



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

CONTACT: JON KASPER
ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER/MEDIA RELATIONS
801.392.1978 x-16
JKASPER@BIGSKYCONFERENCE.ORG



FACEBOOK.COM/BIGSKYCONF



TWITTER.COM/BIGSKYCONF

WEBER STATE SELECTED FIRST IN PRESEASON POLLS

OGDEN, Utah (Oct. 23, 2014) - Defending Big Sky Conference men's basketball champion Weber State has been selected by the coaches and media to repeat.

Weber State was tabbed first in the 2014-15 preseason polls, which were released Thursday by the league. Coaches were not allowed to vote for their own team.

Randy Rahe's Wildcats earned eight first-place votes from the coaches and 117 total points. The Wildcats received 31 of the 36 first-place votes in the media poll, and 424 total points.

Weber State returns two starters from last year's squad, which finished 14-6 in conference play and 19-12 overall. Weber State has won at least 10 conference games in eight consecutive seasons, a league record.

"It's always an honor to be picked first in the polls," Rahe said. "We were able to have some success last year but this is a new season. I never put too much stock in the polls but we always have high expectations for our team and I'm excited about the group of players we have this year."

The coaches selected Eastern Washington second, followed by Northern Arizona and Sacramento State. Eastern Washington earned one first-place vote and 100 points. Northern Arizona garnered two first-place votes and 99 points. Sacramento State received a first-place vote and 90 points. It marked the first time the Hornets have received a first-place vote in a Big Sky men's basketball preseason poll. Portland State was selected fifth with 80 points.

The media tabbed Northern Arizona second with four first-place votes and 339 total points. Eastern Washington was third with one first-place vote and 318 total points. Sacramento State was fourth with 298 points, followed closely by Montana with 297.

The Big Sky Conference expands to 12 basketball members this season with the return of the University of Idaho. The Vandals competed in the Big Sky Conference from 1963-1996, winning championships in 1980, 1981, 1989 and 1990. Don Verlin's club was selected seventh by the coaches and eighth by the media. Idaho returns senior guard Connor Hill, who averaged 14.2 points per game and is the school's all-time leader with 232 3-pointers.

League teams will play 18 conference games this season, competing against seven teams twice, and the other four teams once. The top eight teams will advance to the 2015 Big Sky Conference Championship, which will be held at the site of the regular-season champion starting on Thursday, March 12.

Weber State, which last won back-to-back regular-season titles in 2009-2010, returns junior forward Joel Bolomboy, the reigning conference Defensive Player of the Year, as well as sophomore guard Jeremy Senglin, the conference Freshman of the Year in 2013-14. Sophomore Richaud Gittens, who averaged 7.1 points off the bench also returns.

Eastern Washington has failed to advance to the conference championship the past two seasons, but appears ready to challenge for a league title in Jim Hayford's fourth season at the helm. Junior guard Tyler Harvey returns along with three other starters. Harvey led the Big Sky in scoring last season, averaging 21.8 points per game. He was also among the national leaders in 3-point field goals made per game (3.5) and 3-point field-goal percentage (.433).

PRESEASON POLLS

Media Poll

| | |
|---------------------------|-----|
| 1. Weber State (31) | 424 |
| 2. Northern Arizona (4) | 339 |
| 3. Eastern Washington (1) | 318 |
| 4. Sacramento State | 298 |
| 5. Montana | 297 |
| 6. Northern Colorado | 242 |
| 7. Portland State | 227 |
| 8. Idaho | 207 |
| 9. North Dakota | 175 |
| 10. Idaho State | 125 |
| 11. Montana State | 104 |
| 12. Southern Utah | 52 |

Coaches' Poll

| | |
|---------------------------|-----|
| 1. Weber State (8) | 117 |
| 2. Eastern Washington (1) | 100 |
| 3. Northern Arizona (2) | 99 |
| 4. Sacramento State (1) | 90 |
| 5. Portland State | 80 |
| 6. Northern Colorado | 73 |
| 7. Idaho | 65 |
| 8. Montana | 56 |
| 9. North Dakota | 38 |
| 10. Idaho State | 35 |
| 11. Montana State | 24 |
| 12. Southern Utah | 15 |

Northern Arizona exceeded preseason expectations in Jack Murphy's first two seasons with the Lumberjacks, advancing to the conference tournament in both campaigns. The Lumberjacks could take the next step this season with the return of four starters, including guard Quinton Upshur. The senior was named First Team All-Conference and the Top Newcomer after averaging 15.4 points per game and shooting .389 percent from 3-point range.

On paper, Sacramento State has its best team since the Hornets joined the Big Sky in 1996. All five starters return from a squad that advanced to the conference tournament for the first time since 2006. The Hornets, coached by Brian Katz, will be led by senior guards Mikh McKinney and Dylan Garrity. McKinney was a First Team All-Conference selection who averaged 16.6 points and 4.6 assists per game as a junior. Garrity ranks 10th in league history with 443 assists. He picked up his scoring last season, averaging 13.2 points per game, and made a league-best .472 percent of his 3-pointers.

Tyler Geving's Portland State Vikings return two starters from last year's squad which finished 11-9 in conference and advanced to the league semifinals. The Vikings were picked seventh by the media. Senior guard Gary Winston was Second Team All-Conference last season. Senior guard DaShaun Wiggins shared the Top Reserve honor.

Northern Colorado also advanced to the semifinals last season. B.J. Hill's squad returns two starters, including senior guard Tevin Svihovec. The Bears were selected sixth by the coaches and media. Senior forward Tim Huskisson and sophomore guard Jordan Wilson also return to the starting lineup.

Montana begins a new era under first-year coach Travis DeCuire, a former Grizzly point guard. The coaches tabbed Montana eighth. The Grizzlies will be led by senior guard Jordan Gregory and 6-foot-8 junior forward Martin Breuning, who sat out last season after transferring from Washington.

North Dakota, Idaho State, Montana State and Southern Utah rounded out both polls.

North Dakota lost to Weber State in the 2014 Big Sky Championship. Brian Jones' club must replace a trio of outstanding guards, including Troy Huff, who averaged 19.2 points per game en route to First Team All-League honors. UND will be helped by the return of senior forward Jaron Nash.

Idaho State returns senior guard Chris Hansen, who averaged 16.6 points per game and shot .400 percent from 3-point range last season.

Montana State is under the direction of new head coach Brian Fish, a former assistant at Oregon.

Southern Utah returns all five starters from a squad that finished 1-19 in Big Sky play last season.