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2008 IOWA CONFERENCE SOFTBALL PREVIEW

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA . . . Wartburg College, the defending Iowa Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (IIAC) Softball Tournament Champion and one of three IIAC schools to qualify for the NCAA Tournament, is the coaches' pick to capture the 2008 IIAC title. The Knights received seven of nine first-place votes and a total of 71 points to edge Coe College, another NCAA qualifier that advanced to the national tournament. The Kohawks received the two remaining first-place votes and 65 points.

Luther College, the 2007 IIAC regular season champion and an NCAA Tournament qualifier, is third in the IIAC Coaches' Poll with 54 points, just ahead of Central College (53 points) and Simpson College (46 points). The complete 2008 IIAC softball Coaches' Poll follows.

Rank	School (1st place votes)	Points	2007 Record
1	Wartburg (7)	71	31-8, 8-4 IIAC
2	Coe (2)	65	31-14, 13-3 IIAC
3	Luther	54	35-7, 14-2 IIAC
4	Central	53	27-13, 9-7 IIAC
5	Simpson	46	28-11, 8-6 IIAC
6	Loras	36	19-21, 7-9 IIAC
7	Buena Vista	27	7-23, 2-14 IIAC
8	Cornell	23	11-20, 2-11 IIAC
9	Dubuque	21	13-27, 3-11 IIAC

National Rankings: Three Iowa Conference schools are ranked in the National Fastpitch Coaches Association (NFCA) Preseason Poll. Wartburg is ranked second, Coe is 14th and Central is 21st. Wartburg finished 2007 ranked 9th by the NFCA, Coe was 22nd, and Luther received votes in the final NFCA poll.

Conference Tournament: The Third Annual Iowa Conference Softball Tournament will be played May 1-3. The Tournament's top seed will serve as the host.

Willadsen to Retire at Season's End: After nearly three decades of leading the Buena Vista University softball team, **Marge Willadsen** has announced that she will retire as head softball coach at season's end. She will continue on as an administrator within the athletic department.

Willadsen enters this season ranked seventh among active Division III coaches in victories with a career mark of 561-421-2. Her 1984 National Championship team is the university's only championship to this day. In addition, she has led the Beavers to a pair of national runner-up finishes (1983, 1992), six Iowa Conference Championships – including three straight from 1994-1996 – and five Regional Championships.

She is a four-time Iowa Conference Coach of the Year and two-time National Coach of the Year who has coached 90 all-conference performers, including six IIAC MVP's, and has seen 22 of her players earn All-American honors.

Heather (White) Hupke, a four-time All-American at Buena Vista and current coach at Briar Cliff University, has been named as Willadsen's successor.

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

Buena Vista University Beavers
2007 Record: 7-23 overall, 2-14 IIAC (9th)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 5/4
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 2/0

Players to Watch

Brandi Sykora, Sr., P – A three-time All-Conference performer, went 6-16 with a 3.97 ERA and 72 strikeouts in 153 1/3 innings. She threw 20 complete games (in 21 starts), struck out 72 batters and held opponents to a .309 average.

Monica Tucker, Sr., 3B/1B – Tucker started all 30 games for the Beavers, posting a .206 batting average with 14 hits.

Whitney Kriz, Jr., SS – Kriz batted .188 in 30 games with 16 hits and five doubles.

Quote from head coach Marge Willadsen

"We will have a number of younger players vying for starting positions who have good potential to improve our record from last season. Our senior pitcher, Brandi Sykora, will give us experience on the mound but she will be working with freshmen catchers. [I'm] looking forward to playing all the conference teams in my last season. [The] conference race will be close as it always has been.

Central College Dutch
2007 Record: 27-13 overall, 10-7 IIAC (5th)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 5/4
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 2/0

Players to Watch

Kelly Harris, Sr., C – A three-time All-Conference selection, Harris played in 38 games a year ago, posting a .351 batting average. She also recorded team-highs in hits (40), doubles (10), and triples (4), while also scoring 25 runs and driving in 25. Harris also picked off a league-high 11 runners from behind the plate.

Alysha Overturf, Jr., CF – Overturf started all 40 games for the Dutch, hitting .272 with 31 hits, a team-high 29 runs scored, eight doubles, and 28 RBI.

Afton Nelson, So., 3B – Nelson also started all 40 games, posting a .294 batting average with 32 hits, seven doubles, 20 RBI and 23 runs scored.

Megan Swingen, Jr., P – Swingen started 20 games in 2007, finishing with an 11-9 record and a 3.04 ERA. In 117 1/3 innings, she posted team-highs in complete games (8) and strikeouts (73).

Quote from head coach George Wares

"We are exciting about another Iowa Conference softball season. The league looks to be as strong as always, and will be well represented in post-season. We think we have a good balance of experience to mix with a very good group of freshmen."

