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## MONTANA TOPS PRESEASON POLLS

**OGDEN, UTAH (Oct. 18, 2012)** - Defending Big Sky Conference champion Montana has been selected first in the 2012-13 preseason men's basketball polls.

Wayne Tinkle's Grizzlies received eight first-place votes and 98 total points in the coaches' poll, and 24 first-place votes and 344 points in the media poll.

Both polls were released by the league office Thursday. Coaches were not allowed to vote for their own teams.

"We do have a few key pieces back," Tinkle said. "It's nice to see us recognized, but coaches don't put a lot of credence in the polls. We have an awfully long ways to go to compete for the championship. We're facing some adversity right now with some injuries."

Weber State, which lost to Montana in the Big Sky Championship game, was selected second in both polls. Randy Rahe's Wildcats earned three first-place votes from the coaches and 92 total points. Eight media members selected Weber State first. The Wildcats earned 318 points from the media.

Montana is slated to return a pair of All-Conference performers in senior guard Will Cherry and junior Kareem Jamar.

Cherry, from West Oakland, Calif., was named the Big Sky Defensive Player of the Year in 2011-12, and has twice been named First Team All-Conference. He averaged 15.8 points per game, 3.3 assists, and a league-high 2.6 steals per game as a junior. Cherry is currently sidelined with a foot injury, but should return by the start of conference play.

Jamar, a 6-foot-5 guard/forward from Venice, Calif., emerged as one of the top all-around players in the Big Sky last season, earning First Team All-League honors. He averaged 13.6 points, 5.6 rebounds, 3.7 assists, and 1.1 steals per game. Senior forward Mathias Ward, who averaged 10.9 points and 3.9 rebounds per game, also returns to the starting lineup.

Montana finished 15-1 in conference in 2011-12, and went 25-7 overall. The Grizzlies lost to Wisconsin in the first round of the NCAA Tournament. The Grizzlies have played for the Big Sky Championship three straight seasons, winning twice.

### 2012-13 Preseason Men's Basketball Polls

#### **Coaches' Poll**

1. Montana (8)..... 98
2. Weber State (3).....92
3. Northern Colorado.....74
4. North Dakota .....67
5. Portland State.....61
6. Eastern Washington .....53
7. Sacramento State .....51
8. Montana State ..... 48
9. Idaho State .....25
10. Southern Utah.....23
11. Northern Arizona ..... 14

#### **Media Poll**

1. Montana (24) .....344
2. Weber State (8) ..... 318
3. Eastern Washington ..... 231
4. Northern Colorado ..... 221
5. Portland State..... 218
6. North Dakota ..... 173
7. Montana State..... 171
8. Sacramento State.....166
9. Idaho State .....106
10. Southern Utah ..... 98
11. Northern Arizona .....67

Weber State lost NBA Lottery Pick and two-time league MVP Damian Lillard, but the Wildcats are once again expected to contend. Two starters return from last year's 25-7 squad, which went 14-2 in conference and won a game in the in the CollegelInsider.com postseason tournament.

Senior guard Scott Bamforth, a First Team All-Conference pick as a sophomore and Second Team pick last season, returns along with junior center Kyle Tresnak. Big things are also expected from sophomore guard Gelaun Wheelright and junior Davion Berry, who sat out last season as a transfer. Berry averaged 23.7 points per game as a sophomore at Division II Cal State Monterrey Bay.

Northern Colorado was selected third by the coaches and fourth by the media. B.J. Hill's squad is slated to return leading scorers Tate Unruh (11.3 ppg and Tevin Svihovec (10.8 ppg). The Bears, who won the 2010-11 Big Sky Championship, led the nation in 3-point field-goal shooting a season ago.

Eastern Washington, under second-year coach Jim Hayford, returns senior Collin Chiverton, the Big Sky's Top Newcomer last season. Chiverton averaged 13.9 points per game. The Eagles were tabbed third by the media and sixth by the coaches.

League newcomer North Dakota could make a splash. The coaches selected Brian Jones' club fourth, while the media picked it sixth. North Dakota played in the Great West Conference last season and finished 17-15. North Dakota returns four starters, including junior guard Troy Huff who led the team in scoring and rebounding.

Portland State was picked to finish fifth in both polls. The Vikings lost All-Conference performers Charles Odum and Chehales Tapscott from last year's team that finished third in the Big Sky.

Sacramento State was picked to finish seventh in the coaches' poll and eighth in the media poll. Montana State was picked seventh in the media poll and eighth in the coaches' poll. Sacramento State returns four starters, including 2011-12 Freshman of the Year Dylan Garrity. Montana State's top returner is senior guard Xavier Blount.

"It's going to be one of the more competitive seasons in awhile," Tinkle said. "I don't think the eventual regular-season champion is going to have just a couple of losses. We're going to beat up on each other. Sacramento State is probably a top-five team before all is said and done. Northern Colorado has all of its young studs back. It's going to be a real shootout until the end."

Rounding out the poll both polls were Idaho State, Southern Utah and Northern Arizona. All three teams feature new coaches this season.

Idaho State will be led by Bill Evans, who served as an assistant at Montana the last four years. He was the head coach at Southern Utah from 1992-2007. Jack Murphy takes over at Northern Arizona. The first-year head coach served the past three seasons as an assistant coach at Memphis. Nick Robinson, a Stanford graduate who was an assistant at LSU for three seasons, is Southern Utah's new coach. Southern Utah played in the Summit League last season, finishing 14-17.

"I'm really excited," Tinkle said of the new-look Big Sky. "Commissioner (Doug) Fullerton has done a nice job of solidifying the conference. Others around us in the West seem to be struggling to find an identity, while we're holding strong. North Dakota could be a surprise. Some out there don't understand how good they are. Southern Utah, a lot of us aren't sure. They have a great young man in Coach Robinson leading the program."

The 2013 Big Sky Championship will consist of the top seven teams from the regular-season standings. The championship will be played March 14-16 at the site of the regular-season champion. The No. 1 seed will receive a bye to the semifinals. There will be three first-round games on Thursday, March 14.

Teams will play 20 conference games this season in a true double round-robin format.

The 2012-13 season begins on Nov. 9.