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Coaches Pick Grand Valley State, Findlay to Win 2005 GLIAC Volleyball Divisional Titles

BAY CITY, Mich. -- The head volleyball coaches of the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (GLIAC) chose Grand Valley State University to win the league's North Division, and the University of Findlay to take the South Division in preseason balloting.

Grand Valley State, the 2004 GLIAC North Division champion, received 31 points and three of the six first-place votes it was eligible for. The Lakers narrowly edged out Northwood University, which garnered 30 points and three first-place votes. Northern Michigan University placed third in the division with 27 points and one first-place nod. Ferris State University finished fourth with 26 points.

Michigan Tech University placed fifth in the division with 14 points, followed by Lake Superior State University (11 points) and Saginaw Valley State University (8).

Findlay, after tying for second place in last season's South Division race, received 23 points and three first-place votes in the poll. The Oilers outdistanced Ashland University by two points (23-21). The Eagles received two first-place nods.

Hillsdale College tallied 18 points and one first-place vote to finish third, followed by Wayne State University (12 points), Gannon University (10), and Mercyhurst College (6).

The GLIAC proved to be one of Division II's toughest conferences last season, sending six teams -- Ashland, Ferris State, Grand Valley State, Hillsdale, Northern Michigan, and Northwood -- to the NCAA II Great Lakes Region Tournament. Northern Michigan emerged as the regional champion, earning a trip to the "Elite Eight," Division II's national championship tournament.

Each of the GLIAC's 13 coaches voted for the division in which they play, but were not allowed to vote for their own team. The first-place team in the North Division ballot received six points, while the second-place team received five points, etc. The first-place team in the South Division received five points, while the second-place team received four points, etc.

GLIAC volleyball teams open play on Thursday, Aug. 25 with conference play beginning Tuesday, Sept. 13. The 2005 GLIAC Volleyball Championship Tournament will be held on Nov. 9, 12, and 13 on campus sites. The quarterfinals will take place on Wednesday, Nov. 9, while the semifinals and finals are scheduled to take place on Nov. 12 & 13 on the campus of the highest remaining seed.

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2005 GLIAC Preseason Volleyball Coaches Poll

<i>North Division</i>	
<i>School (first-place votes)</i>	<i>Points</i>
1. Grand Valley State (3)	31
2. Northwood (3)	30
3. Northern Michigan (1)	27
4. Ferris State	26
5. Michigan Tech	14
6. Lake Superior State	11
7. Saginaw Valley State	8
<i>South Division</i>	
1. Findlay (3)	23
2. Ashland (2)	21
3. Hillsdale (1)	18
4. Wayne State	12
5. Gannon	10
6. Mercyhurst	6

2004 GLIAC Volleyball Final Standings

<i>North Division</i>	
<i>School</i>	<i>Record (GLIAC)</i>
Grand Valley State	27-7 (16-2)
Ferris State	25-7 (14-4)
Northern Michigan	24-7 (13-5)
Northwood	21-10 (11-7)
Michigan Tech	11-20 (8-10)
Lake Superior State	8-22 (4-14)
Saginaw Valley State	2-29 (0-18)
<i>South Division</i>	
Ashland	26-6 (14-3)
Hillsdale	19-10 (11-6)
Findlay	24-8 (11-6)
Wayne State	11-14 (6-11)
Gannon	14-18 (4-13)
Mercyhurst	6-23 (2-15)

The following are previews on each of the GLIAC's 13 women's volleyball sponsoring institutions:

Ashland University: Head coach Connie Surowicz, in her third season at AU, got the Eagles pointed in the right direction a year ago. In 2004, AU finished 26-6, won the GLIAC South Division championship and advanced to the NCAA Division II playoffs for the first time in school history. Surowicz (33-28 at Ashland, 316-157 in 13 years at the collegiate level) must find a way to replace GLIAC player of the year Carrie Ritchie. The Eagles bring back 6-2 setter Lynsey Warren, a first team All-GLIAC choice and the region's freshman of the year, plus Mary Kate Glowe, a 5-10 sophomore outside hitter who was second on the team in kills (428) last season. Glowe, an honorable mention All-GLIAC selection, also had a school record 476 digs. Natalie Kapteyn, a 6-0 senior middle hitter, and Angie Tolland, a 5-11 senior middle hitter, are two other returning starters who played key roles last season.

