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GLIAC Volleyball Coaches Pick Grand Valley State and Findlay for 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 received 36 points and all six first-place votes it was eligible for. Northwood University garnered 30 points and beat out Ferris State University for second place in the division by four points, though the Bulldogs earned the remaining first-place vote. Northern Michigan University finished fourth with 22 points.

Michigan Tech University placed fifth in the division with 15 points, followed by Lake Superior State University (11 points) and Saginaw Valley State University (7).

Findlay, last season's regular-season South Division winner, received 24 points and four first-place votes in the poll. Hillsdale College edged out Mercyhurst College by one point (20-19) for second place.

Gannon University tallied 19 points to finish fourth while Ashland University and Wayne State University tied for fifth with seven points each.

The GLIAC proved to be one of Division II's toughest conferences last season, sending four teams -- Grand Valley State, Northwood, Findlay and Northern Michigan -- to the NCAA II Great Lakes Region Tournament. Grand Valley State emerged as the regional champion and hosted the "Elite Eight," Division II's national championship tournament, reaching the semifinals before bowing out.

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.

2002 GLIAC Preseason Volleyball Coaches Poll

North Division

<i>School (first-place votes)</i>	<i>Points</i>
1. Grand Valley State (6)	36
2. Northwood	30
3. Ferris State (1)	26
4. Northern Michigan	22
5. Michigan Tech	15
6. Lake Superior State.....	11
7. Saginaw Valley State	7

South Division

1. Findlay (4)	24
2. Hillsdale (1)	20
3. Mercyhurst (1)	19
4. Gannon.....	13
5. Ashland	7
Wayne State	7

2001 GLIAC Volleyball Final Standings

North Division

<i>School</i>	<i>Record (GLIAC)</i>
Grand Valley State	30-5 (17-1)
Northwood	25-9 (12-6)
Ferris State	21-11 (12-6)
Northern Michigan.....	22-10 (12-6)
Michigan Tech	18-12 (9-9)
Lake Superior State.....	16-13 (5-13)
Saginaw Valley State	10-25 (3-15)

South Division

Findlay	29-7 (15-2)
Mercyhurst	19-16 (10-7)
Hillsdale	20-12 (9-8)
Gannon.....	12-13 (7-10)
Wayne State	6-21 (2-16)
Ashland	8-23 (1-16)

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GLIAC volleyball teams open play on Friday, Aug. 30 with conference play beginning Tuesday, Sept. 17. After four years at the Kellogg Arena in Battle Creek, Mich., the GLIAC Volleyball Championship Tournament will return to the site of the team with the best regular season conference record. The tournament will take place on Nov. 14-16.

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

Ashland University: Head coach Sue Uebel, in her 24th season at AU, and the three seniors on this year's team, will spearhead the charge as the Eagles hope to make the GLIAC tournament for the first time since 1997. Middle hitter Shawndra Thompson, a four-year starter, leads the veteran contingent. The other two seniors, right-side hitter Lora Wisenbarger and outside hitter Leigh Greenfelder, are returning starters who played through nagging injuries a year ago. As for the underclassmen, junior setter Becky Myher is coming off of a breakout season. She had 104 service aces a year ago, the second best single-season total in school history.

Ferris State University: Seventh-year head coach Tia Brandel-Wilhelm is optimistic entering the 2002 campaign as eight letterwinners and five starters return from last season's GLIAC Tournament runner-up finish. The Bulldogs, who are embarking on their 30th anniversary campaign, finished 21-11 overall a year ago and tied for second place in the conference's North Division. Senior middle hitter Alaina Olds (Kingsley), a 2001 American Volleyball Coaches Association All-Great Lakes Region First-Team selection, leads a talented and experienced unit. Olds led the Bulldogs in both kills (405) and total blocks (148) last season. Fellow senior Stephanie Speed (Bothell, Wash.) tallied a team-high 360 digs last year and earned honorable mention all-conference accolades.

University of Findlay: Head Coach Wick Colchagoff will have an experienced squad with seven seniors, who were all on the 1999 NAIA 5th place National finishing team. Jill Zwiebel (St. Marys, Ohio) heads up the class. The second team All-GLIAC Middle Hitter led Oilers in blocks last season and was second on the team in kills. Blocking should be a strength of the Oilers as Jill Duling (Sr, OH, Columbus Grove, Ohio), honorable mention All-GLIAC, who was second on the team in blocks and first in hitting percentage, also returns for her senior year. Jennifer Bostelman (Sr, DS, Antwert, OH) leads the Oilers in the backcourt. She had 89 aces last season and is currently in 6th place in Oiler history.

