



BIG SKY CONFERENCE
2491 WASHINGTON BLVD, SUITE 201
OGDEN, UT, 84401

CONTACT: ALYSSA ASKEW
MEDIA RELATIONS ASSISTANT
801.392.1978 x-12
AASKEW@BIGSKYCONFERENCE.ORG



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PORTLAND STATE SLIGHT FAVORITE OVER NORTHERN COLORADO

Ogden, Utah (August 9, 2012) - The Big Sky soccer coaches have selected Portland State as a slight favorite over Northern Colorado to win the 2012 championship.

Coaches were not allowed to vote for their own team in the preseason poll, which was released Thursday by the league office.

Portland State received two first-place votes for a total of 68 points. After going 4-1-2 in conference last year, Portland State was a co-regular season Big Sky champion, sharing the title with Northern Colorado. Portland State fell short of winning its first Big Sky conference championship title after losing to Weber State in the semifinals 0-0, 4-3 in a shootout.

Portland State returns five starters and 12 letterwinners from the 2011 squad, including three players who received All-Big Sky honors. The 2011 Big Sky Offensive MVP and Golden Boot winner, forward Megan Martin is among those returning. Head coach Laura Schott has been the PSU coach since 2008. Under Schott's reign the Vikings haven't lost more than two conference games in a single season. Schott was named co-Big Sky coach of the year in 2009.

Northern Colorado was picked to finish second with four first-place votes and 66 total points, just two points shy of first. The Bears were co-regular season champions with Portland State, after finishing a school-best 4-1-2 in conference. It was the team's first ever Big Sky co-regular season championship. NC hosted the Big Sky Championship for the first time since joining the league in 2006. Head coach Tim Barrera is the reigning Big Sky Conference coach of the year. Northern Colorado has been to the championship three times in the past six seasons. The Bears return seven starters including the 2011 Big Sky Defensive MVP Aundrea Martinez and the 2010 Big Sky Offensive MVP Danielle Birdsall.

Montana was chosen to finish third with two first-place votes and 64 points. In 2011, Montana finished 3-3-1 in conference and earned the No. 4 seed in the Big Sky Championship, its first tournament appearance since 2008. Under first-year head coach Mark Plakorus, the Grizzlies knocked off Northern Colorado and Weber State to win the championship and advance to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since the 2000 season. Montana lost in the first round 3-0 to eventual national champion Stanford. The Grizzlies will be returning all 11 starters from the 2011 season.

Weber State was picked to finish fourth with one first-place vote and 58 total points. Weber State finished the 2011 season third overall with a 4-2-1 conference record. The Wildcats advanced to the Big Sky Conference tournament in 2011, breaking a two-year drought. WSU advanced to the Big Sky championship match before falling in a shootout to Montana.

Northern Arizona and Sacramento State were picked to finish tied for fifth with 50 points each. Northern Arizona also received one first-place vote. Although the Lumberjacks posted just a 3-9-7 record in 2011, NAU recorded seven ties, a Big Sky record. Sacramento State finished the 2011 season with a 2-3-2 record. The Hornets' biggest question this season will be at the goalkeeper position after Big Sky record holder for shutouts (29) Savannah Abercrombie graduated.

Idaho State finished seventh with 39 points. The Bengals finished the 2011 season with a 2-5 conference record. ISU is looking to return to the conference tournament for the first time since 2009.

Eastern Washington was picked eighth with 23 points. The Eagles finished the 2011 season with a 1-5-1 conference record and is returning 16 letterwinners including seven starters.

Rounding out the poll are North Dakota and Southern Utah, who tied for ninth with 16 points a piece. This will be the first season in the Big Sky Conference for North Dakota and Southern Utah. UND finished the 2011 season with a 6-9-3 overall record, and the Thunderbirds finished with a 4-11-3 overall record.

The first regular season matches start August 17, with the first conference matches starting Sept. 21. At the end of the conference season, the top four teams will advance to the Big Sky Championship.

Preseason Soccer Poll

| Team | Points |
|-----------------------|---------------|
| 1. Portland State | 68 (2) |
| 2. Northern Colorado | 66 (4) |
| 3. Montana | 64 (2) |
| 4. Weber State | 58 (1) |
| T5. Northern Arizona | 50 (1) |
| T5. Sacramento State | 50 |
| 7. Idaho State | 39 |
| 8. Eastern Washington | 23 |
| T9. North Dakota | 16 |
| T9. Southern Utah | 16 |

(Number of first place votes in parenthesis)