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GLIAC Softball Coaches Pick Wayne State To Win 2005 Crown

Warriors Seeking First League Title Since 1996, Defending Champ GVSU Picked Second

BAY CITY, Mich. -- The head softball coaches of the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (GLIAC) chose Wayne State University to win the league's 2005 championship in preseason balloting.

The Warriors claimed six of 11 possible first-place votes and 96 total points. Wayne State finished four points ahead of Grand Valley State University, last season's conference champion, which earned five first-place votes and 92 total points.

Ashland University claimed third place in the poll with 79 points, outdistancing fourth place Ferris State University which tallied 74 points.

A total of three points separated fifth place Gannon University from sixth place Saginaw Valley State University in the preseason rankings. The Lady Knights garnered 58 points to the Cardinals' 55 points.

Hillsdale College was seventh after totaling 42 points, followed closely by the University of Findlay (36 points), and Mercyhurst College (31).

Northwood University tallied 28 points for tenth place, while Lake Superior State University earned 14 points to round out the poll.

The league's 11 head softball coaches ranked each of the GLIAC teams, but were not allowed to rank their own squad. The first-place team on each ballot received ten points, while the second-place team received nine points, etc.

The 2005 GLIAC softball tournament will feature a new format. The eight-team double elimination event will be held at the Emerson Park Softball Complex in Midland, Mich. on Friday, May 6 and Saturday, May 7.

GLIAC softball teams open the 2005 conference season on Friday, Apr. 1.

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2005 GLIAC Preseason Softball Coaches Poll		
Rank	School (first-place votes)	Points
1.	Wayne State (6)	96
2.	Grand Valley State (5)	92
3.	Ashland	79
4.	Ferris State	74
5.	Gannon	58
6.	Saginaw Valley State	55
7.	Hillsdale	43
8.	Findlay	36
9.	Mercyhurst	31
10.	Northwood	28
11.	Lake Superior State	14

2004 GLIAC Softball Final Standings*		
Place	School	Record (GLIAC)
1.	Grand Valley State	36-8 (14-2)
2.	Wayne State	36-22 (15-5)
3.	Ferris State	24-21-1 (14-6)
4.	Ashland	27-17 (12-6)
5.	Saginaw Valley State	26-19-1 (11-9)
6.	Hillsdale	16-18-1 (9-11)
7.	Gannon	28-17 (7-11)
8.	Lake Superior State	13-22 (7-11)
9.	Mercyhurst	16-23-1 (7-13)
10.	Findlay	13-33 (5-15)
11.	Northwood	14-31 (3-15)

* - GLIAC Softball final standings are usually based on the average of regular season and tournament finishes. The 2004 final standings reflect regular season finish only as the 2004 tournament was cancelled due to inclement weather.

The following are season previews on each of the GLIAC's 11 Softball Teams:

Ashland University: The 2004 Ashland University softball team enjoyed its 13th straight winning season, finishing 27-17. Most of the key offensive cogs from that squad return to the lineup, highlighted by first team All-GLIAC selections Bree Beabout (SO, 1B, .351, 18 RBI) and Sara Mathes (SR, DP, .311, 8 HR, 25 RBI). Ninth-year head Coach Sheilah Gulas (302-125 at Ashland) will have to deal with the graduation of pitchers Leslie Eberhardt and Josie Nelson. That pair combined for 120 career victories at AU. Sophomore Jaime Williams (0-0, 2.03 ERA) is the top returning pitcher for the Eagles.

Ferris State University: Ferris State hopes to be GLIAC title contenders this spring as the Bulldogs return 11 letterwinners from last season's 24-21-1 team, including their entire three-member pitching staff. Senior Rachel Chartier (11-7, 1.79 ERA, 141.0 IP) started 21 of 27 contests last season en route to attaining All-GLIAC Honorable Mention accolades. Head coach Keri Becker, who begins her eighth year at FSU as the program's all-time winningest coach with a 225-146-1 career mark, will rely on veteran leadership in the field with senior catcher Melissa Worsley (.240, 1 HR, 16 RBI) behind the plate and senior Navreet Gill (.254, 0 HR, 12 RBI) at shortstop. Juniors Emily McLean (.308, 1 HR, 19 RBI) and Jessica Jaroniewski (.239, 0 HR, 3 RBI) are the returning outfield starters. The Bulldogs also welcome seven newcomers to this season's squad.

