. We look forward to elevating our game to the point where we can compete with teams in the upper half of the Conference.”

The 2004 Duhawks on the mound: Loras returns all three pitchers from last season. Senior **Trixie Reed** led the team with eight victories, 12th most in IIAC. She struck out 51 batters (15th in IIAC) in 110.0 innings (8th) over 18 games and recorded a 3.63 ERA.

Sophomore **Sara Neverman** finished 15th in the Conference last season with a 2.48 ERA in 14 games (12 starts). She posted a 4-8 record and struck out 29 batters in 73.1 innings. Junior **Jessica Nahorski** appeared in 14 games with eight starts. She posted a 3.88 ERA and struck out 50 batters in 61.1 innings but won just once in eight decisions. The team’s primary reliever, she recorded the team’s lone save.

The 2004 Duhawks offensively and defensively: All-Conference outfielder **Amanda Reiss** leads the group of returning position players. She hit .327, led the team with nine doubles, and tied for the team lead with 34 hits and six stolen bases. She played all three outfield positions and posted a .943 fielding percentage (3 errors in 53 chances).

Junior **Mary Nosbisch** (16 games) and sophomore **Stephanie Bohlen** (5 games) saw limited action in the outfield last season and will compete with freshmen **Nicki Kohl** and **Megan Bosso** for the open outfield positions.

Junior catcher **Michelle Kearney** returns behind the plate. Last season she hit a team-high .330, tying for the team lead with 34 hits. She also drove in a team-high 17 runs. Defensively, she threw out 12 of 37 would-be base stealers (25 percent).

Three experienced starters return to the infield for the Duhawks led by third baseman **Sarah McKone**, who hit .275 last season with a team-high six home runs (t-3rd in IIAC). She ranked 12th in the IIAC in slugging percentage (.516).

Joining McKone around the infield are second baseman **Kelly Burns** and first baseman **Kari Cutler**. Burns hit .232 in 37 games and Cutler hit .215 but posted a .971 fielding percentage while splitting time between first base and the outfield.

Sophomore **Bri Erger** (12 games) and **Cari Heffernen** (8 games) saw limited action around the infield last season and will compete with newcomers **Liz Book**, **Holly Hartwig**, **Amanda Palisi** and **Nicole Tutich** for playing time in the infield.

Luther College Norse
(18-17 Overall; 4-11, 8th place in IIAC)

Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 4/4

Pitchers Returning/Lost: 3/1

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 12/6

What the Coach is saying: “I think we will turn some heads this year, our pitchers have a year under them and we have a good mix of experience and youth in our defense and hitting line-up,” third-year coach **Renae Hartl** said.

The 2004 Norse on the mound: Luther has a young but experienced pitching staff with the three returning pitchers all sophomores that pitched in at least 18 games and posted a 3.40 or lower earned run average. **Michelle Osterhaus** and **Katelyn Kampfe** both won seven games, 13th in the IIAC. Osterhaus went 7-8 with a 2.46 ERA and 40 strikeouts in 20 games, including 17 starts. She ranked 14th in the Conference in ERA and 15th in innings pitched (82.2). Kampfe posted a 7-3 record with a 3.40 ERA in 19 games.

Trisha Stogdill went 4-5 last season but had a 2.45 ERA which ranked 13th in the Conference. Her 56 strikeouts in 57.2 innings ranked 13th in the IIAC and her opponents’ batting average of .254 ranked 14th.

Freshman **Becki Buls**, a three-time All-State selection from Independence (Iowa) High school, will provide additional depth to the staff.

The 2004 Norse offensively and defensively: Second Team All-Conference second baseman **Katie Chambers** leads the returning players. She ranked 12th in the Conference with a .347 batting average, finished second with 30 runs scored and tied for 11th with 41 hits. Joining Chambers in the infield is senior shortstop **Julie Esterday**, who hit .254 with 10 RBI in 30 games last season.

Senior **Teri Olson** and junior **Jen Anderson** return to the corner outfield positions. Olson hit .286 in 19 games in right field. Anderson hit .135 in 30 games in left field. Sophomore **Katie Hopp** hit .269, tied for second on the team with three home runs and drove in 12 runs as the designated player last season.

Five former All-State high school performers will compete for the openings in the field – **Christina Gaard** (outfield), **Erin Michael** (outfield), **Heidi Mitchell** (catcher/outfield), **Alicia Uhde** (infield) and **Ashley Wirtz** (infield).

Simpson College Storm **(31-4-1 Overall; 12-3-1, 4th place in IIAC)**

Starters Returning/Lost: 7/2

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 12/4

What the Coach is saying: “Although we will lack some experience on the mound, we do have the potential to be quite strong at that position,” ninth-year coach **Henry Christowski** said. “Our defense from last year is largely intact with probably our biggest question mark being who will take over at shortstop for graduated **Laura Holbrook**.”

The 2004 Storm on the mound: Simpson returns two pitchers from last season, but the duo combined for just one start in 20 games. Junior **Kate Brandt** appeared in 14 games, 13 out of the bullpen. She tied for second in the Conference with four saves, and had a 1.45 ERA and 21 strikeouts in 19.1 innings.

Sophomore **Brandi Smith** appeared in six games. She went 1-0 with one save, a 0.72 ERA and 13 strikeouts in 9.2 innings. Junior transfer **Jacki Dougherty**, and freshmen **Marissa Campbell** and **Halie Stalzer** will also see time on the mound this season.

The 2004 Storm offensively and defensively: All-American designated player **Sara Kahler** and All-Region selections **Michelle Montgomery** (first base) and **Rebecca Siler** (center fielder) lead Simpson’s offense. Montgomery led the Conference with a .444 batting average. She finished second in the IIAC with 29 RBI, third with 48 hits, third with a .483 on-base percentage, fourth with a .667 slugging percentage and tied for fifth with five home runs.

