



Jeff Ligney
Director of Media Relations

4271 Zander Dr.
 Bay City, MI 48706
 Voice: (989) 686-4703 Fax: (989) 686-4713
 E-mail: jlligney@svsu.edu

21 March 2002
 For immediate release

GLIAC Softball Coaches Pick Grand Valley State for 2002 Title *Defending Champs Earn Five First-Place Votes in First-Ever GLIAC Preseason Poll*

BAY CITY, Mich. -- The head softball coaches of the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (GLIAC) chose Grand Valley State University to win the 2002 title in the league's inaugural preseason poll.

Grand Valley State, the defending GLIAC champion, garnered five first-place votes and had a total of 95 points. Wayne State University, tallied five first-place nods but totaled 91 points to place second.

Ashland University finished in third place with 86 points and earned one first-place vote. Gannon University finished fourth with 72 points.

Seven points are all that separated fifth, sixth and seventh places. The University of Findlay tallied 59 points, five ahead of Ferris State University (54 points) and seven in front of Saginaw Valley State University (52).

Hillsdale College (36 points) beat out Northwood University (28) for eighth place. Lake Superior State University (19) and Mercyhurst College (15) round out the poll.

Each of the GLIAC's 11 coaches ranked the teams in the conference, but were not allowed to vote for their own team. The first-place team on the ballot received ten points, while the second-place team received nine points, etc.

The following are previews on each of the 11 GLIAC softball teams:

Grand Valley State University: Grand Valley will defend its GLIAC championship after a 48-7-1 season in 2001 that saw the Lakers advance to their third consecutive NCAA Regional tournament. Coach Doug Woods has four straight seasons with 40-plus wins and was named GLIAC Coach of the Year for the fourth time in his tenure. First-Team All-GLIAC selection Amber Castonguay and Second Team All-GLIAC pick Jen Mackson will lead the pitching staff. Last year the two combined for 42 wins, an earned run average of 0.88, 19 shutouts, and 264 strikeouts. The offense will be led by senior left fielder Kelly Burt and junior shortstop Kerri Jonas, both of whom garnered All-GLIAC recognition a year ago.

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2002 GLIAC Softball Preseason Coaches Poll

<i>School (first-place votes)</i>	<i>Points</i>
1. Grand Valley State (5)	95
2. Wayne State (5)	91
3. Ashland (1)	86
4. Gannon	72
5. Findlay	59
6. Ferris State	54
7. Saginaw Valley State	52
8. Hillsdale	36
9. Northwood	28
10. Lake Superior State	19
11. Mercyhurst	15

2001 GLIAC Softball Final Standings*

<i>School</i>	<i>Record (GLIAC)</i>	<i>T</i>
1. Grand Valley State.....	48-7-1 (16-4)	1
2. Wayne State.....	37-20 (15-5)	2
3. Gannon	40-14 (13-7)	5
4. Ashland.....	39-20 (12-8)	4
Saginaw Valley State.	23-27-1 (9-10)	3
6. Findlay.....	25-19 (12-7)	5
7. Ferris State.....	22-23 (13-7)	7
8. Northwood.....	14-40 (6-14)	7
9. Hillsdale	25-19-1 (7-13)	9
10. Lake Superior State....	11-31-1 (4-16)	9
11. Mercyhurst.....	5-35 (2-18)	9

* - GLIAC Softball final standings are an average of regular season and conference tournament finishes.

T - GLIAC Tournament Finish

Wayne State University: Head coach Gary Bryce enters his 21st year as head coach of the Wayne State softball team. Bryce has compiled a career-record of 650-422-5 over that span, which included a 37-20 mark in 2001. Senior All-American Kelly Kashmerick will lead the Warrior bats. Kashmerick, who plays centerfield, hit .404 with three homeruns, 25 runs batted in and 82 total hits to lead the team last season. Junior Connie Milroth is one of WSU's top returning pitchers. Milroth posted a 20-10 record last season with a 2.34 ERA and 83 strikeouts.

Ashland University: The strength of this year's AU team will be in the battery. Sophomore pitcher Josie Nelson led the country in strikeouts per seven innings a year ago while going 19-11 with an 0.94 ERA. She piled up a school record 296 strikeouts. Behind the plate, head coach Sheilah Gulas returns one of the region's best players in senior catcher Alicia Longstreth. A third-team All-American and a first-team Verizon Academic All-American last year, Longstreth hit a league-best .410 with four homers and 28 RBI.

