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2008 IOWA CONFERENCE BASEBALL PREVIEW

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA . . . Luther College, which earned a share of its 12th Iowa Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (IIAC) baseball title last year, is atop the 2008 IIAC Baseball Preseason Coaches Poll. The Norse received eight first-place votes for a total of 72 points.

Wartburg College, which tied Luther last year for a share of its 11th consecutive league title, received the remaining first-place votes and is second in the Poll with 65 points. Central College is third in the Poll with 55 points after receiving two second-place votes, three third-place votes, and three fourth-place votes. Loras sits fourth with 46 points, just ahead of Simpson with 42. The Duhawks received three third-place votes and three fourth-place votes. The complete 2008 IIAC baseball Coaches' Poll follows.

Rank	School (1st place votes)	Points	2007 Record
1	Luther (8)	72	31-11, 18-5 IIAC
2	Wartburg (1)	65	28-13, 18-5 IIAC
3	Central	55	19-20, 12-10 IIAC
4	Loras	46	23-18, 13-10 IIAC
5	Simpson	42	18-24, 9-13 IIAC
6	Coe	37	17-22, 7-17 IIAC
7	Dubuque	31	13-27, 7-17 IIAC
8	Buena Vista	28	18-16, 11-11 IIAC
9	Cornell	20	17-21, 8-15 IIAC

Conference Schedule: The Conference schedule was expanded to 24 games in 2007. 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: The 2008 Iowa Conference Baseball Tournament hosted by Simpson College will be held May 8-10 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 No. 3-seed will play the No. 6-seed at 1:00 p.m. Thursday at Veterans Memorial Stadium with the winner playing the No. 2-seed at 4:00 p.m. at Veterans. The No. 4-seed will play the No. 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.

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

Buena Vista University Beavers
2007 Record: 18-26 overall, 11-11 IIAC (6th)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 3/6
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 7/5

Players to Watch

Jeff Weisenborn, Sr., OF – In 2007, Weisenborn finished second on the team in hitting with a .333 batting average with four doubles, a home run and eight RBI. Weisenborn also made six appearances on the mound last season, compiling a 1-0 record with a 17.05 earned run average.

Michael Stephenson, So., IF – A Second Team All-Iowa Conference selection last season, Stephenson hit .351 with two doubles, two triples, 15 RBI, and five stolen bases. Also committed only four errors in 125 chances at second base, ranking 12th in the league with 79 assists.

Mark Blum, So., IF – Blum hit .317 in 28 games (all starts) with five doubles, a triple, 22 RBI, and four stolen bases. He also pitched 17.0 innings in 10 appearances, accumulating a 1-1 record with a 7.94 earned-run average.

Quote from head coach Steve Eddie

"It seems everyone in the league has a veteran team, except for us. We will need to spend a lot of time working on the most basic of fundamentals, and focus on developing our young players throughout the course of the season."

Central College Dutch
2007 Record: 19-20 overall, 12-10 IIAC (4th)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 9/0
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 8/0

Players to Watch

Michael Edwards- LF – An All-Conference Second Team selection and a Third Team All-Region selection, Edwards led the Dutch at the plate last season. He ranked in the top ten of the Iowa Conference in doubles (19, second), slugging percentage (.610, fourth), home runs (4, sixth), batting average (.376, seventh), hits (53, ninth), and RBI (32, 10th). Edwards also committed just one error in 46 chances while patrolling the Central outfield.

Brett Mahan, Sr., RHP – A two-time All-Iowa Conference selection and a Second Team All-Central Region selection in 2006, Mahan threw 73.2 innings in 11 appearances, compiling a 5-5 record, a 2.93 ERA, and 52 strikeouts (20 looking). Mahan ranked fifth in strikeouts and seventh in the IIAC in ERA and opposing batting average (.240).