Ferris State University: The FSU women's volleyball team welcomes back six starters and 12 letterwinners from last year's GLIAC Championship team. While the Bulldogs must replace four-year starting setter Ashley Green and 2004 American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA) All-America Second-Team honoree Karla Fairbanks, the cupboard certainly isn't bare. A five-member senior class includes two-time (2003-04) Daktronics Division II All-Great Lakes Region Second Team libero Brittny Godlewski, middle hitters Lauren Heine and Becky Thureau, setter Emily Clouse along with outside hitter Sarah Miller. The Bulldogs also return junior outside hitter Danielle Baucher, who tallied honorable mention AVCA All-Region kudos and second-team All-GLIAC recognition a year ago. Baucher led Ferris with 416 digs in 2004 and also posted the team's second-highest kills figure with 340 total. Head coach Tia Brandel-Wilhelm enters her 10th Bulldog campaign with a 308-116 (.726) career coaching mark, including a 190-96 (.664) ledger at Ferris State following last season's 25-7 overall finish. Ferris State, which reached the NCAA-II Great Lakes Regional Tournament for the 12th time last year, also won the GLIAC Tournament Championship for the first time in school history. The Bulldogs are ranked 17th in the CSTV/AVCA Division II Coaches Preseason Top 25 Poll.

University of Findlay: The University of Findlay Oilers finished the 2004 season at 24-8. The Oilers will be trying for their seventh straight year of 20 wins or more in 2005. This is the second longest streak in the GLIAC behind GVSU. Coach Wick Colchagoff enters his eighth season. He is the most successful coach in the history of the program and has guided the Oilers to 179-81 (.688) record during his tenure. The Oilers return 2 All-GLIAC performers from 2004. Junior, setter, Kelly Byrnes (1st team All-GLIAC and AVCA ALL-Region) will return to run the offensive. She has her favorite target from 2004 2nd team All-GLIAC Junior, outside hitter, Erin Puthoff as a mainstay of the offensive. With over 500 digs in 2004, Senior Ann Dzierwa will anchor the defensive at the libero position. The Oilers open the season with #1 preseason ranked The University of Nebraska, Kearney on August 25th.

Gannon University: Gannon hopes to rebound from its first losing season since 2001 after posting a 14-18 record last season. Seventh-year head coach Michele Mason (95-73 career record) has guided the Lady Knights to the GLIAC Final Four twice in the last three seasons, including an appearance in the title game in 2002. She ranks second all-time at Gannon in coaching victories (95) and winning percentage (.565). Six letterwinners and three starters return from last year's squad. Junior outside hitter Katie Flower (Hudson, Ohio/Twinsburg) and senior middle hitter Mary Horvat (Lansford, Pa./Marian) headline the returnees. Flower was named to the All-GLIAC second team in 2004 after finishing fourth among GLIAC players in digs per game (4.69) and ninth in kills per game (3.61). Horvat is the only senior on the roster and hopes to provide leadership for Gannon's young team that features eight freshmen. Horvat recorded 244 kills and 69 blocks last season. The Lady Knights open the 2005 season August 26-27 at the Indiana (Pa.) Invitational.

Grand Valley State: Grand Valley State, who finished 27-7 overall and 16-2 in the GLIAC, will return nine letterwinners and three starters to its 2005 squad. GVSU will be led by AVCA All-American Honorable Mention honoree senior middle blocker Tracy Kirk. Kirk led the Lakers and ranked fourth in the GLIAC with a .334 hitting percentage and averaged 3.55 kills per game. Seniors middle blocker Lauren Hanson (2.82 kills, 1.03 blocks) and outside hitter Tina Tromblay (3.44 digs, 2.77 kills) will also be key contributors to the team this season. Head coach Deanne Scanlon is set to begin her 11th season at the helm of the Lakers and has tallied a GLIAC record of 152-40 (.792) and an overall record of 262-84 (.757).

Hillsdale College: The Hillsdale College volleyball team had an historic campaign in 2004, and is hoping to make a little more history in 2005. With six players returning who got significant playing time, along with a pair of talented incoming freshmen, the Chargers have high expectations this season. Head coach Chris Gravel (career record 163-132) heads into his 10th season coaching the Chargers, and has what he calls one of his most talented teams. The team is strong up front, with returning middle and outside hitters Becky Grzegorski (First Team All-Region and All-GLIAC), Taryn Rudland (Second Team All-GLIAC) and Katherine Jones, the team has a lethal trio of six-footers in the middle. They were the team's top three hitters and blockers last year, and all will be juniors this season. Freshman Stephanie Booms joins Hillsdale after being named Miss Volleyball in the state of Michigan for the 2004-05 season at Marysville High School.

Lake Superior State University: Lake Superior State returns eight letterwinners from last year's 8-22 squad and will rely heavily on three red-shirt freshmen and a couple true freshmen. Top returnees include fifth-year seniors Vanessa Vincent, a two-time All-GLIAC Honorable Mention selectee, and Ashlee Buckley. Both outside hitters have a chance to reach the 1,000-kill milestone this season. Blocking leaders Amy Molenaar, a senior, and Ashley Wyers, a junior, also return. The Lakers expect to have more depth at every position, but will be looking at new faces at the setter and libero positions. LSSU coach Mark Engle is entering his 11th season and has a career record of 95-210.