Gannon University: Fourth-year head coach Michele Mason and the 2002 edition of the Lady Knights have one thing on their mind: making it back to the GLIAC Tournament. Gannon failed to qualify for the post-season tournament last season for the first time under Mason after finishing 12-13 overall and 7-10 in league play. Junior Mandi Altomari and senior Katie O'Connor are Gannon's top returning hitters. Altomari, an outside hitter, was second on the team in kills last season with 299 and finished fifth in the GLIAC in digs with 3.55 per game. O'Connor, a middle hitter, earned All-GLIAC honorable mention accolades in 2001 after recording 289 kills, 205 digs, and 97 blocks. Jess Deemer will run the offense from the setter position. The junior was fifth in the GLIAC last season with 10.04 assists per game.

Grand Valley State: Over the last several years, Grand Valley State volleyball has staked its claim as one of the best volleyball schools in the country. The Lakers are the only school in the nation to make trips to the Elite Eight the last two seasons. A year ago, GVSU advanced to the NCAA DII Final Four and finished with a 29-5 record. With all six starters returning in 2002 the expectations are just as high. Head Coach Deanne Scanlon starts her eighth season at the helm for GVSU. Scanlon has tallied a 173-66 record in her first seven years in Allendale. Leading the way for the 2002 Lakers will be four seniors who have been battle tested and are ready to take the team to the top. Carly Miller became just the second Laker to earn AVCA First Team All-American plaudits and is on pace to break the career kills record this season. Miller led the GLIAC in hitting percentage and kills in 2001 and was named to the NCAA Elite Eight All-Tournament team. Chara Fehsenfeld earned Verizon Academic All-American honors as well as being named to the All-Region team along with senior teammate Traci Skrzypek. Lisa Cramer adds some depth and leadership to the backrow and should make major contributions. Six other returners from last year's squad and five solid newcomers give Scanlon a team she believes can compete for a national championship.

Hillsdale College: Eight letterwinners return for head coach Chris Gravel's squad, including Second Team All-GLIAC performer Brook Brown, who finished third on the team in kills (226) and second in blocks (84) last season. Junior Sarah Spaulding returns after ranking fourth on the team in kills (191), first in service aces (47) and third in digs (226). The Chargers will welcome the additions of Busra Kurtuldu, a junior transfer from Turkey, and freshmen Brook Neptune and Sumer Way, who were both All-League players as preps. Hillsdale will open the season with tournaments at Wheeling Jesuit, Madonna University and Grand Valley State before heading into the league season against Wayne State on Sept. 17.

Lake Superior State University: Coach Mark Engle's team returns 11 letterwinners who are set to improve on last year's 16-14 record, the Lakers' first winning mark since 1988. Senior outside hitter Ericka Marcus has led LSSU in kills two of the last three years and is a solid all-around player. Senior outside hitter Elaina Hall returns for a fifth season after recovering from a knee injury. She was off to a hot start in 2001-02 before going down five matches into the season. Outside hitter Kirsten Vroman, middle blocker Carrie Ash and setter/outside hitter Leslie Newcomer round out the seniors, while outside hitters Courtney Dusnik and Ashlee Buckley, and middle blocker Kristy Kelly are sophomores who played extensively in 2001-02. Buckley (229) and Kelly (204) were second and third on the team, respectively, in kills behind Marcus (292). Kelly also led LSSU in total blocks with 68.

Mercyhurst College: Last season, unheralded Mercyhurst came from nowhere to record its finest record in eight years and its first winning season in the GLIAC since it joined the conference in 1995. Head coach Missy Soboleski's team finished with an overall mark of 19-16 and a conference record of 10-7, good for second place in the South, and the Lady Lakers first-ever berth in the conference tournament. The coaching staff will rely on several returning players to shoulder much of the load this fall. Junior MH Jenn Barba, senior OH Leslie Macko, and sophomore OH Lyndsi Hughes must play to their capabilities again this season if the Lady Lakers are to continue their improvement. The trio combined for 1160 kills, 788 digs, and 266 blocks last season. Other returnees who saw plenty of action in 2001 are senior DS Carrie Borowski and senior MH/OH Mary Beck. New players include junior MH/OH Kaili Klieman, a transfer from Oakland University; S/OH Kari Clapham; MH Brittney Heuser; OH Heather Rejc; and DS/Libero Kelsie Smith.

