



WOMEN'S SOCCER

PRESEASON RELEASE

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ST. LOUIS - Illinois State has been picked by league coaches to win the Missouri Valley Conference women's soccer title in 2017. The Redbirds received 63 total points and seven first-place tallies.

Last season, after being tabbed to finish fourth in the coaches' poll, Illinois State claimed the MVC title. Illinois State set a new MVC record after a 14-game winning streak in 2016. Brad Silvey is entering his first season as head coach, after two seasons as the assistant at Illinois State. Silvey welcomes back 15 letterwinners and eight starters. Among them are three redbirds who made the preseason all-conference team, including Kelli Zickert, Mikayla Unger, and Haley Smith. Zickert was a first-team all-MVC pick last year, Unger was named 2016 Freshman of the Year, and goalkeeper Smith was on the all-freshman team.

Drake received a single first-place vote while totaling 51 points to finish second in this year's pre-season poll. The Bulldogs were 12-4-3 (2-3-1 MVC) last season. Drake welcomes back the 2015 MVC Player of the Year, Rebecca Rodgers. Rodgers missed the 2016 season due to a leg injury but returns to the 2017 roster. Rodgers along with junior midfielder Alyssa Brand, were selected by coaches to the preseason team.

Loyola was picked to finish third in this year's poll, receiving 43 total points. Last year, Loyola made it to the semifinals of the conference tournament for the second-straight year. Two Ramblers who earned second-team all-MVC honors a year ago are on this year's pre-season team, including midfielder Sienna Cruz and forward Jenna Szczesny (LUC).

Last season, Evansville finished second in the standings after posting a 3-2-1 record in conference play. The Purple Aces are tabbed to finish fourth in the coaches' poll, with a total of 40 points. Evansville welcomes back 14 letterwinners and six starters. Nikki Baham, is one of three seniors on this year's squad and is the top returning goal-scorer for Evansville.

After finishing the 2016 season 2-2-2 in MVC play and earning their highest finish ever in the MVC with the No. 3 seed, the UNI Panthers are tied for fifth place in the coaches' poll with 29 points. Bruce Erickson enters his first year at the UNI helm. Erickson comes to UNI after two years at Wayne State (Neb.) and is no stranger to the conference, serving as the head coach of Creighton from 1999-2014. UNI returns 20 letterwinners and nine starters, among them, senior Sarah Brandt who was named to the all-MVC pre-season squad.

Valparaiso, the newest member of the Missouri Valley Conference, tied for fifth place in the coaches' poll with 29 total points. The Crusaders were an affiliate member of the Valley for soccer from 1996-98. Last season, while in the Horizon League, Valparaiso finished 9-10-0 overall. Head Coach, John Marovich, welcomes back 19 letterwinners and 8 starters. Among the eight starters is senior forward Cory Griffith who made the preseason squad. Griffith posted 17 points and set single-season program records for the Crusaders last season.

Missouri State is picked seventh in the coaches' poll with 17 points. The Bears finished the 2016 season with a 5-8-4 overall record and 1-3-2 slate in MVC play. Missouri State returns 14 letterwinners and seven starters, including their leading scorer Ashley Croonfield and 2016 First-team all-MVC selection, Mary Disidore. Disidore was also selected to this year's preseason all-conference team.

2017 PRESEASON POLL

Rank	Team (1st-place votes)	Points
1.	Illinois State (7)	63
2.	Drake (1)	51
3.	Loyola	43
4.	Evansville	40
T5.	Northern Iowa	29
T5.	Valparaiso	29
7.	Missouri State	17
8.	Indiana State	16

Indiana State finished their 2016 season in the semifinals of the Missouri Valley Conference. The Sycamores are tabbed to finish eight in the poll, after receiving 16 total points. Indiana State returns 22 letterwinners and seven starters from last year's team who posted a 7-11-2 (2-3-1 MVC) record. Katie Wells earned All-MVC honors last year, and she's on this year's pre-season team after leading her team with 19 points in 2016.

All eight of the Missouri Valley soccer teams will begin their seasons, with non-conference opponents, the weekend of August 18th-20th. Missouri State will host the 2017 MVC Conference Championship, November 3rd and 5th, following first round matches hosted by the #3 and #4 seeded teams on October 29th.



2017 MVC PRESEASON ALL-CONFERENCE TEAM

PLAYER, TEAM	CL.	POS.	HOMETOWN (HIGH SCHOOL)
Sarah Brandt, Northern Iowa	Sr.	F	Ankeny, Iowa (Ankeny Centennial)
Cory Griffith, Valparaiso	Jr.	F	Lemont, Ill. (Providence Catholic)
Jenna Szczesny, Loyola	Jr.	F	Hoffman Estates, Ill. (Barrington)
Mikayla Unger, Illinois State	So.	F	Fort Wayne, Ind. (Shattuck St. Mary's)
Katie Wells, Indiana State	Jr.	F	Indianapolis, Ind. (Warren Central HS)
Kelli Zickert, Illinois State	Sr.	M/F	Arlington Heights, Ill. (Buffalo Grove)
Alyssa Brand, Drake	Jr.	M	Skokie, Ill. (Niles North)
Sienna Cruz, Loyola	So.	M	Cottage Grove, Wis. (Monona Grove)
Mary Disidore, Missouri State	Sr.	M	Lenexa, Kan. (St. Thomas Aquinas)
Rebecca Rodgers, Drake	R-Sr.	M	Peotone, Ill. (Peotone)
Haley Smith, Illinois State	So.	GK	Fall River, Nova Scotia (Shattuck St. Mary's)



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