Bluffton picked as frontrunner in HCAC softball championship chase

Greenwood, Ind. – Bluffton University’s softball team, the defending Heartland Collegiate Athletic Conference champion, has been selected the preseason favorite to repeat as champion in a vote of the HCAC’s eight head coaches. The Beavers collected 62 total points in the poll and six first-place votes.

Bluffton tops the ‘Top Four’ poll and is followed by Defiance College with 47 total points. The Yellow Jackets also picked up a first-place vote in the poll. The College of Mount St. Joseph is picked to finish in third place with 46 total points and Transylvania University, a two-time conference champion, rounds out the poll with 44 total points.

Bluffton is coming off a 26-8 season and captured the HCAC championship with a 12-2 conference record. The Beavers were paced by the HCAC ‘Most Valuable Player’, Sarah Betts (Bryan, Ohio/Bryan). She is a junior this season and will be looking to match last year’s outstanding performance. Betts finished 2004 with a 25-7 overall record and an earned run average of 0.74. She struck out 273 hitters in 209 innings of work and earned Division III third team NFCA/Louisville Slugger all-American status. Also returning this season is senior outfielder Allison Lange (Archbold, Ohio/Archbold) who was named to the Division III NFCA/Louisville Slugger all-American second team last season. She hit .522 with 14 doubles, five home runs, and 27 runs batted in. In her first year on the job, head coach Holly Spann was honored in 2004 by earning HCAC ‘Co-Coach of the Year’ honors. She will look to a strong returning nucleus to help the Beavers grab a second consecutive championship.

Defiance head coach Kary Kankey was also named HCAC ‘Co-Coach of the Year’ after leading her Yellow Jackets to the HCAC tournament title and a second place regular season finish. Defiance was 22-19-1 overall and 9-5 in conference play last season. The Yellow Jackets advanced to the NCAA tournament and will look to return this season behind several key returning players. Leading the way will be senior outfielder Kacy VanderHorst (Celina, Ohio/Celina). She led the team with a .355 batting average last year and collected seven doubles and 18 runs batted in. Sophomore pitcher Alicia Allen (Grafton, Ohio/Midview) will also be a key returnee. Allen was 6-4 in the circle in 2004 with a 1.32 earned run average.

Mount St. Joseph will be looking to stay in the championship race with a senior laden ball club. The Lions will be led by seniors Kati Stroub (New Richmond, Ohio/New Richmond), Carrie Higgins (Cincinnati, Ohio/Seton), and Annie Neumann (Cincinnati, Ohio/Seton). Stroub, a pitcher, was 14-11 with a 1.78 earned run average last season. Neumann batted .405 with 30 runs scored and Higgins contributed at the plate with a .346 average. She had 24 runs batted in. The Lions were 19-17 overall and 8-6 in the HCAC.
Transylvania will have a strong duo of returning bats in the lineup. Third baseman Katie Frommeyer (Indianapolis, Ind.) will be returning for her senior season in 2005 and sophomore first baseman Andrea Fitzpatrick (Bowling Green, Ky.) returns as the 2004 HCAC ‘Freshman of the Year’. Frommeyer batted .314 with eight home runs and 23 runs batted in. Fitzpatrick blistered the ball at a .376 clip and had 13 home runs and 33 runs batted in. Transy will look to improve on last season’s 23-13 overall record and 7-6 mark in the HCAC.

The HCAC Preseason Coaches’ ‘Top Four’ is a poll of the eight conference head coaches. A complete poll is conducted with the top four teams in total points released as the ‘Top Four’.

**2005 HCAC Softball Coaches Preseason Top Four**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Points (first place votes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Bluffton</td>
<td>62 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Defiance</td>
<td>47 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Mt. St. Joseph</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Transylvania</td>
<td>44</td>
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**2005 Softball Players to Watch**

**Anderson:** Amber Hall – P (Sr., Noblesville, Ind./Noblesville), Jami Lawson – OF (So., Pendleton, Ind./Pendleton Heights), Lesli Randall – OF (So., Muncie, Ind./Delta), Dawn Sanders – 1B (So., Pendleton, Ind./Pendleton Heights)

**Bluffton:** Sarah Betts – P/OF (Jr., Bryan, Ohio/Bryan), Allison Lange – OF (Sr., Archbold, Ohio/Archbold), Lane Leedy – IF (Sr., Bellville, Ohio/Clear Fork), Mandy Snider – SS (Sr., Wapakoneta, Ohio/Wapakoneta)

**Defiance:** Alicia Allen – P/OF (So., Grafton, Ohio/Midview), Chris Moreo – SS (Sr., Delphos, Ohio/Jefferson), Kalette Peters – 1B (Sr., Arcanum, OH/Franklin Monroe), Kacy VanderHorst – OF (Sr., Celina, Ohio/Celina)

**Franklin:** Jill Carson – OF (So., Plainfield, Ind./Plainfield), Danielle Gibbs – CF (Jr., Cloverdale, Ind./South Putnam), Megan Gohlke – P/IF (St. Joseph, Mich./St. Joseph), Kristen Karrle – OF/DH (Hobart, Ind./Wheeler), Heather Watson – 3B (Jr., Ninevah, Ind./Brown County)

**Hanover:** Jill Boys – P/IF (So., New Richmond, Ohio/New Richmond), Stephanie Piontek – P/IF (Mason, Ohio/Mason), Monica Pogue – IF/C (Louisville, Ky./Seneca)

**Manchester:** Melissa Brown – P/IF (Veedersberg, Ind./Attica), Holly McEathron – C (Jr., Mill Creek, IN/LaPorte), Angie Pippenger – OF (Sr., Elkhart, Ind./Elkhart Central), Andrea Shell – OF/C (Sr., Flint, Mich./Flint Central)

**Mount St. Joseph:** Carrie Higgins – 3B (Sr., Cincinnati, Ohio/Seton), Annie Neumann – OF (Sr., Cincinnati, Ohio/Seton), Kati Stroubl – P (Sr., New Richmond, Ohio/New Richmond), Megan Vincent – OF (So., Fairfield, Ohio/Fairfield)

**Transylvania:** Andrea Fitzpatrick – 1B/UT (So., Bowling Green, Ky.), Katie Frommeyer – 3B/C (Sr., Indianapolis, Ind.), Lyndsey Mayberry – P/OF (So., Villa Hills, Ky.), Amy Meikel – P/1B (Jr., Lexington, KY)

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