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Bryant Headlines 2014 NEC Women's Lacrosse Preseason Poll

Somerset, NJ -- After coming ever so close to claiming the NEC women's lacrosse championship last season, conference head coaches have installed Bryant as the 2014 favorite in the annual preseason poll announced on Tuesday afternoon.

Head coach Jill DePetris' team received six first place votes in the balloting among the NEC's eight head coaches. DePetris led the Bulldogs to the 2013 NEC Tournament final in the team's first season under full Division I membership.

Mount St. Mary's was selected second, taking the remaining two first place votes. Sacred Heart followed close behind in third while Robert Morris and Central Connecticut rounded out the top five. Saint Francis U followed in sixth, with Wagner seventh and LIU Brooklyn rounding out the poll.

2014 Northeast Conference Women's Lacrosse Preseason Coaches Poll

1. Bryant (6)
2. Mount St. Mary's (2)
3. Sacred Heart
4. Robert Morris
5. Central Connecticut
6. Saint Francis U
7. Wagner
8. LIU Brooklyn

First place votes in parentheses

Bryant, which finished in third place last season with a 6-3 NEC mark, will feature a veteran roster that includes nine seniors. Leading the way will be All-NEC first team selection and explosive goal scorer **Lisa Vendel (Sandy Hook, CT/Newtown)**, a senior midfielder. Showcasing her offensive talents, Vendel led the NEC with 46 goals and finished second with 2.56 ppg. She also ended the year sixth on the circuit in both points (54) and points per game (3.00).

Classmate **Lindsay Langella (Northport, NY/Northport)** returns to anchor the Bulldog backline after a strong junior campaign. Langella, named one of three team captains, started all 18 contests last season and picked up 17 ground balls and caused 11 turnovers.

The Bulldogs also return NEC All-Tournament team selection **Brianna Watt (Babylon, NY/Babylon)**, a senior goalkeeper. Watt compiled a 10-8 record in 2013 and ranked third in the conference with a 9.08 goals against average.

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After its 15th tournament appearance in the league's 16-year women's lacrosse history last season, the Mount hopes to return to the top of the NEC in 2014. The Mountaineers return nine starters, including senior All-NEC first team performers **Lindsay Diaz (Timonium, MD/Dulaney)** and **Gabe Little (Hampstead, MD/North Carroll)**. Last season Diaz proved she could patrol both sides of the midfield with 25 goals, 26 ground balls and a team-high 17 caused turnovers en-route to first team All-NEC honors. Little, a first team All-NEC defender, ranked second in the conference with 3.11 ground balls per game.

Head coach B.J. Johnson enters her fourth season at the Mount after helping the Mountaineers reach the NEC Tournament for the 11th consecutive season and match the NEC record with 15 overall trips. The Mount tied for third in the NEC last season with a 6-3 conference mark.

Picked third, Sacred Heart returns an All-NEC second teamer in senior midfielder **Shelby Vaccaro (Brightwaters, NY/Bay Shore)**. Vaccaro was an offensive standout for the Pioneers in 2013, leading the team with 36 goals, 21 assists and 57 points. She ranked in the NEC top-five in all three categories.

Points of #NECPride

Robert Morris sophomore midfielder **Jessica Karwacki (Sparks, MD/Hereford)** led the nation with 9.56 draw controls per game and set a new NCAA record with 152 on the year in her first season in Moon Township. She was named to the NEC All-Rookie team.

The NEC placed three players in the NCAA top-10 in ground balls last season with the Mount's **Gabe Little (Hampstead, MD/North Carroll)** the only returning player. Little averaged 3.11 ground balls last season ranking her sixth in DI.

Central Connecticut enters the 2014 season off the most successful campaign in the program's 14-year history, The Blue Devils earned a second place NEC finish with a 7-2 mark and a subsequent appearance in the NEC semis. Taking over the program is **Laura Campbell**, who served as head coach at American University during the 2011 and 2012 seasons.

Wagner's defense caused havoc for opponents, forcing an NEC-high 10.82 turnovers per game last season, ranking the Seahawks fifth among the nation's elite programs.

About The Northeast Conference

Now in its 33rd year, the Northeast Conference is an NCAA Division I collegiate athletic association consisting of 10 institutions of higher learning located throughout six states. Media coverage of the NEC extends to four of the largest markets in the United States - New York (#1), Pittsburgh (#23), Baltimore (#27), and Hartford/New Haven (#30). Founded in 1981 as the basketball-only ECAC Metro Conference, the NEC has grown to sponsor 22 championship sports for men and women and now enjoys automatic access to 14 different NCAA Championships. NEC member institutions include Bryant, Central Connecticut, Fairleigh Dickinson, LIU Brooklyn, Mount St. Mary's, Robert Morris, Sacred Heart, St. Francis Brooklyn, Saint Francis U and Wagner. For more information on the NEC, visit the league's official website (www.northeastconference.org) and digital network (www.necfrontrow.com), or follow the league on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Google+, all @NECsports.