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2007 IOWA CONFERENCE BASEBALL PREVIEW

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA . . . Wartburg College, which earned a share of its 10th straight Iowa Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (IIAC) baseball title last year, is atop the 2007 IIAC baseball preseason Coaches Poll despite receiving just two first-place votes. The Knights received five second-place votes and a third-place vote for a total of 65 points.

Central College and Coe College received three and four first-place votes, respectively, and are tied for second in the Poll with 61 points. Central, which shared the 2006 title with Wartburg and Simpson College to earn its first IIAC title since 1975, garnered one second-place vote, two third-place votes and two fourth-place votes. Coe received a second-place, third-place and two fifth-place votes. The complete 2007 IIAC baseball Coaches' Poll follows.

Rank	School (1st place votes)	Points	2006 Record
1	Wartburg (2)	65	27-15, 11-5 IIAC
t-2	Central (3)	61	26-14, 11-5 IIAC
t-2	Coe (4)	61	27-19, 10-6 IIAC
4	Luther	53	17-21, 7-9 IIAC
5	Simpson	46	26-10, 11-5 IIAC
6	Buena Vista	34	14-24, 5-11 IIAC
7	Dubuque	27	14-25, 5-11 IIAC
8	Loras	26	18-22-1, 8-8 IIAC
9	Cornell	23	19-19, 4-12 IIAC

Conference Schedule: The Conference schedule has expanded to 24-games. Schools will play a three-game series against each Conference opponent. Two of those series will be weekday series with a seven-inning doubleheader on Tuesday and a single nine-inning game the following Wednesday at opposite sites. The remaining series will be played on Friday-Saturday at the same site. A single nine-inning game will be played on Friday followed by a seven-inning doubleheader on Saturday.

Conference Tournament: There are two slight changes to the Iowa Conference baseball Tournament format which will be hosted by Luther College on May 10-12 in Cedar Rapids. The top two teams from the regular season will receive a first round bye and the Tournament schedule will feature four games on Thursday, four games on Friday and two, possibly three, games on Saturday. The previous schedule had three games on Thursday, four games on Friday and three, possibly four, games on Saturday.

Under the new schedule, the #3-seed will play the #6-seed at 1:00 p.m. on Thursday at Veterans Memorial Stadium with the winner playing the #2-seed at 4:00 p.m. at Veterans. The #4-seed will play the #5-seed at 1:00 p.m. on Thursday at Daniels Park (home field of Coe College) with the winner advancing to play the top-seed at 7:00 p.m. at Veterans. All remaining games are scheduled to be played at Veterans Stadium, home of the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim's Midwest League affiliate, Cedar Rapids Kernels.

New Coaches: **Ben Blake** replaces longtime Simpson head coach **John Sirianni**. Blake served on the Storm coaching staff the past three seasons, including as associate head coach in 2006. Sirianni retired following the 2006 season after 22-years at the helm, compiling a 510-307-2 record (.625 winning percentage) and leading Simpson to four Conference titles including last season.

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

Buena Vista University Beavers

2006 Record: 14-24 overall, 5-11 IIAC (t-7th)

Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 6/4

Pitchers Returning/Lost: 6/3

Players to Watch

Ryan Dupic, Sr., 1B/DH/RHP – A First Team All-Conference selection last season, Dupic hit .303 with five home runs, 27 RBI and a .505 slugging percentage. He tied for sixth in the IIAC in home runs, tied for 16th in RBI and was 14th in slugging percentage. On the mound, he posted a 4-6 record with a 5.67 ERA in 10 games. He struck out 51 batters in 60.1 innings, including five complete games. He ranked third in the Conference in strikeouts, 10th in innings pitched and tied for 12th in wins. Defensively, Dupic made just one error in 238 chances and his .996 fielding percentage ranked fourth in the Conference.

Michael Barta, Sr., RHP/Inf. – Barta posted a 3-3 record with a 4.63 ERA and 20 strikeouts in 11 games including seven starts. His ERA was 16th in the Conference. Offensively he hit .302 with a home run, eight RBI and a .442 slugging percentage.

Adam Hardie, Sr., 1B/LF – Hardie finished second on the team with a .316 batting average and tied for fourth with 22 runs scored. He hit one home run, drove in 22 runs and had a .362 on-base percentage

Alex Fokken, Jr., OF – Fokken hit .290 with 17 RBI and he scored 11 runs in 29 games.

