



# 2016-17 Big West Women's Basketball

Big West Conference - 2 Corporate Park, Suite 206, Irvine, CA 92606

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## **LBSU Favored To Claim Big West Women's Basketball Crown**

**IRVINE, Calif.** – Long Beach State finds itself in the eye of the coaches and media this preseason as the club was selected as the league favorite in polls conducted with both groups.

The 49ers claimed 73 points and five first place votes in the coaches poll, while also collecting 157 points and nine first place votes in the media ballot. LBSU is no stranger to winning as the club has improved its win total in each of the last six seasons, including back-to-back 20-win seasons for the first time since 1990-92. The Beach returns all five starters and 10 letterwinners from last year's 24-win club, led by seniors Raven Benton (13.5 ppg, 2.5 apg) and Jewelyn Sawyer (9.0 ppg, 6.0 rpg). Benton was an All-Big West first team pick a year ago, while Sawyer claimed the league's Defensive Player of the Year honor. The experienced group will look to record the program's third consecutive 20-win season, the first Big West regular season crown since 2005-06 and the first Big West Tournament title since 1991.

Defending Big West regular season champion UC Riverside found itself in the top three in both polls as the Highlanders finished second amongst the media and third in the coaches. UCR, which went 16-0 on the way to the regular season championship a year ago, lost all-time leading scorer Brittany Crain and Annelise Ito, but bring back a talented core led by senior Réjane Verin (17.0 ppg, 8.6 rpg), junior Michelle Curry (9.2 ppg, 3.9 rpg, 2.7 apg) and senior Simone DeCoud (9.1 ppg, 3.4 rpg, 1.8 spg). The team also welcomes back junior Clémence Lefebvre (8.1 ppg, .377 3FG%) who suffered a season-ending injury at the start of conference play. The Highlanders have a typically tough schedule prior to conference play, traveling to USC, California, Loyola Marymount, Missouri and Kansas before getting into Big West play. The team also hosts WNIT champion South Dakota.

Defending Big West Tournament champion Hawai'i found itself in the third position in the media poll and fifth in the coaches balloting. The Rainbow Wahine are coming off a season in which it claimed its first Big West title since 1996 and first NCAA bert since 1998 as a member of the WAC. Head coach Laura Beeman saw significant roster turnover after the historic run, as UH returns just five players from that squad. The team will look to junior Sarah Toeaina (6.7 ppg, 2.9 rpg, .863 FT%), senior Briana Harris (8.4 ppg, 3.4 rpg) and sophomore Olivia Crawford (3.4 ppg, 1.4 apg) to for increased production and leadership for the talented group of newcomers. The team will have a number of home games to build chemistry in the non-conference segment of the season as five of the first seven contests are in the friendly confines of the Stan Sheriff Center.

Last season's Tournament runner-up also found itself in high regard in the preseason polls as UC Davis recorded a second place showing in the coaches poll and fourth place showing in the media poll. The Aggies enter the 2016-17 campaign with just five upperclassmen and one senior, but have a bevy of talent led by sophomore Morgan Bertsch (13.9 ppg, 5.0 rpg, 1.1 bpg), junior Pele Gianotti (11.5 ppg, 5.2 rpg, 1.6 apg) and junior Rachel Nagel (8.7 ppg, 3.0 rpg). The team also welcomes junior Marley Anderson who will be a key addition in the middle after transferring from Eastern Washington. The seven returning letterwinners will mix with a talented newcomer group that will embark on an early season schedule that sees the Aggies play eight of their first 10 at home with two tough road contests against Pacific and Stanford.

The media and coaches also chose a six-woman All-Conference team, both of which included the same players. Benton, Bertsch and Verin were joined by CSUN sophomore Channon Fluker and the Cal Poly duo of senior Hannah Gilbert and junior Dynn Leaupepe.

The full coaches and media poll results are available on the following page.

### Coaches Poll Results

|    |                      |    |
|----|----------------------|----|
| 1. | Long Beach State (5) | 73 |
| 2. | UC Davis             | 61 |
| 3. | UC Riverside (1)     | 56 |
| 4. | UC Santa Barbara (1) | 52 |
| 5. | Hawai'i (1)          | 48 |
| 6. | CSUN (1)             | 46 |
| 7. | Cal Poly             | 42 |
| 8. | UC Irvine            | 17 |
| 9. | Cal State Fullerton  | 10 |

( ) First-place votes

### Media Poll Results

|    |                      |     |
|----|----------------------|-----|
| 1. | Long Beach State (9) | 157 |
| 2. | UC Riverside (7)     | 154 |
| 3. | Hawai'i (3)          | 127 |
| 4. | UC Davis (1)         | 113 |
| 5. | CSUN                 | 103 |
| 6. | Cal Poly             | 97  |
| 7. | UC Santa Barbara     | 89  |
| 8. | UC Irvine            | 34  |
| 9. | Cal State Fullerton  | 26  |

( ) First-place votes

### Preseason Coaches All-Conference Team

| <u>Name</u>    | <u>School</u>    | <u>Pos.</u> | <u>Year</u> | <u>Hometown</u>        |
|----------------|------------------|-------------|-------------|------------------------|
| Raven Benton   | Long Beach State | G           | Jr.         | Tacoma, Wash.          |
| Morgan Bertsch | UC Davis         | F           | So.         | Santa Rosa, Calif.     |
| Channon Fluker | CSUN             | C           | So.         | Pasadena, Calif.       |
| Hannah Gilbert | Cal Poly         | F           | Jr.         | Morro Bay, Calif.      |
| Dynn Leaupepe  | Cal Poly         | G           | Jr.         | Camarillo, Calif.      |
| Réjane Vérin   | UC Riverside     | F           | Sr.         | Les Abymes, Guadeloupe |

### Preseason Media All-Conference Team

| <u>Name</u>    | <u>School</u>    | <u>Pos.</u> | <u>Year</u> | <u>Hometown</u>        |
|----------------|------------------|-------------|-------------|------------------------|
| Raven Benton   | Long Beach State | G           | Jr.         | Tacoma, Wash.          |
| Morgan Bertsch | UC Davis         | F           | So.         | Santa Rosa, Calif.     |
| Channon Fluker | CSUN             | C           | So.         | Pasadena, Calif.       |
| Hannah Gilbert | Cal Poly         | F           | Jr.         | Morro Bay, Calif.      |
| Dynn Leaupepe  | Cal Poly         | G           | Jr.         | Camarillo, Calif.      |
| Réjane Vérin   | UC Riverside     | F           | Sr.         | Les Abymes, Guadeloupe |