



# MISSOURI VALLEY CONFERENCE BASEBALL

## PRESEASON COACHES' POLL: FEBRUARY 1, 2022

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### Coaches Select DBU as Missouri Valley Conference Baseball Favorite

ST. LOUIS – DBU, which returns a host of key position players and pitchers from last year's MVC Regular Season title team, has been tabbed as the league favorite in the annual coaches' preseason poll, receiving all eight first-place votes.

The Patriots tallied 64 points and were named the favorite over second-place pick Indiana State (46 points). Illinois State (39 points) and Southern Illinois (39 points) finished tied for third, while Bradley finished fifth with 34 points.

Missouri State was selected in sixth place with 32 points, followed by Evansville (19 points) in the seventh slot and Valparaiso eighth (15 points).

The Valley has a depth of talent and experience returning to the league this season despite losing 10 players to the MLB Draft, bringing back 24 players from the 2021 All-MVC teams. The coaches have voted 13 players representing seven teams to the 2022 preseason All-MVC baseball squad.



DBU welcomes back six position players and seven key pitchers from a team that finished the season with a 41-18 record, en route to capturing the MVC regular season and tournament title. The Patriots ended the season one win away from the College World Series, falling to Virginia in the third and deciding game of the Columbia Super Regional. DBU claimed a 40-win season for the seventh straight year in 2021. DBU's seven-straight seasons with 40+ wins is the longest active streak in the nation after Florida State and Louisville saw their streaks end. The Patriots return five All-Missouri Valley Conference selections and will

open the season ranked No. 22 in the D1 baseball.com Top 25. While the Patriots must replace last year's MVC Joe Carter Player of the Year in Jackson Glenn, DBU returns four starters in the infield along with Freshman All-American outfielder Jace Grady. Grady, Cole Moore and Andrew Benefield each earned All-MVC honors a year ago and will look to anchor the Patriot offense in 2022. Grady hit .337 with four homers, 17 doubles and 40 RBI as a freshman, while Moore added 11 home runs, 14 doubles and 46 RBI, while hitting .329. Benefield also chipped in nine long balls with 12 doubles and 41 RPI a year ago. Peyton Sherlin led the staff in saves (4) last year and his 68 career appearances ranks ninth-most all-time in the program's Division I era dating back to 2004. Sherlin was a first-team All-MVC selection with a 2.92 ERA and 47 strikeouts in 40.0 innings of work. Luke Eldred will look to anchor the rotation this spring after going 4-0 with a 2.23 ERA in 10 starts last season. The Patriots will once again test themselves with a tough non-conference schedule with 16 games against seven teams that made the NCAA field, including eight games against teams that finished the season ranked in the USA Today Coaches Top 25.



Indiana State returns nine position starters and four key pitchers from last season's 31-21 squad that finished second in the MVC standings and earned an at-large berth into the NCAA field. The Sycamores' season ended in the Vanderbilt Regional, falling to Georgia Tech. Jordan Schaffer returns as the Valley leading hitter with a .367 batting average while sitting second overall in the conference with 79 hits. He added seven

home runs and 52 runs scored while driving in 34 RBI. Schaffer ended the 2021 season on a 12-game hitting streak including the Sycamores' postseason run in the NCAA Regionals and had hits in 29 of the last 30 games to highlight his redshirt junior season. Connor Fenlong is heading back to the mound for the Sycamores this season as the redshirt junior right-hander will look to build off his inaugural season with the Sycamores that saw him finish among the Valley leaders in saves. Fenlong finished second on the Sycamores' pitching staff with a 3.06 ERA, while posting a 4-3 record in an ISU-leading 20 appearances. He added six saves and a 31:12 strikeout-to-walk ratio on the year. He is back to lead a Sycamores' pitching staff that finished fifth in the MVC with a 4.50 ERA while holding opponents to a .255 batting average.

RANK	TEAM (1ST-PLACE VOTES)	POINTS
1.	DBU (8).....	64
2.	Indiana State.....	46
3.	Illinois State .....	39
	Southern Illinois.....	39
5.	Bradley .....	34
6.	Missouri State.....	32
7.	Evansville .....	19
8.	Valparaiso .....	15

Illinois State returns six position starters and seven key pitchers this spring. The Redbirds finished the 2021 season with a 23-34 record and finished sixth in The Valley standings. On the offensive side, Illinois State returns 258 hits (51.1%), 139 RBIs (53.9%), 22 home runs (55%), and 12 stolen bases (40%). Sophomore outfielder Ryan Cermak will look to anchor the lineup in 2022. Cermak hit 11 home runs with 10 doubles and 40 RBI as a freshman last season, while hitting .284. On the mound, Illinois State returns 316.2 innings pitched (67.7%), 18 wins (78.3%), all nine saves, and 276 strikeouts (67.5%). Jordan Lussier will look to anchor the rotation after going 6-3 with a 4.36 ERA in 74.1 innings of work last season. Lussier started 14 games and registered 67 strikeouts. Illinois State is scheduled for 16 games against Power Five opponents (10 Big Ten, three SEC, three Big 12) this season, which would be a program record.