Coe College Kohawks
2007 Record: 31-14 overall, 13-3 IIAC (2nd)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 9/0
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 1/0

Players to Watch

Ellie Schultz, Jr., RHP – Schultz, the defending IIAC Pitcher of the Year and a third-team All-American, appeared in 39 games, posting a 27-9 record with a league-low 0.77 ERA, 230 strikeouts and two saves in 247 innings.

Ashley Leonard, Jr., SS – Leonard started 40 games with a .339 batting average and team-highs in hits (43) and runs scored (25). She also hit seven doubles, drove in 16, and stole six bases.

Amy Hanse, So., 1B – Hanse started all 45 games for the Kohawks, posting 39 hits in 131 at-bats for a .298 average. She posted a team-high 23 RBIs and drew 12 walks. Defensively, Hanse made only three errors in 460 chances at first base for a .993 fielding percentage.

Abby Wedemeier, C/DP – Wedemeier started 35 games with a .343 batting average, 36 hits, 20 RBI, nine doubles and 14 runs scored. She also posted a team-high .514 slugging percentage.

Quote from head coach Bob Timmons

"We need to stay healthy and improve on offense if we want to be a factor in the conference this year."

Cornell College Rams
2007 Record: 11-20 overall, 2-11 IIAC (8th)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 5/4
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 1/1

Players to Watch

Ashton Horn, So., P – Horn posted an 8-7 record with a 2.92 ERA and 86 strikeouts in 21 appearances (15 starts) last season. Horn pitched 108 innings and threw 13 complete games.

Sara Blaser, Jr., 3B – Blaser played in 26 games, hitting .356 with 26 hits and team-highs in RBI (23) and home runs (6). She also posted a .630 slugging percentage and drew eight walks.

Brittany Raymond, Sr., C – Raymond started all 31 games for the Rams, batting .244 with 22 hits and 10 runs scored. She led Cornell defensively with a .975 fielding percentage, committing only four errors in 160 chances.

Quote from head coach Shanda Ness

"Historically, the Iowa Conference has a very strong reputation. There are no weak teams in the conference. We really want to focus on the little things this year. We want the girls to bring a positive attitude and come ready to work every day. We want to be a team that shows up every day to compete."

University of Dubuque Spartans
2007 Record: 13-27 overall, 3-11 IIAC (7th)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 5/3
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 3/1

Players to Watch

Katie Golien, So., P – Golien played in 16 games in 2007, making 14 starts and pitching 12 complete games. In 102 innings, she registered a 6-7 record with a 3.36 ERA and 91 strikeouts.

Lynn Nehl, So., C/IF – Nehl played in 39 games, hitting .286 with 30 hits, 15 runs scored, and 12 RBI. She also drew 12 walks and stole five bases.

Donna Cozzie, So., OF – Cozzie, who started all 40 games last season, hit .256 with 34 hits in 133 at-bats. She also scored 18 runs and stole six bases.

Quote from head coach Corey Parr

"As a first year coach I found out very quickly the caliber of teams that compete in the IIAC. It truly was an eye-opening experience. I can't say that we did as well as I would have liked, but compared to year's past I believe we did take a step in the right direction. One nice thing about having such a young team (zero seniors this year), is that now these girls know what to expect from every team in this conference."

Loras College Duhawks
2007 Record: 19-21 overall, 7-9 IIAC (6th)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 6/2
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 1/1

Players to Watch

Kate Earleywine, So., P – Earleywine set the single season strikeout mark last year with eight games remaining in the regular season. She finished with 208, 70 more than the previous record holder. She also tied the single-game mark of 12 in game one of a home doubleheader with Luther College last year. Earleywine was a Second Team All-IIAC selection. She finished 14-18 with a 3.28 ERA, holding opponents to just a .262 batting average in nearly 200 innings.

Stacy Bahl, Sr., 1B – Bahl, Loras' other All-IIAC performer from a year ago, started all 40 games and led the team in nearly every major offensive category, including batting average (.345), hits (40), and RBI (26).

Jamie Wendt, Sr., 3B – Wendt played in 39 games, hitting .291 with 32 hits, 18 RBI, 19 runs scored, and a team-high five home runs.

Kim Chalekian, Jr., C – Chalekian appeared in 34 games in 2007, starting 24, where she hit .211 with 15 hits in 71 at-bats. She led the Duhawks in fielding percentage, committing only one error in 99 chances.

Quote from head coach Katie Koopmann

"I'm looking forward to the 2008 season and this team for a few reasons. I think we have some real leaders on this team and every player on our roster from a year ago who hit a homerun is back. I think Jamie (Wendt) and Stacy (Bahl) will continue to be the source of power in the lineup. The conference is strong, and we'll be looking to make a move into the top five in the standings."