University of Findlay: Head Coach Ron Ammons enters his third season (29-57) with a few tested veterans and some new faces as The University of Findlay tries to improve upon its 2004 record of 13-33, 5-15 in GLIAC play (10th). Sophomore Michele Jordan (6-10, 4.29 ERA) will anchor a young pitching staff that may include three freshmen. Seniors Brandy Fields (shortstop, .322) and Alicia Fetter (catcher, .244, 23 RBI) are returning All-GLIAC Honorable Mention selections.

Grand Valley State University: Grand Valley State captured the GLIAC regular season title and made its sixth consecutive NCAA DII Great Lakes Regional Championship appearance en route to a 36-8 overall and 14-2 GLIAC record in 2004. The Lakers will look to defend their crown and advance in the postseason with one senior, seven juniors, five sophomores, and seven freshmen. Senior shortstop Sarah Pappé led GVSU last season with a .323 batting average, tallying seven doubles, six triples, and four home runs. Junior pitcher Kristin Jenner tallied a 9-3 record with a 1.14 ERA. She yielded just 13 earned runs and 22 walks, while recording 57 strikeouts. The young team is led by veteran head coach Doug Woods who is entering his 15th season with an overall record of 550-226-3.

Gannon University: Gannon returns nine letterwinners and five everyday starters from last year's 28-17 squad. The Lady Knights have posted 15 consecutive winning seasons and 14 straight 20-win campaigns. The program advanced to two consecutive GLIAC Tournament title games before last year's post-season tournament was cancelled due to weather.

Head coach Beth Pierce enters her fifth season at Gannon as one of the best in school history. She is Gannon's all-time leader in winning percentage (.659) and second in victories (126-54-1). Juniors Joanna Fergus (Youngstown, Ohio/Austintown Fitch) and Allison Gerger (Coraopolis, Pa./Montour) headline Gannon's offensive attack in 2005. Fergus hit .293 with three homers and 17 RBI last season. Gerger added three home runs and 20 RBI while hitting for a .291 average. Jenn Kulick (Leechburg, Pa./Leechburg) is Gannon's lone returning pitcher after posted a 10-8 record and 2.01 ERA as a true freshman in 2004.

Hillsdale College: The Hillsdale softball team will be under new leadership for the 2005 season as Sunny Jones begins her first season at the helm of the program. Jones was a former National Player of the Year and Four-time All-American for Ashland from 1996-99. With six seniors on this year's team, Hillsdale will have great leadership on the field. HC returns 14 letterwinners from last year's squad, including senior pitcher Joelle Frantz, who was granted another year of eligibility by the NCAA. Frantz had four victories and a team-leading 60 strikeouts last season, before suffering an injury. Hillsdale's offensive lineup will be led by senior Colleen McNutt, who hit a team-high .347 with 33 hits and 15 RBI as a junior. Senior Becky Fair also returns after hitting .318 with 21 hits in 2004. Among the 14 returning letterwinners, 13 saw significant playing time last season.

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Lake Superior State University: Lake Superior State is as deep as it has been in several years with seven returning starters, including junior pitchers Ashley Hughes and Cherish Samuels, who was ranked fifth in the GLIAC in strikeouts per game last season with an average of 7.88 and the team's best earned run average of 2.71. Other returning starters include junior center fielder Audrey Hewitt, sophomore shortstop Erin Retherford, senior designated hitter Emily Bell, senior catcher/first baseman Sara Demmer, and junior second baseman Chelsea Sparrow. Bell batted .297 and hit three home runs to lead Laker hitters last year. Sparrow was second in hitting at .281 and led the team in base hits with 34. LSSU's standout newcomers include Division II all-state pitcher Stephanie Reveley from St. Clair Shores, Mich., and junior catcher Chelsea Rhadigan from Macomb Community College. The Lakers finished 13-22 overall and 7-11 in the GLIAC last season. LSSU head coach Don Myers is entering his 16th season.