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### 2022 MVC PRESEASON ALL-CONFERENCE TEAM

PLAYER, TEAM	POS.	B/T	YR.	HOMETOWN (PREVIOUS SCHOOL)
Jake McCaw, Illinois State	1B	L/R	RJr.	Bloomington, Ill. (Normal Community)
Connor O'Brien, Bradley	1B	R/R	Jr.	San Diego, Calif. (Rancho Bernardo)
Cody Cleveland, Southern Illinois	2B	R/R	Jr.	Rockwall-Heath, Texas (Northeast Texas College)
Andrew Benefield, DBU	3B	R/R	RSO.	Murfreesboro, Tenn. (Louisville)
Jordan Schaffer, Indiana State	SS	R/R	RSr.	Terre Haute, Ind. (West Vigo)
Drake Baldwin, Missouri State	C	L/R	Jr.	Madison, Wis. (Madison West)
Jace Grady, DBU	OF	S/R	So.	Austin, Texas (Elgin)
Ryan Cermak, Illinois State	OF	R/R	So.	Riverside, Ill. (Riverside-Brookfield)
J.T. Weber, Southern Illinois	OF	R/R	Sr.	Metropolis, Ill. (Massac County)
Luke Eldred, DBU	SP	R/R	RSr.	Mt. Vernon, Iowa (Mt. Vernon)
Shane Gray, Evansville	SP	R/R	Sr.	West Jefferson, Ohio (West Jefferson)
Peyton Sherlin, DBU	RP	L/L	Sr.	Deer Park, Texas (Deer Park)
Trey Ziegenbein, Missouri State	RP	R/R	Sr.	Blue Springs, Mo. (Johnson County CC)

## 2021 FINAL MVC STANDINGS

	Missouri Valley Conference			Overall Records		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
#14 DBU	18	6	.750	41	18	.695
Indiana State	14	10	.583	31	21	.596
Bradley	12	10	.545	20	22	.476
Southern Illinois	15	13	.536	40	20	.667
Missouri State	11	13	.458	21	23	.477
Illinois State	12	15	.444	23	34	.404
Evansville	11	16	.407	28	27	.509
Valparaiso	9	19	.321	16	35	.314



Valparaiso returns eight position starters and nine key pitchers from its 2021 team that finished 16-35. The season culminated on a high note as Valpo won two games in the MVC Tournament for the first time since joining the league. Reigning MVC Freshman of the Year Kaleb Hannahs is back after earning Collegiate Baseball Newcomer Freshman All-American status and All-MVC second team honorees last season. Hannahs became the first Valpo freshman to lead the team in batting average since 2012 a year ago at .296 while finishing the season on a 20-game on-base streak.

All eight Missouri Valley Conference baseball teams begin action on February 18 with non-conference games, while league battles will heat up starting Friday, April 1.



For the 26th time in 40 seasons, multiple MVC baseball teams were selected as part of the field of 64 teams to play for the 2021 College World Series title.

The Valley ranked No. 7 amongst 31 leagues in conference RPI. Four of the Power-Five conferences (SEC, Big 12, ACC, Pac-12) held four of the top five positions, while the American and C-USA sat fifth and sixth just ahead of The Valley.

The Valley made its sixth appearance in the NCAA Super Regionals since the format was adopted in 1999. DBU made its first appearance as a member of the MVC, but second time in program history (2011 as an independent).



Missouri State will host the 2022 Missouri Valley Conference Championship, May 24-28, in Springfield, Missouri. All games will be played at Hammons Field and will be shown live on ESPN+.



Southern Illinois returns four position starters and six key pitchers from its 2021 team that finished 40-20 on the season.