Quote from head coach Steve Eddie

“Our players are looking forward to starting a new season after the poor finish in 2006. The eight seniors on this year’s team would like to end their careers with a better showing. Our team doesn’t have a lot of superstars, but we have a lot of unselfish players that will move runners and that play for each other.”

Central College Dutch

2006 Record: 26-14 overall, 11-5 IIAC (t-1st)

Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 6/3

Pitchers Returning/Lost: 4/0

Players to Watch

Brett Mahan, Jr., LHP – Mahan was a First Team All-Conference and Second Team All-Central Region selection last season after posting a 9-1 record with a 2.53 ERA, 73 strikeouts and seven complete games. He led the IIAC in wins, ERA, strikeouts and starts (tied, 11). His 74.2 innings pitched were second in the Conference and his .260 opponents’ batting average ranked fifth.

Jeremy Kippley, Jr., 1B – Kippley was a Second Team All-Conference and All-Central Region pick last year following a season in which he hit .345 with three home runs, 10 doubles, 41 RBI, a .531 slugging percentage and a .427 on-base percentage. He finished among the Conference leaders in most offensive categories including RBI (t-5th), triples (t-5th, 4), doubles (t-6th), hits (t-10th, 50), slugging percentage (11th), home runs (t-12th), runs (14th, 32), on-base percentage (17th) and batting average (18th).

Mike Luce, Jr., RHP – Luce posted a 5-2 record with a 3.55 ERA and 38 strikeouts in 12 games including nine starts. He threw 66 innings and held opponents to a .292 average. Luce finished 6th in the IIAC in innings pitched and wins (tied), 10th in ERA and strikeouts, and 17th in opponents' batting average.

Derek Knutson, So., 3B/C – Knutson was one of six Central players to hit over .300, posting a .329 average (fourth on the team). He ranked among Conference leaders in triples (t-7th, 3), home runs (t-12th, 3), RBI (12th, 30) and slugging percentage (16th, .486).

Quote from head coach Adam Stevens

"The Iowa Conference is going to be very competitive again this year. I think we have the potential to have a very good defense to go along with a solid pitching staff. Our guys have shown a great work ethic in preparing for the season and we are excited about the challenge's that lay ahead."

Coe College Kohawks

2006 Record: 27-19 overall, 10-6 IIAC (4th)

Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 3/6

Pitchers Returning/Lost: 2/1

Players to Watch

Cody Smith, Jr., OF – A two-time All-Conference selection and a Second Team All-Central Region pick last year, Smith is the top returning hitter from the Kohawks NCAA qualifying team that finished second in the IIAC with a .319 team batting average. He hit .365 last year, third on the team and 12th in the IIAC. His 36 RBI ranked 10th in the Conference but were the most by anyone without a home run. Smith tied for the Conference lead with six triples, tied for third with 65 hits, tied for eight with 36 runs scored, tied for 14th with eight doubles and was 20th with a .478 slugging percentage.

Ryan Nicholson, So., RHP – Nicholson was one of two freshmen to earn All-Conference honors last year after posting a 5-2 record with a 3.23 ERA and striking out 49 batters in 13 games. He completed four of five starts and held opponents to a .206 batting average in 47.1 innings. He led the Conference in opponents' batting average and fewest hits allowed (36), ranked fourth in ERA and strikeouts, and tied for sixth in wins.

Lee Boyse, Jr., RHP – Boyse went 4-4 last season with a 3.82 ERA, 27 strikeouts and five complete games in 12 appearances (11 starts). He tied for the Conference-lead with 11 starts, ranked fourth in innings pitched (73.0), ninth in opponents' batting average (.276) and t-12th in wins.

Quote from head coach Steve Cook

"We'll be little more inexperienced than past years. Leadership out of our veteran starters will be key for us to succeed. I'm very optimistic that some young players will emerge. This is our most talented class of newcomers in my time here."

Cornell College Rams

2006 Record: 19-19 overall, 4-12 IIAC (9th)

Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 7/2

Pitchers Returning/Lost: 5/2

Players to Watch

Tyler Downing, Jr., 1B – Downing led the Rams in most offensive categories last year including batting average (.363), home runs (tied, 2), RBI (tied, 19), doubles (tied, 7), slugging percentage (.478) and on-base percentage (.435). He ranked 13th in the Conference in average, 15th in on-base percentage and 19th in slugging percentage.