Mercyhurst College: The Mercyhurst College women's volleyball team hopes to rebound from a disappointing 6-23 overall record and a 2-15 conference mark in 2004. The Lakers will be guided by first year head coach, Ryan Patton. Patton, who assisted last year, takes over for Missy Soboleski who left after six years at the helm. Although Mercyhurst must replace five players, including Second Team All-Conference MH Lyndsi Hughes, it does return nine letterwinners and five starters. Among those Patton will count on senior setter Kari Clapham, 2004 GLIAC Honorable Mention (114 kills, 973 assists), sophomore MH Christine Nisbet (124 kills, 69 blocks), and sophomore LS Kristin Peterson (175 kills). The trio also combined for 71 service aces.

Michigan Tech University: Michigan Tech, who finished 11-20 overall and 8-10 in the GLIAC, will return 10 letterwinners and six starters to its 2005 team. The Huskies will be led by First Team All-GLIAC selection senior middle hitter Julie Motz. Motz finished the 2004 regular season ranked 12th in the nation in blocks per game (1.48) and 21st in hitting percentage (.383). Senior leftside hitter Taryn Franznick (2.25 kills) and senior libero Jamie Orłowski (3.95 digs) will also be called upon to help carry the load this season. Head coach Krista Mikesch enters her seventh season behind the Huskies bench and has recorded a GLIAC record of 45-64 (.413) and an overall record of 84-104 (.447).

Northern Michigan University: The Northern Michigan University volleyball team is coming off a trip to the NCAA II Elite Eight, a 24-7 overall record and a 13-5 mark in the GLIAC in 2004. NMU finished the 2004 season in third place in the GLIAC North. The 'Cats were bounced in the GLIAC Tournament by Ferris State in the first round, but came back to run the table at the NCAA II Great Lakes Regional Tournament. Qi Wang takes over for Jim Moore who left NMU for the University of Oregon. Wang was 133-17 at Truman State in four years. He led the Bulldogs to a 37-1 mark in 2004 with their only loss coming against Barry in the championship match of the NCAA II National Tournament. The 'Cats return three starters and five letterwinners to the squad. Andrea Smith and Holly Greenamyre are the top two hitters from last year who return. Smith was second in 2004 with 347 kills (3.34 k/game) and Greenamyre had 302 (2.82 k/game). Brittany McGowan, the top setter on the team last year as a freshman, returns for her sophomore campaign. She had 756 assists in 2004 (6.94 a/game). Greenamyre led the 'Cats in 2004 with 15 block solos. Liz Kohn, the Libero of the squad, returns for her final season at NMU. She had a team-high 416 digs in 2004 (3.68 d/game).

Northwood University: The Northwood volleyball team returns nine letterwinners from last season's team that reached the finals of the NCAA Great Lakes Regional. Second year head coach Tim Koth (21-10 in 2004) will bring back four starters, led by GLIAC Freshman of the Year Gorana Maricic. She ranked among the NCAA leaders in aces (0.66 per game – 19th) and kills per game (4.68 per game – 27th). The Timberwolves also return senior middle blocker Dragana Todorovic, sophomore outside hitter Lana Sorokina, sophomore setter Marija Zivanovic. The Timberwolves will open their 2005 season at the Holiday Inn Invitational, hosted by Ferris State, August 26-27.

Saginaw Valley State: Head Coach Will Stanton begins his third year at Saginaw Valley State in search of building blocks after struggling through two tough seasons in 2003 and 2004. Out with the old and in with the new has been the motto as Stanton brought in nine newcomers to try and rite the ship. The Cardinals welcome back senior Julie Ritsema in the middle. Ritsema will serve as team captain and is the lone senior on a very young squad. Also back are setters Amy Howard and Jessica Conley, who split time last season with Howard earning more playing time towards the end of the season. SVSU also gets Laura Shultz back after missing the last third of the season due to an injury.

Wayne State: Although Wayne State has four starters returning from last year's 11-14 roster, second-year head coach Ernie Gilbert is also looking for nine newcomers to strongly contribute to WSU's first winning season since 1998. The Warriors have five players back who have totaled 1025 career games in the Green & Gold including senior middle blocker Elisa Joris who starts her second season in Detroit. A Second Team All-Great Lakes Region selection, Joris led the GLIAC in blocks and was fourth in the country with 1.73 per game. Also back for her senior season is outside hitter Megan Smolen who is on pace to finish her career in the top five in kills, attempts, aces and digs at WSU. With the recruiting class, Gilbert added power and height in the off-season with a pair of big-hitting transfers Jordan Peek (6-4, RS-SO) and Nicole Jackson (6-0, JR) along with redshirt sophomore Karri Kuczajda (5-10, OH) who had to sit out last season after transferring. Also returning are seniors Kerri Royer (6-0, S) and Kelita Sinclair (5-11, MB) as well as junior Kristi Pieper (5-8, OH). The Warriors begin the season Sept. 2-3 at the Holiday Inn Classic in California, Pa.