SIU won 40 games in a season for the sixth time ever and first time in 31 seasons, since the 1990 team went 49-14. As a team, SIU hit .297 and shattered the school record with 84 home runs. SIU scored 439 runs, which is the second-most in program history. Senior outfielder JT Weber returns to the outfield for the Salukis after leading the MVC in runs batted in (63) in 2021, while ranking fourth in runs scored (57), tied for fourth in hits (76) and fourth in home runs (15). Cody Cleveland also returns to the lineup after earning All-MVC honors alongside Weber. Cleveland hit .346 with seven doubles, five home runs and 24 RBI last season. Senior right handed pitcher Noah Farmer returns to lead the Saluki rotation in 2022. Farmer was third in the MVC in ERA (2.98) and innings pitched (66.1) in 2021.



Bradley returns seven position starters and six key arms from last season's team. The Braves finished 20-22 in 2021. By finishing the league season with a 12-10 (.545) record in 2021,

Bradley posted its most MVC wins in a season since 2007 (13-11). Bradley has won at least 11 league games and posted a winning conference record in each of the last three Valley seasons. Prior to its current three-year run of success, Bradley had never before posted three consecutive winning conference seasons with at least 11 wins. Junior first baseman Connor O'Brien returns to lead the Braves in 2022. O'Brien collected first-team All-MVC accolades in both 2019 and 2021 - becoming the first Bradley player to receive first-team honors twice in his career since designated hitter Greg Partyka in 2013 and 2014. O'Brien led Bradley last season with a .366 batting average - hitting four home runs to go with 26 RBI.



Missouri State welcomes back seven position starters and three key pitchers from last year's 21-23 team. Missouri State's Keith Guttin enters his 40th season as head coach of the Bears in 2022 with 1,309 career victories un-

der his belt. Guttin ranks 19th all-time and third among active coaches in the Division I ranks, trailing only Minnesota's John Anderson (1,331) and Georgia Tech's Danny Hall (1,312). The Bears returning players account for 67 percent of last season's hits, 72 percent of home runs, 69 percent of RBI, 72 percent of game-winning RBI and 73 percent of stolen bases.



Evansville returns eight position starters and eight key pitchers from last year's 28-27 squad. The Aces' season mark was its best since the 2016 campaign when UE also finished 29-27.

The Aces smashed 45 home runs a season ago and the 2022 campaign should see little drop-off in that department. Both of the Aces top power hitters return with Tanner Craig recording a team-high 12 homers last season and Danny Borgstrom, who tallied nine long balls. Of the 455 innings pitched by the Aces' staff, UE brings back pitchers who pitched 364.2 innings, including 22 of 28 wins and the top three pitchers in ERA.

## Opening Weekend Schedule

	Opponent	Site	Time (CT)	
Fri., Feb. 18	Valparaiso at Memphis	Memphis, Tenn.	TBA	
	Indiana State vs. BYU	Port Charlotte, Fla.	11:30 AM	
	Missouri State at Central Arkansas	Conway, Ark.	3 PM	
	Illinois State at Arkansas	Fayetteville, Ark.	3 PM	
	Evansville at NC State	Raleigh, NC	3 PM	
	Southern Illinois at Louisiana Monroe	Monroe, La.	6 PM	
	SEMO at #22 DBU	Dallas, Texas	6:30 PM	
	Bradley at Incarnate Word	San Antonio, Texas	6:30 PM	
	Sat., Feb. 19	Valparaiso at Memphis	Memphis, Tenn.	TBA
		Illinois State at Arkansas	Fayetteville, Ark.	TBA
Indiana State vs. Ohio State		Port Charlotte, Fla.	11 AM	
Missouri State at Central Arkansas		Conway, Ark.	12 PM	
Evansville at NC State		Raleigh, NC	2 PM	
SEMO at #22 DBU		Dallas, Texas	2 PM	
Southern Illinois at Louisiana Monroe		Monroe, La.	6 PM	
Bradley at Incarnate Word		San Antonio, Texas	6:30 PM	
Sun., Feb. 20		Valparaiso at Memphis	Memphis, Tenn.	TBA
		Indiana State vs. Marshall	Port Charlotte, Fla.	10:30 AM
	Southern Illinois at Louisiana Monroe	Monroe, La.	1 PM	
	SEMO at #22 DBU	Dallas, Texas	1 PM	
	Illinois State at Arkansas	Fayetteville, Ark.	1 PM	
	Missouri State at Central Arkansas	Conway, Ark.	1 PM	
	Evansville at NC State	Raleigh, NC	1 PM	
	Bradley at Incarnate Word	San Antonio, Texas	1 PM	
	Indiana State vs. Ohio State	Port Charlotte, Fla.	2:30 PM	