



WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

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HARTFORD WOMEN'S BASKETBALL CLAIMS TOP BILLING IN PRESEASON POLL

CAMBRIDGE, Mass.-- University of Hartford is the unanimous favorite to win the 2008 America East Women's Basketball Championship according to a vote of the conference's head coaches. After winning their second-straight regular season crown and playing in the Championship title game in 2007, the Hawks received all eight possible first-place votes, tallying 64 points (coaches are not permitted to vote for their own team).

University of Vermont garnered the final first-place vote and 56 points to finish second in the poll. Binghamton University received 45 points for third-place. Boston University placed fourth with 43 points, and Stony Brook University rounded out the top-five with 32 points. Defending America East Tournament Champion UMBC earned 28 points for sixth-place.

University of Maine, University at Albany and University of New Hampshire filled out the nine-team poll, finishing with 25, 16 and 15 points, respectively.

Hartford (25-9 overall record, 15-1 America East record) enters the 2007-08 season with a streak of three seasons with 20 or more wins, including a victory over a ranked opponent in each of the last two years. After snapping their two-year reign as America East Tournament Champions last year, the Hawks look to capture the league title once again on their home court. Hartford is led by preseason all-conference pick senior Danielle Hood, who is the only first-team all-conference selection returning from a year ago. Sophomore Erica Beverly, the 2006 Rookie of the Year, will return to the court after sustaining an injury early last season which kept her out for the remainder of '06-'07.

Vermont (19-12, 8-8) was the conference's surprise team last season, finishing third in the regular season after being selected to finish eighth in the preseason poll. The rookie tandem of Courtney Pilypaitis, 2007 Rookie of the Year and third-team all-conference, and May Kotsopoulos, an all-rookie and all-defensive team honoree, lead the Catamounts. Both will return with a year of experience under their belts. Vermont lost just one starter from last year and will look to win its first conference championship since 2000.

Binghamton (12-19, 7-9) boasts two preseason all-conference team honorees this year in seniors Laura Sario and Laine Kurpniece. Sario and Kurpniece were second-team and third-team all-conference selections, respectively, last year. The Bearcats are an experienced squad with four seniors and America East Championship Quarterfinal wins in each of the last two seasons. This year's top-three billing is Binghamton's highest spot in the preseason poll since joining America East in 2001.

The Terriers (15-15, 7-9) lost their top two scorers, Katie Meinhardt and Erica Kovach, from a year ago to graduation, but return senior Cheri Raffo and sophomore Aly Hinton. Raffo started all 30 games last season and finished tied with Kovach for second on the team in points. Hinton, a unanimous all-rookie team honoree, was sixth in the conference in rebounding and also a 30-game starter. The Terriers look to return to the title game, a feat they accomplished for three straight seasons before falling in the quarterfinals of the 2007 tournament.

Stony Brook (18-11, 14-2) will look to preseason all-conference pick Dana Ferraro to help lead the Seawolves through a youth movement. With the loss of the conference's Player of the Year, Mykeema Ford, first-team all-conference Jessica Smith, and third-team all-conference Leah Getz, new head coach Michele Cherry has a lot of holes to plug. Cherry inherits a roster with five freshmen and five sophomores, and just three seniors and two juniors. The Seawolves have had the highest-scoring offense in the conference for three straight seasons.

The Retrievers (16-17, 6-10) made a cinderella run through last year's tournament, becoming the first seven seed to win the America East Women's Basketball Championship and playing in the program's first-ever NCAA Tournament. Two starters return from the championship team, seniors Kristin Drabyn and Morgan Hatten. Drabyn is a force behind the three-point arc with 2.06 three-point field goals per game last season, while Hatten protects the ball well with a 1.64 assist-to-turnover ratio a year ago. With a short roster of just 11 players, the five freshmen have a good chance of getting significant time on the court this season.

Maine (13-5, 7-9) hired Head Coach Cindy Blodgett during the offseason to replace Ann McNerney. The Black Bears hope that Blodgett, a 1998 Maine graduate and the program's all-time leading scorer with 3,005 career points, can return the team to America East dominance as when Blodgett led her team to four straight America East titles as a player. Kris Younan, Maine's sole senior, will lead a young team of two juniors, six sophomores and four freshmen which finished tied for fourth during the 06-07 regular season.

The Great Danes (9-22, 4-12) won their second America East Championship game ever last year, and return seniors Kristin Higy, Sherri Mikus and Gia Sanders this year. Higy is the top returning scorer and rebounder, averaging 10.4 points per game and 6.2 rebounds per game last season. Mikus started all 31 games for Albany last year, putting up 2.0 assists, 5.8 rebounds, and 9.3 points per game. An all-defensive player a year ago, Sanders finished second in the conference with 49 blocks on the season.

2007-08 Preseason Poll		
Rank	Team (1st-place votes)	Total
1.	Hartford (8)	64
2.	Vermont (1)	56
3.	Binghamton	45
4.	Boston U.	43
5.	Stony Brook	32
6.	UMBC	28
7.	Maine	25
8.	Albany	16
9.	New Hampshire	15

New Hampshire (9-20, 4-12) welcomed Head Coach Kristin Cole during the offseason as the program's fifth head coach. A highlight of the 06-07 season was the emergence of Amy Simpson, an all-rookie last year. Simpson started all 27 games and averaged 7.0 points per game. With 7.3 points per game, senior Ashley Cerniglia is the Wildcats' top returning scorer, while junior Danielle Flowers was an 18-game starter a year ago.

For more information on America East women's basketball, including updated statistics and standings, visit www.AmericaEast.com.