Kahler ranked third in the Conference with a .435 batting average. She led the Conference with a .523 on-base percentage, ranked second with a .685 slugging percentage, tied for fifth with five home runs and tied for seventh with 27 RBI.

Joining Montgomery around the infield is senior third baseman **Alexis Angier** and junior second baseman **Jeana Baker**. Angier, a 2002 All-Conference selection, hit .333 last season, ranked fifth in the Conference with 18 walks and ranked eighth with a .448 on-base percentage. Baker hit .250 in 23 games. Defensively, she committed just one error in 52 chances (.981 fielding pct.).

Senior **Krista Schurr** and juniors Siler and **Courtney Steeve** return in the outfield from right to left. Siler hit .340 last season (15th in IIAC) and also ranked among the Conference leaders in triples (1st with 5), slugging percentage (3rd with a .680), home runs (t-5th with 5) and on-base percentage (11th with a .423). Steeve hit .280 with a home run and 12 RBI in 35 games last season. Schurr hit .219 in 35 games.

Freshman **Jill Mitchell** is the top candidate to replace All-Region catcher **Amanda Pilcher** behind the plate.

Upper Iowa University Peacocks
(21-17 Overall; 6-10, 6th place in IIAC)

Starters Returning/Lost: 5/6

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 7/8

The 2004 Peacocks on the mound: Sophomore **Angie Weber**, an All-Region selection as a freshman, leads the Upper Iowa pitching staff. In 34 games last season (17 starts), she posted a 14-10 record (t-3rd in wins in IIAC) with four saves (t-2nd) and a 1.93 ERA (12th). She led the Conference with 222 strikeouts, ranked third in innings pitched (152.1), and third in opponents' batting average (.149).

Sophomore **Marcy Esparza** posted a 6-4 record last season in 18 games (17 starts). She had a 3.42 ERA and struck out 40 batters in 71.2 innings. Esparza held opponents to a .259 batting average (15th in IIAC). Sophomore **Stacey Monroe** is the team's top newcomer expected to contribute on the mound.

The 2004 Peacocks offensively and defensively: All-Region shortstop **Chyanne Kleve** leads the Peacocks offense. She hit .443 last season with eight home runs and 25 RBI. She ranked second in the Conference in batting average and home runs, while ranking 11th in RBI.

Senior **Kristie Calvert** hit .233 with 10 RBI in 38 games at second base and behind the plate. Junior **Alison Nesteby** and sophomore **Sara Pudelek** saw limited playing time around the infield and will compete with newcomers **Jill Christofferson**, **Jena Kilburg**, **Cheri Lyons**, **Andrea McShane**, **Priscilla Rubalcava** and **Jessica Ryan** for the open infield positions.

Senior outfielder **Jenny Hayek** hit .185 with six RBI in 37 games. Newcomers **Virginia Lewis**, **Lindsay Switzer** and **Jessica Thurnau** will compete for the openings in the outfield.

Wartburg College Knights
(38-10 Overall; 14-3, 2nd place in IIAC)

Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 7/2

Pitchers Returning/Lost: 2/1

Letterwinners Returning/Lost: 15/3

What the Coach is saying: “We’re looking forward to an exciting year,” first-year coach **Kara Kehe** said. “With seven position players returning from the 2003 squad and some talented newcomers, the team has high expectations for the season.”

The 2004 Knights on the mound: Wartburg graduated the school’s all-time wins and strikeout leader **Stephanie Rasmussen** but return experience in senior **Kelly Watkins**. Watkins posted a 14-4 record with a 1.54 ERA and 74 strikeouts in 28 games last season. She tied for fourth in the Conference in victories, ranked 10th in ERA, ninth in strikeouts, fifth in innings pitched (123.0) and 10th in opponents batting average (.222).

Junior **Courtney Kowalke** went 2-0 last season with a 2.68 ERA in 10 games. Sophomore transfer **Jackie Sorensen** and freshman **Rochelle Miller** will also see time on the mound this season.

The 2004 Knights offensively and defensively: Three returning All-Conference performers will lead the Knights’ offense this year. First Team All-Conference catcher **Heather Winter** hit .301 last season. She tied for second in the Conference with six home runs, ranked 11th with 41 hits and tied for 11th with 25 RBI. Defensively, she committed just two errors in 150 chances (.987 fielding pct.).

Another First Team All-Conference selection, senior **Betsy Girsch** returns at second base. She hit .297 with 10 doubles, two triples, two home runs and 13 RBI last season. Also returning to the infield is junior shortstop **Cindy Hanneman**, the only player to start all 48 games last season. She hit .271 and drove in 23 runs while playing .950 defense (10 errors in 200 chances).

Sophomore **Renaë Vomacka** was a Second Team All-Conference utility player last season, splitting the year between catcher and designated hitter. She hit .310 with a home run and 19 RBI in 42 games. She did not commit an error in 104 fielding chances.

Sophomores **Deb Schindler** and **Jenny Flora** return to the outfield. Schindler hit .328 last season. She led the Conference with 16 doubles, tied for third in the Conference with 28 RBI, tied for seventh in the Conference with 45 hits and 11th with a .518 slugging percentage. Flora hit .304 and stole 12 bases last season.

Seniors **Carrie Clement**, who split time between first base and the outfield last season (.284 average in 31 games) and **Alicia Cox** (team-high 14 stolen bases in 42 games), and sophomore **Shannon Lillibridge** (.300 average in 35 games) return.