Jeremy Kippley, Sr., 1B – Another two-time All-IIAC selection and 2006 Second Team All-Region selection, Kippley hit .311 in 39 games. He posted a .420 on-base percentage with 26 RBI and seven doubles. Kippley also played well defensively, committing only four errors in 338 chances at first base to rank second in the league with a .988 fielding percentage.

Michael Luce, Sr., RHP – Luce appeared in 12 games for the Dutch in 2007 posting a 3-3 record with a 3.33 ERA and 46 strikeouts in 67.2 innings of work. He ranked in the top ten in the league in ERA (10th), opposing batting average (.239, sixth), and strikeouts (ninth).

Quote from head coach Adam Stevens

"I have really enjoyed working with this group of guys. We have a strong nucleus of returning players and look forward to competing in the always competitive Iowa Conference."

Coe College Kohawks
2007 Record: 17-22 overall, 7-17 IIAC (t-8th)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 5/4
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 4/0

Players to Watch

Ryan Nicholson, Jr., RHP – A Second Team All-Conference selection as a freshman in 2006, Nicholson finished 2007 ranked first in the IIAC in strikeouts (61) and third in ERA (2.09) and innings pitched (81.2), and fourth in opponents' batting average (.227).

Cody Smith, Sr., OF – A three-time All-Conference honoree, Smith started all 39 games for the Kohawks, hitting .348 with 48 hits, 32 runs scored, and nine doubles.

Alec Lewis, So., RHP – Lewis appeared in 13 games with a 2-5 record, a 3.54 ERA, and 39 strikeouts. Opponents hit just .235 against him last season, ranking fifth in the IIAC.

Lee Boyse, Sr., RHP – Boyse went 4-2 with a 4.14 ERA and 24 strikeouts in 10 starts for Coe last season.

Quote from head coach Steve Cook

"We're looking forward to rebounding from last year's finish. We should have quality starting pitching, returning our top three guys. We're hoping that some of the younger position players that saw significant varsity time last year will be ready to jump start our offense."

Cornell College Rams
2007 Record: 17-21 overall, 8-15 IIAC (7th)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 8/1
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 8/2

Players to Watch

Tyler Downing, Sr., 1B – Downing hit .264 with 12 RBI, nine doubles and 19 runs scored. He made only five errors in 277 chances at first base, ranking 13th in the Conference with a .982 fielding percentage.

Jim Bose, Sr., 3B/RHP – Bose was a First Team All-Conference pick at third base in 2006, but hit only .181 in 35 games a year ago. He hit a team-high five home runs, scored 18 runs, knocked in 14, and hit five doubles. On the mound, he went 2-5 with a 4.72 ERA and 25 strikeouts in eight appearances.

Tad Barry, Sr., OF/RHP – Barry went 3-3 with a 5.58 ERA, 34 strikeouts and 5-1 with a 3.40 ERA, 40 strikeouts and eight complete games in 11 appearances. He held opponents to a .296 average in 50.0 innings. Offensively, Barry hit .296 with 32 hits, five doubles, and a home run in 33 games. He stole a team-high 12 bases and had a league-high eight sacrifice bunts.

Casey Korn, Jr., IF/P – A First Team All-Iowa Conference utility player last year, Korn led the Rams in most every offensive category. In 37 games, he batted .302 with team-highs in hits (39), runs scored (19), doubles (9), and triples (1). Korn also led the Cornell on the mound, posting team-highs in innings (66.0), complete games (5), wins (3), and strikeouts (53), and registered a 3.41 ERA.

Quote from head coach Frank Fishler

"Our baseball team looks forward to the start of the 2008 season. We return a number of position players and pitchers that will provide us with leadership and experience". Our newcomers will add quality depth. Our players have a strong work ethic and look forward to the competitive Iowa Conference."

University of Dubuque Spartans
2007 Record: 13-27 overall, 7-17 IIAC (t-8th)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 6/3
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 6/2

Players to Watch

Alex Martinez, Sr., SS – Martinez, a First Team All-Conference and Third Team All-Central Region selection last year, will move to shortstop this year after playing second base in 2007. He hit .371 last year, ranking ninth in the Iowa Conference. Martinez also ranked third in home runs (5) and on-base percentage (.457), seventh in slugging percentage (.564), eighth in runs scored (36), and ninth in batting average (.371).