Michigan Tech University: With nine underclassmen, including seven freshmen among its 13-player roster, head coach Krista Mikesch will have a young squad this season. The Huskies are coming off a solid 18-12 mark in 2001, however, four of the six starters from that team, and six letterwinners all total, have departed. The two starters that do return bring a lot to the table. The team's lone senior — leftside hitter Sarah Ahnen — has been a regular in the Huskies lineup since arriving on the scene back in 1999. She has played in all but one match in her career and 94 all total. A year ago, Ahnen contributed 2.70 kills per game, third on the club and just .08 per game short of the number two position. In addition, she was one of the team's top defensive players with 3.13 digs per game. She also was credited with 29 total blocks, 21 service aces, and 23 assists. The other returning starter is junior co-captain and setter Kristin Klock. A two-year starter, Klock played in all 30 matches last year and averaged 10.37 assists per game. She was also a stalwart defensively, leading the team in digs with 3.46 per game.

Northern Michigan University: The NMU squad will have a different look for the 2002 season. Scott Sandel left in July to become the head coach at Boise State University. Tracy Hruska, who has been with the program for three years as the assistant coach, was named the interim coach for the season. Two seniors will lead the way for the Wildcats as Beth Laveen and Meaghan Kimball will lead the squad. Laveen was a First Team All-GLIAC and All-Great Lakes Region selection last year as she led the 'Cats with 446 kills (3.69 k/game), 32 solo blocks and 85 assisted blocks. Sophomore, Kelli McCune who led the squad with 1,413 assists in 2001 is back in the fold for the Wildcats. Aimee Dewitte, another sophomore, will play at the middle blocking position as she had 232 kills in 2001 (2.61 k/game). The Wildcats welcome five freshmen and a junior college transfer to add depth to the squad. The Wildcats are hoping to be in the GLIAC mix after the dust has settled on the 2002 season.

Northwood University: Head Coach Jeff Williams and his staff have built Northwood University volleyball into one of the elite programs in the country and look to continue that success after a 2001 GLIAC Tournament title and a berth in the NCAA Great Lakes Regional where NU bowed out in the semifinals. The cornerstone of the team is setter and two-time Second Team All-American Amy Gruszynski. She enters 2002 having played in 93 matches during her career and registered 3,769 assists. In 2001, Gruszynski posted a career-best 217 kills and a .370 hitting percentage, second best in the GLIAC. She ranked third in the league in assists per game (10.86). Junior outside hitter Laura Zaskowski led Northwood with 431 kills a year ago, ranking sixth in the GLIAC in kills per game (3.62). Laura's defense also improved from her freshman year as she registered 306 digs. Sophomore Sladjana Vasiljevic burst onto the scene and garnered Great Lakes Region and GLIAC Freshman of the Year honors. The 6'3" standout from Sarajevo, Bosnia ranked second on the team with 333 kills and a .357 hitting percentage. In addition, Sladjana led the squad with 54 aces and 105 total blocks.

Saginaw Valley State: Coach Bob Sells Lady Cardinal squad made a lot of progress last year, despite a 10-25 record. With just two seniors on last year's roster, the Cardinals were young and played very inspired volleyball. The 2002 season looks to be the same with lone senior, Captain Jamie Reed (Saginaw, Mich./Heritage), being the key for the Cardinals success this year. Reed will be the returning setter and is 149 digs away from the all time career dig record for the Cardinals. She is also a team leader in service aces, assists and serving percentage. She will be dishing out assists to fellow captain, junior, Valarie Lyczkowski, (Temperance, Mich.), who will be anchoring the offense from the middle position. Lyczkowski is a team leader in block assists and is the Cardinals best passer in serve receive. Opposite Val in the middle will be sophomore Kelly Samalik (Freeland, Mich.), who had a very solid performance in her freshman year. Samalik led the team with 19 solo blocks in 2001.

Wayne State: Wayne State University first year head coach Limin Jin (Lee-mean Gene) is set for the challenges of building a young, new team. Jin takes over a squad that finished fifth in the GLIAC South Division (2-15 league record). Warrior top returners include junior co-captain Rebecca Hague (Leamington, Ont./Leamington Secondary) at the net as the Warriors' starting setter. The 5-10 junior recorded 309 assists in 2001, an average of 7.02 per game. The top returning hitter is senior Jaime Banners (Shelby Twp., Mich./Eisenhower) who is coming off a season in which she recorded 130 kills in 71 games. The other co-captain, Allison Jurasek (Clinton, Mich./Clinton), will make her WSU debut after transferring from the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga and redshirting last season. While at UTC, the 6-0 senior had 159 kills and 78 total blocks in 100 games while playing the middle blocker position in 2000.