Luther College Norse
2007 Record: 35-7 overall, 14-2 IIAC (1st)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 5/4
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 3/2

Players to Watch

Tami Magner, Sr., C – A Second Team All-American and a First Team All-IIAC selection a year ago, Magner started all 42 games for the Norse, ranking second in RBI (52), third in the league in batting average (.441), home runs (13), and slugging percentage (.795), fourth in hits (56), and fifth in on-base percentage (.471) and runs scored (39).

Ashley Hoffman, Sr., 3B – A Third Team All-American and a First Team All-Conference honoree, Hoffman also started all 42 games. She ranked led the Conference in home runs (15), finished second in slugging percentage (.808), third in RBI (49), sixth in on-base percentage (.451) and hits (47), and was ninth in batting average (.376).

Shalyn Duffy, Sr., RHP – Duffy, a First Team All-IIAC selection, played in 20 games a year ago, starting 17. In 100 1/3 innings, she posted a 15-2 record with a 2.02 ERA and 79 strikeouts. Duffy finished in the league by holding opponents to a .201 batting average.

Kim Hess, Jr., RF – An All-IIAC player a year ago, hit .415 with 54 hits, 42 runs scored, and a team-high nine stolen bases. Hess topped the league with 15 sacrifice bunts, ranked fourth in runs scored, fifth in hits, and sixth in the IIAC in batting average.

Quote from head coach Renae Hartl

"Our three seniors have created an amazing atmosphere in practices so far this February. Their leadership, drive, and physical play will direct our 2008 season. We also are excited about our sophomores, who are stepping up in a big way to fill positions vacated by the '07 graduating seniors. We are looking forward to our very competitive conference schedule as I expect to see a very top-heavy league this year with teams one through nine competing to win every day out."

Simpson College Storm
2007 Record: 28-11 overall, 9-6 IIAC (4th)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 2/7
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 2/0

Players to Watch

Shyann Warrick, Sr., RF – Warrick, a Second Team All-Iowa Conference performer last season, led the Storm with a .361 batting average, also posting team-highs in hits (43), doubles (9), home runs (6), and RBI (27). She also ranked second in runs scored with 24 and stole four bases.

Calie Hohneke, Sr., P – Hohneke, a three-time All-Iowa Conference performer, pitched in 29 games in 2007, posting an 18-8 record with a 1.44 ERA, 122 strikeouts and a save in 160 1/3 innings. She ranked second in the IIAC in wins, third in ERA and innings pitched, and fourth in strikeouts and opposing batting average (.233).

Amanda Armstrong, Sr., SS – Armstrong, a two-time All-IIAC selection, played in 35 games last season, hitting .325 with 27 hits in 83 at-bats. She finished third on the team with 22 runs scored and knocked in 15.

Carlye Owens, Jr., 2B – Owens, a First Team All-IIAC selection last season, hit .346 with 36 hits, 17 RBI, five doubles and a home run.

Quote from head coach Henry Christowski

"We will be filling some key roles on the right side of our infield and it appears we will be starting three seniors, a junior and a mixture of freshmen and sophomores. Our pitching staff will be led by senior Calie Hohneke, who compiled an 18-8 record last season with a 1.44 ERA."

Wartburg College Knights
2007 Record: 31-8 overall, 8-4 IIAC (3rd)
Starting Position Players Returning/Lost: 8/1
Pitchers Returning/Lost: 2/1

Players to Watch

Ashley Steines, Sr., UT – Steines, a 2007 NFCA/Louisville Slugger Division III All-American, first team all-Iowa Conference and all-Midwest Region selection, hit .430 with a league-best 64 hits and nine triples. She added 12 doubles and 39 RBIs to her totals. Steines ranked third in the IIAC in runs scored (43), fourth in doubles (12), and fifth in batting average and slugging percentage (.671).

Ashley Rogers, Sr., IF – Rogers, the IIAC's Most Valuable Player in volleyball last fall, started the last three seasons at first base for Wartburg. She hit .342 with nine home runs and 42 RBIs in 2007. Rogers finished fourth in the IIAC in RBIs, home runs, walks (20), and sixth in slugging percentage (.658) runs scored (36).

Angela Hartwig, Jr., P – Hartwig was a first team all-Iowa Conference in 2007. She finished 17-3 with a 1.26 earned run average in 24 starts with nine complete games and one solo and six combined shutouts. Hartwig fired 134 strikeouts in 122 and a third innings while surrendering only 27 walks.

Quote from head coach Kara Kehe

"Our student-athletes are excited about the opportunities that lie ahead this season. With several key returning players and some energetic newcomers, we have the potential to be solid both offensively and defensively in what looks to be another competitive Iowa Conference race."

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