Danny Cantu, Sr., 3B – Cantu, a Second Team All-Conference third baseman in 2007, finished tied for seventh in the IIAC in runs batted in with 34 and ranked 12th in batting average (.362).

Alex Larson, So., OF – Larson hit .323 playing in 25 games for the Spartans last season.

Tadd Boals, Sr., RHP – Boals went 3-4 with a 4.35 ERA, starting a league-high 12 games and pitching in a league-high 89.0 innings. His 18 appearances ranked second in the league, as did his eight walks allowed.

Quote from head coach Shane Schellsmidt

"My coaching staff and I are very excited to have the number of position players and members of the pitching staff returning from last year. I'm very optimistic that by having a season together, they will emerge this season how we had hoped they would have last year."

Loras College Duhawks
2007 Record: 23-18 overall, 13-10 IIAC (3rd)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 6/2
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 8/2

Players to Watch

Adam Gross, Jr., OF – A returning All-Region and First Team All-Conference selection, Gross led Loras in nearly every offensive statistical category in 2007. Starting all 41 games for the Duhawks, he ranked in the top ten in the IIAC in batting average (fourth, .383), slugging percentage (second, .631), on-base percentage (10th, .439), runs scored (t-3rd, 40), hits (t-7th, 54) and led the league in triples (9) and stolen bases (15). Gross also ranked among the league leaders in fielding percentage, committing only two errors in 126 chances (.984).

Matt Barilla, Sr., LHP – Another returning all-region and First Team All-Iowa Conference selection, Barilla posted league-highs in wins (9), starts (12), appearances (14), complete games (7), and innings pitched (89.0). His 2.83 ERA and 51 strikeouts both ranked sixth in the IIAC.

Nick Olberding, Jr., SS – Olberding also started all 41 games for the Duhawks, ranking second on the team behind Gross in average (.349), hits (53), and RBI (28). He also posted a league-high 141 assists from his shortstop position.

Tim Carty, Sr., RHP – Carty went 2-4 in 10 appearances last season, striking out 13.

Quote from head coach Carl Tebon

"Our goal is to climb the standings and improve on the third place finish from 2007. Everyone on the roster is ready to make a run at the Iowa Conference title. We're happy about having so many guys back defensively. It was a big part of staying in games and earning wins last year. We're looking to improve offensively down the lineup one through nine. Obviously Adam (Gross) will be the first domino, and we'll feed off of him at the top of the lineup, but ultimately we need to raise our team batting average put more pressure on opposing pitchers."

Luther College Norse
2007 Record: 31-11 overall, 18-5 IIAC (t-1st)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 5/3
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 11/1

Players to Watch

Jeff Hiatt, Sr., SS – A Second Team All-Central Region and Second Team All-Iowa Conference selection in 2007, Hiatt started all 42 games, hitting .366 with 36 RBI and four home runs. His RBI total ranked fifth in the IIAC.

Adam Kohls, Jr., RHP – A First Team All-IIAC and Second Team All-Region honoree, Kohls appeared in 13 games, starting 10, and posted an 8-1 record with a 2.55 ERA and 50 strikeouts in 77.2 innings. His ranked in the top ten in the IIAC in ERA (fifth), innings pitched (fourth), strikeouts (seventh), wins (tie, second), and opposing batting average (third, .223).

Nathan Todd, Jr., RHP – Todd appeared in 13 games in 2007 going 8-3-1 with a 2.40 ERA and 58 strikeouts, ranking second in the IIAC in strikeouts and fourth in ERA. He started a team-high 12 games and held opponents to a .250 batting average.