Mercyhurst College: Mercyhurst showed improvement last year under first-year coach Sara Headley, ending the 2004 campaign with a three-game winning streak and an overall mark of 16-23-1. The infield would appear to be the strength of the team with several All-Conference players returning. Senior captains, Hannah Cox (Second Team All-GLIAC) and Rachelle Haight (Honorable Mention All-GLIAC) will be looked to for leadership in the infield at third and first base respectively. Cox played in 38 of 40 games last season, hitting 8 doubles and 2 home runs. Haight led the team in batting with a .333 average. She scored 9 runs and knocked in another 8 in only 19 games. Junior Kate Conochan (Honorable Mention All-GLIAC) will also see some time at first base and in the designated hitter position. She led the team last year in RBIs (21) and home runs (7) while maintaining a .299 batting average.

The Lakers' pitching staff looks solid with sophomores Jen Feret (Second Team All-GLIAC) and Katie Clark returning to the mound. Feret had a 2.45 ERA in 95.2 innings while striking out 66. Clark had a 3.36 ERA in 72.1 innings while striking out 33.

Northwood University: Despite returning 10 of its 14 letterwinners from last season's 14-31 squad, the 2005 Northwood University softball team remains full of youth. The Timberwolves feature only one senior and six juniors on their 15-player roster. Junior hurler Lisa Shepard will lead the way on the hill. She tossed 160 innings last season, finishing with a 1.88 ERA and 186 strikeouts. She already ranks second on Northwood's all-time list for strikeouts (319). Senior Ellie Neidhamer should see most of her action behind the plate this year. She enters her final season at Northwood with 69 career hits. Sophomore Rachel Minikel will look to build on her freshman campaign that saw her hit five of Northwood's seven home runs. Minikel led the team in slugging percentage (.419) and total bases (54) in her first season. Fellow sophomore Amrit Dhillon led the team with 15 RBI's and six doubles in her freshman season. Head Coach Heather Bruder enters her fifth season at the helm of the Timberwolves.

Saginaw Valley State University: SVSU finished last season in fifth place in the conference standings under first-year head coach Sabrina Lane. The Cards will look to climb the standings in Lane's second season at the helm with the top two pitchers and two of the top three hitters returning to the lineup. Senior Katie Albert (Waterford, Mich./Kettering) will be a fixture at second base after hitting .346 in 43 games as a junior. She led the team with 25 RBI's, three triples and also fielded .964 with 107 putouts. Junior first baseman Tabitha Greenwood (Vassar, Mich.) cracked six homers and 67 total bases last year. She scored 19 runs with 21 RBI's in 44 games. Sophomore hurler Lorelea Rice (Caledon East, Ont./Mayfield Secondary) led the staff with an 8-3 record and 1.23 ERA as a freshman. She posted three shutouts and 62 strikeouts in 85.2 innings.

Wayne State University: The Wayne State softball program returns 10 letterwinners and has added five freshman and a junior college transfer in hopes of returning to the NCAA tournament. The 2005 team carries three consecutive GLIAC Freshmen of the Year recipients in Lisa Gauthier (2002), Meghan Misiak (2003) and Sarah Ytsma (2004). The promising youth and depth gives 24th-year head coach Gary Bryce hopes of a successful season.

Last season, WSU finished 36-22 playing one of the toughest schedules in the country. 2004 Regional All-American Sue Verbeem enters her junior year as one of the teams top offensive players after batting .328 with 18 doubles and a .464 slugging percentage a year ago. Ytsma is the team's top returning hurler after posting a 16-7 mark last season with a 1.72 ERA. She also tallied two saves, five shutouts, and a .222 opponents batting average.