Jim Bose, Jr., 3B/RHP – Bose was a First Team All-Conference pick at third base last year after hitting .306. He led the team with 27 runs scored, and tied for the team lead in home runs (2) and doubles (7). His .927 fielding percentage led all regular third basemen in the Conference. On the mound, he went 1-1 with a 1.26 ERA, 12 strikeouts and two saves in eight games.

Tad Barry, Jr., OF/RHP – Barry went 5-1 with a 3.40 ERA, 40 strikeouts and two complete games in 10 appearances. He held opponents to a .283 average in 39.2 innings. He tied for third in the Conference for fewest hits allowed (45), ranked sixth in ERA, tied for sixth in wins, eighth in strikeouts and 12th in opponents' batting average. Offensively he had two home runs and two doubles among 19 hits. He stole six bases and had 13 sacrifice hits, finishing third nationally in sacrifice hits per game (0.41).

Dan Cleary, Sr., RHP – Cleary went 1-4 last season with a 7.17 ERA and 25 strikeouts in 47.2 innings.

Quote from head coach Frank Fishler

"We are excited about having a group of committed, returning players with a year of Iowa Conference experience under them. Our newcomers will add depth to our program. Our team is looking forward and ready for the challenge of an always competitive Iowa Conference."

University of Dubuque Spartans **2006 Record: 14-25 overall, 5-11 IIAC (t-7th)**

Players to Watch

Kyle Harris, Jr., C – Harris led the Spartans in most offensive categories last season. He hit a team-best .405 and led the team with 29 RBI, a .526 slugging percentage and a .474 on-base percentage. He tied for the team lead with two home runs and 47 hits. Harris ranked seventh in the IIAC in batting, 11th in on-base percentage, 12th in slugging and t-14th in hits. He also threw out 14 would-be base stealers, fourth-most in the Conference.

Kamron Koplitz, Sr., RHP – Koplitz was a Second Team All-Conference pick last year after posting a 3-4 record with a 4.05 ERA, 34 strikeouts and one save in 11 games. He completed three of seven starts and held opponents to a .272 average in 60 innings. He ranked seventh in the IIAC in opponents' batting average, 11th in innings pitched, 13th in ERA and t-13th in strikeouts.

Stryder Morissette, Jr., 2B/DH – Morissette hit .338 and drove in eight runs in limited playing time last year. He had 23 hits in 22 contests and had a .408 on-base percentage.

Quote from head coach Shane Schellsmidt

"It's going to be a tough league all around, the new 3 games series will be demanding, and yet exciting. We'll rely heavily on our incoming class this year. We hope with all of their college experience, they will make an immediate contribution to our goal."

Loras College Duhawks **2006 Record: 18-22-1 overall, 8-8 IIAC (5th)** **Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 7/1** **Pitchers Returning/Lost: 7/3**

Players to Watch

Brent Poffenbarger, Sr., RHP – Poffenbarger split the 2006 season between the bullpen and the rotation, posting a 3-4 record with two saves and a complete game in 12 appearances. He struck out 28 batters in 50 innings.

Nick Olberding, So., SS – Olberding hit .287 with a team-high two home runs and 17 RBI as one of only two players to appear in all 41 of Loras' games. He was second on the team with seven doubles and tied for third with 20 runs scored.

Kris Thomas, Sr., 3B – Thomas hit .265 with a team-high 20 RBI last year. He scored 21 runs (third on the team), had a .381 on-base percentage and a .324 slugging percentage in 34 games.

Tim Andrews, Jr., OF/DH – Andrews was a Second Team All-Conference selection last year despite injuries limiting him to 21 games. He hit .418 and slugged .612 in just 67 at-bats. He had nine doubles (10th in IIAC) and two triples (t-11th) among his 28 hits.

Quote from head coach Carl Tebon

"Our goal is to finish in the top-three of the Conference, win 25 games, and make the Conference Tournament. Pitching match-ups and depth will be the key to having a successful Conference season. We like the idea of a (three-game) series, which will give a better perspective on a team's true depth."

