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PRESEASON POLLS RANK NORTHERN COLORADO NO. 1

OGDEN, Utah (August 13, 2012) - In a vote by the league's head volleyball coaches, Northern Colorado was picked to win the 2012 Big Sky Conference title. This is the second time since 2006 that the Bears were favored in the preseason.

The poll was released on Monday by the league. The coaches were not allowed to vote for their own teams.

Northern Colorado received nine first-place votes for a total of 99 points. The Bears are looking to defend their regular-season and postseason championships. In 2011, the Bears won the regular-season title with a 13-3 record. Northern Colorado swept Eastern Washington and Portland State to win the win the conference title and qualify for the NCAA tournament.

NC will host the 2012 championship in Greeley, Colo., Nov. 23-24. The tournament will expand to six teams with quarterfinals and semifinals being played on Friday, and the championship on Saturday.

Northern Colorado is coached by Lindsey Oates (formally Benson), who enters here eighth season at the helm and led the Bears to a 22-9 overall and 13-3 league record in 2011. The postseason championship was the second for NC. The Bears won their first conference championships in 2009 by defeating Portland State 3-1.

The Bears return conference MVP Player Kelley Arnold and conference tournament MVP Marissa Hughes.

Portland State was picked to finish second with one first-place vote and 88 total points. PSU defeated Sacramento State in the semifinals, but lost to the Bears in the championship. Portland State finished the season 18-13 and 12-4 in the league.

The Vikings won the 2010 conference tournament by defeating the Bears 3-2. PSU is led by head coach Michael Seemann, who is entering his sixth season. The Vikings return outside hitter Megan Ellis and setter Garyn Schlatter, but lost libero Nicole Bateham.

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Eastern Washington was chosen third by the coaches with 71 points. The Eagles finished the season 13-15 and 9-7 in the conference. The Eagles are coached Miles Kydd, who is entering his fifth season.

Kydd is returning to his roster outside hitter Cora Kellerman, who redshirted the 2010 season and was named Big Sky First Team in 2011.

League newcomer North Dakota was picked fourth with 70 points and one first-place vote. UND finished the 2011 season with a 26-5 overall and 8-2 in the Great West. UND is the three-time (2009-11) defending Great West Conference Champions. North Dakota has a very young roster this season that doesn't have a senior on it.

Montana is ranked fifth in the preseason with 62 points. UM is led by Jerry Wagner, entering his seventh season. Wagner has coached Montana to four Big Sky tournaments in his first six years. UM missed the tournament last season after finishing fifth with an 11-13 overall and 8-8 conference record.

The Grizzlies finished one point ahead of sixth place Sacramento State, which finished with 61 points. The Hornets finished third last season with a 17-15 overall and 10-6 conference..

The Hornets lost in the semifinals to Portland State at the 2011 conference tournament. SAC is returning outside hitter Janelle Currey, rightside hitter Kayla Beal and setter Hannah Hettinga.

Rounding out the poll were Idaho State (7th, 48 points), Northern Arizona (8th, 33), Southern Utah (9th, 30), Weber State (10th, 24) and Montana State (11th, 19).

The 2012 season begins Aug. 24th, and the first conference match will be played on Sept. 13.

VOLLEYBALL POLL

<u>Team</u>	<u>Points</u>
1. Northern Colorado	99 (9)
2. Portland State	88 (1)
3. Eastern Washington	71
4. North Dakota	70 (1)
5. Montana	62
6. Sacramento State	61
7. Idaho State	48
8. Northern Arizona	33
9. Southern Utah	30
10. Weber State	24
11. Montana State	19

(Number of first place votes in parenthesis)a

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