Gannon University: Gannon aims for its 12th consecutive winning season under second-year head coach Beth Pierce. The Lady Knights lost only two position starters from last year's 40-14 squad that narrowly missed an invitation to the NCAA Tournament. Heather Ford, the 2001 GLIAC Freshman of the Year, anchors the Gannon pitching staff. The sophomore received All-GLIAC and All-Region accolades last year after posting a 20-3 record. She broke Gannon's single-season strikeout record (204) and was one victory shy of the school's win record. Megan Campbell will lead the Gannon offensive attack. Campbell led last year's team in batting average (.365) and hits (57).

University of Findlay: Coach Heather Rinkevich is looking to build on the team's success of a year ago by returning eight starters, five of which were starters from last year's 25-19 squad. Senior Nicole Frazier and Junior Stacy Sharp will be leading the way on the mound. Frazier is coming off a 17-3 season. Her 1.24 ERA was fifth best in the conference last year. Sharp, GLIAC Freshman-of-the-Year in 2000, will join Frazier as the workhorses of the pitching staff. When Sharp is not on the mound she will be patrolling centerfield for the Oilers. She hit .282 with 20 RBI (third best on the team) and had 17 walks last season.

Ferris State University: Competitive depth is the keyword as sixth-year head coach Keri Becker welcomes back eight returnees from last season's 22-23 team. FSU, which features 10 freshmen on this season's roster, returns four of its five top hitters and a pair of starting pitchers from a season ago in senior Jennifer Colvin (7-7, 2.11 ERA, five saves) and junior Amanda Opbroek (6-8, 2.20 ERA). At the plate, Opbroek (.257) had 18 extra-base hits which included a team-leading 14 doubles -- two shy of tying the school's single-season record. Senior Casey Scully, who posted a team-best .314 batting average last season, will occupy first base.

Saginaw Valley State University: The Cardinals will look to five seniors to lead the team in 2002 after finishing fourth in the conference last season. Senior Carrie Shay (6-11, 2.15 ERA) will anchor the pitching staff, while Brandi Srda (.292, 16 RBI) and Whitney Babcock (.293, 26 RBI) will provide the offense. Head coach Fred Neering enters the season needing just 22 wins to tie Art Tolfree for the most career victories (170) in the program's history.

Hillsdale College: Coach Jay Jondro's Hillsdale squad is looking to improve on a ninth-place GLIAC finish in 2001. Senior Sarah DeAngelo is the Chargers' top returning pitcher after posting a 13-9 mark last season with a 1.77 ERA. Junior outfielder Gretchen Messenger led the team in hitting with a .333 average in 2001 while posting team-bests in hits (41), RBI (24), doubles (9), and home runs (3).

Northwood University: The Timberwolves are looking to improve under Coach Heather Bruder, who begins her second season. Senior centerfielder Tiffany Honey (.337, 29 runs) leads the team after a stellar junior campaign. Newcomer Jackie Ruma is the front runner for the number one starting pitcher job. Ruma will also play first base and bat second in the lineup. Senior Michelle Kistner (.217, 5 RBI) is hoping for big things as she makes the transition from outfield to shortstop. Junior Heather Vernes will also be a constant on the mound as the number two starter.

Lake Superior State University: The Lakers are led by co-head coaches Don Myers and Karen Sutton-Boger, the tandem that has led LSSU in each of the last 13 seasons. The Lakers boast a young team with just one senior, standout pitcher Jean Pergande. The success of the Lakers is in the lone senior's hands as she looks to round out her record-setting career at LSSU. She has the most wins of any pitcher and is geared to deliver the Lakers to the top of the GLIAC. Brooke Hall, a second-team All-GLIAC selection last season, is solid behind the plate, while Juniors Caitlin Swearengin and Bridget LaMarre add depth in the field and big bats at the plate. LaMarre was an All-GLIAC selection in 2000.

Mercyhurst College: After a rebuilding year in 2001, third-year, Coach Carl Triola's Laker softball team hopes to move up the GLIAC ladder. This year's pitching staff contains more depth than previous years and returns everyone from last season. The top returnee for the Lakers will be sophomore Stacy Pastva (1.62 ERA), an honorable mention All-GLIAC selection in 2001. Returning to the infield will be four-year starter Dayna Shelkey (.218, 4 RBI) at shortstop and senior Nicole Papania (.175, 4 RBI) who will get the nod at second base.

GLIAC softball teams open league play on Friday, Mar. 29. For more information about GLIAC softball please check the GLIAC web site at: www.gliac.org or contact Jeff Ligney, GLIAC Director of Media Relations.