Luther College Norse

2006 Record: 17-21 overall, 7-9 IIAC (6th)

Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 5/3

Pitchers Returning/Lost: 4/0

Players to Watch

Kyle Schroeder, Sr., C/3B – Schroeder was a First Team All-Conference and All-Central Region selection last season. He hit .471 with nine home runs, 48 RBI, 12 doubles, a .798 slugging percentage and a .511 on-base percentage. He led the IIAC in slugging and home runs, finished second in batting and RBI, fourth in doubles and on-base percentage, and tied for sixth in base hits (56). Nationally, Schroeder ranked 5th in RBI/game (1.45), eighth in batting average and ninth in slugging percentage.

Troy Peterson, Sr., OF/1B – Peterson hit .299 with 10 extra base hits (6 doubles, 3 triples and a home run) among his 32 hits on the season. He slugged .439, scored 27 runs and drove in 21.

Adam Kohls, So., RHP – Kohls was one of two freshmen to earn All-Conference honors last year after posting a 3-3 record with a 3.43 ERA, 42 strikeouts, four complete games and a shutout in 10 appearances. He held opponents to a .215 batting average in 63 innings. He ranked second in the IIAC in opponents' batting average, seventh in strikeouts, eighth in ERA and ninth in innings pitched.

Alex Ross, Jr., OF/LHP – Ross hit .357 with a 15 RBI, 25 walks, a .488 on-base percentage and a .398 slugging percentage. He tied for fifth in the IIAC in walks, ranked seventh in on-base percentage and 14th in batting. On the mound, Ross went 1-7 in 13 games, including six starts.

Quote from head coach Brian Gillogly

"We will return a number of position players and members of the pitching staff from last year's team that will provide leadership and experience. We are excited about our recruiting class and feel the combination of veterans and first year players will make us competitive for the upcoming season. Pitching, with the new twenty-four game Conference schedule, will prove to be the key for the team that finishes at the top of the Conference race. Once again we are looking forward to competing in the highly competitive Iowa Conference."

Simpson College Storm
2006 Record: 26-10 overall, 11-5 IIAC (t-1st)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 2/7
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 8/3

Players to Watch

Jason McClafin, Jr., 3B – McClafin, the only returning letterwinner in the Storm infield, hit .330 last year and drove in 18 runs to go along with a .376 slugging percentage and a .388 on-base percentage.

Kyle Meyer, Sr., OF – Meyer hit .288 and drove in 10 runs in 28 games. He slugged .413 and had a .402 on-base percentage. He had 28 hits, including six doubles and two triples, 12 walks and scored 28 runs.

Jared Sass, So., RHP – Sass went 6-0 with a 3.48 ERA, 24 strikeouts and a .280 opponents' batting average. His six wins were the most of any IIAC pitcher without a loss and were tied for third overall. He surrendered the fewest runs in the Conference (18), third fewest hits (tied, 45) finished eight in ERA and 11th in opponents' batting average.

Chad Scieszinski, Sr., RHP – Scieszinski went 5-0 with a 4.02 ERA, 20 strikeouts and a .286 opponents' batting average. His five wins without a loss was second behind teammate Sass and tied for sixth overall. He allowed just 46 hits (fifth fewest in IIAC) in 40 innings.

Quote from head coach Ben Blake

"After losing 13 seniors, we will look to rebuild this year. We are young, any way you look at it, and our starting lineup is up in the air."

Wartburg College Knights
2006 Record: 27-15 overall, 11-5 IIAC (t-1st)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 4/5
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 6/5

Players to Watch

Ryan Grant, Sr., SS – Grant, a Second Team All-Conference and Third Team All-Central Region selection last year, will move to short stop this year after splitting time at second and third last year. He hit .335 last year, third on the team but tops among returnees. He was seventh in the IIAC with 37 runs scored and 11th with 35 RBI.

Aaron Saeugling, Jr., RHP – Saeugling went 4-4 with a 6.52 ERA and 24 strikeouts in 14 games last year, mostly out of the bullpen.

Luke Albert, Jr., RHP – Albert went 1-1 with a 4.35 ERA and 14 strikeouts in 11 games last year including three starts.

Zach Mundy, Jr., LHP – Mundy went 2-0 with two saves, a 3.65 ERA and 17 strikeouts in 14 relief appearances last year.

Quote from head coach Joel Holst

"I have enjoyed being around this group of guys. I think our chemistry will be our strength. We will have mostly juniors and seniors starting for us at all positions. With that said, we have a number of these kids that have been in back up roles and only time will tell if they can handle being the go to guy."