Jacob Waddle, Jr., C/OF – Waddle, a First Team All-Conference selection, started 39 of 41 games for the Norse, hitting a league-high .395 with 58 hits, 40 runs scored and 32 RBI. He ranked in the IIAC's top six in slugging percentage (sixth, .578) and on-base percentage (second, .483).

Quote from head coach Brian Gillogly

"With several position players and pitchers back from last years team we should be solid in the areas of pitching and defense. We will need to develop our hitting depth and be efficient on the base paths to be one of the top teams in the conference. Hopefully last years experience will give us the confidence to once again be in the conference race at the end of the year. We look forward to competing against all the quality teams in the Iowa Conference."

Simpson College Storm
2007 Record: 18-24 overall, 9-13 IIAC (6th)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 2/7
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 12/2

Players to Watch

Jason McClafin, Sr., 3B/1B – McClafin hit .274 in 38 games for the Storm with 34 hits, 22 RBI and a team-high-tying three triples.

Cory Dawson, Jr., DH/1B – A Second Team All-Conference selection last season, Dawson is Simpson's leading returning hitter. He led the league with six sacrifice flies, ranked ninth in the league with a .519 slugging percentage, and 15th with a .352 batting average. Dawson also belted a team-high four home runs, knocking in 26. On the mound, Dawson made 12 appearances, starting seven games, and compiled a 1-3 record with a 6.06 ERA and 20 strikeouts.

Curt Bjork, Jr., C – Bjork played in all 42 games for the Storm last season, finishing third on the team in batting with a .351 average, 46 hits, 24 runs scored, eight doubles, and a team-high 33 RBI. He ranked sixth in the IIAC with a .454 on-base percentage.

Jared Sass, Jr., RHP – Sass started a team-high 10 starts on the mound for Simpson in 2007. In 14 total appearances, he posted a 4-5 record with a 5.96 ERA and 21 strikeouts in 51.1 innings.

Quote from head coach Ben Blake

"We return a good group of guys and a lineup of mostly second-year players that are determined to make last year a "positive" learning experience. In addition, we have a talented crew of youngsters that will likely factor in our success. Depth in our staff will once again prove to be key, as we search for the ever elusive third starter."

Wartburg College Knights
2007 Record: 28-13 overall, 18-5 IIAC (t-1st)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 12/4
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 6/2

Players to Watch

Aaron Saeugling, Sr., RHP/2B – Turned in tremendous junior season on hill and at plate. Was 8-0 with 1.17 earned run average in 77 innings pitched. Earned D3Baseball.com All-American and first team all-Iowa Conference honors in 2007 and is a preseason All-American through D3Baseball.com this season. Threw four complete games and earned two saves. Hit .298 with 25 RBIs and 12 doubles.

Billy Schmitt, So., RHP – Ended 6-3 in seven starters with two complete games during his freshman season. Gave up only 16 earned runs in 65.1 innings of work for 3.31 ERA.

Luke Albert, Sr., RHP – Went 5-2 with 4.84 earned run average in 48 innings last season. Fired 41 strikeouts and allowed only 17 walks during season.

Mike Johnson, Jr., 3B – Top returning offensive player from 2007 squad. Hit .325 with 52 hits, 18 doubles, and 34 RBIs.

Danny Rose, So., SS/RHP – Turned out to be versatile starter for Knights during freshman campaign. Played in 35 games and started 34 with .239 batting average, 18 RBIs and eight stolen bases in nine attempts. Strong in defensive responsibilities with 103 assists and only six errors in 160 chances at second base. Turned in 2-4 record and 3.93 ERA in 17 appearances last spring. Used mostly in relief role.

Kyle Jones, Jr., OF – Hit .301 and was one of four position players to start and play in all 41 games last spring. Drilled 17 extra base hits, including four home runs, and ended with 30 RBIs. Perfect in 51 chances in field and helped complete a double play.

Quote from head coach Joel Holst

"We will field a strong team in '08. With all pitching returning and one of our stronger recruiting classes for pitching, the depth on the mound will be a strength. We will be veteran at all positions with more athleticism than last year's team."