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Central Connecticut Voted Number One In Northeast Conference Men's Soccer Preseason Poll

Somerset, NJ -- In what appears to be a wide open race, Northeast Conference (NEC) men's soccer coaches have tabbed Central Connecticut to win the program's second NEC championship.

After finishing the 2013 regular season in first place with a 6-1 record, reigning NEC Coach of the Year Shaun Green looks to keep his Blue Devils on track for their first NEC Tournament crown since the 2007 campaign.

Fairleigh Dickinson, which has won a conference leading seven NEC titles, earned second place in the poll, receiving two first place votes.

Saint Francis U and Bryant, who faced off in last year's NEC semifinals, came in at the third and fourth place spots, respectively, with tourney finalist Bryant earning one first place vote.

Defending NEC Champion St. Francis Brooklyn picked up two first place votes to take the fifth spot, followed by Robert Morris in sixth, Sacred Heart in seventh and LIU Brooklyn in the eighth position.

All eight teams will start their season Friday, August 29. Preseason pick Central Connecticut opens up its season at home against Stony Brook at 7 pm. Conference play kicks off on Friday, October 10.

The 2014 NEC Championship will take place on November 14 & 16 at the campus of the top seeded team. The top four finishers based on Conference winning percentage will compete in a two-day, single-elimination tournament.

NEC Front Row, the league's cutting edge digital network, will air over 50 men's soccer matches live this season. Games can be viewed on your computer or mobile device, and for the first time will be available in HD. All matches are free of charge and feature one-click access to watch. For a schedule of available games, visit necfrontrow.com.

2014 Northeast Conference Men's Soccer Preseason Coaches Poll

1. Central Connecticut (3)
2. Fairleigh Dickinson (2)
3. Saint Francis U
4. Bryant (1)
5. St. Francis Brooklyn (2)
6. Robert Morris
7. Sacred Heart
8. LIU Brooklyn

(First place votes in parentheses)

Points of #NECPride

Central Connecticut returns 2013 NEC second team All-Conference honorees **Stephen Walmsley (Liverpool, England/Ocean Reef)** and **Josef Abele (Manchester, CT/East Catholic)**. Abele ranked in the top five of every goalie statistical category and tied for first in shutouts (7) during the 2013 campaign.

CCSU head coach **Shaun Green** was inducted into the Connecticut Soccer Hall of Fame on April 5, 2014. Green recently completed his 29th year with the Blue Devils and led his team to the 2013 Northeast Conference regular season title. He is a three-time NEC Coach of the Year (2003, 2011 and 2013). During his tenure the Blue Devils have claimed NEC regular season or tournament championships in 1998, 2007, 2011, and 2013.

Former Fairleigh Dickinson defender **Nicholas Walker** signed a one-year contract with FC Dallas of the MLS following his senior season. The 2013 NEC Defender of the Year was selected with the fifth pick of the third round (43rd overall) in the 2014 MLS SuperDraft. He was recently loaned to Bayamón FC of the Puerto Rican Soccer League.

Another former standout player for the Knights was in the news during the offseason. **Alejandro Bedoya**, who played his freshman and sophomore seasons (2005 and 2006) at FDU, was one of 23 players named to the U.S. National Team roster for the World Cup that took place this past summer in Brazil.

Saint Francis U boasts a young squad but look to be competitive with the leadership of seven seniors, including 2013 NEC second team All-Conference players **Bryan Causey (Virginia Beach, VA/Salem)** and **Mitch Kavlick (Erie, PA/Erie McDowell)**. Likewise, sophomore **Francis de Vries (Christchurch, New Zealand/Cashmere High School)** was an All-NEC first team defender a year ago as a freshman.

Saint Francis U led the conference last season in goals allowed (13) and goals against average (0.68) while boasting the second most shutouts (7).

Bryant returns junior **Brett Larocque (Ottawa, Ontario/Ecole Jean Vanier)**, who led the team in goals (8) and points (18), and was named to the 2013 NEC All-Tournament team after helping lead the Bulldogs to their first-ever title match. Larocque also tied for second in the conference game-winning goals (4). The Bulldogs also bring back junior goalkeeper **Chris Knaub (Yarmouth, ME/Yarmouth)**. Knaub led the conference in saves (87) and had the second most saves per game (4.83) in 2013.

St. Francis Brooklyn won its first NEC title since 1998 and fifth in school history last season. In their quest to repeat, the Terriers return second team All-NEC defender **Andy Cormack (Plymouth, England/Hele's School)**, a senior, and sophomore keeper **Jack Binks (Darlington, England/Hurworth Comprehensive (Siena))**. Both were named to the NEC All-Tournament team a year ago.

Robert Morris brings back the reigning NEC Player of the Year, junior **Neco Brett (Kingston, Jamaica/Excelsior)**. During the 2013 season, the explosive sophomore led the conference in seven offensive categories, including goals (14), points (36) and game-winning goals (6). As a team, the Colonials also paced the NEC with 34 goals scored in 2013.

Sacred Heart brings back leading scorer **Mahmoud Kafel (Fairfield, CT/Fairfield Ludlowe)**. Kafel, a junior midfielder, led the Pioneers in goals (7) and points (16).

LIU Brooklyn comes into this year with nine seniors on its squad. Junior **Tanner Sica (Toms River, NJ/Toms River North)** was a second team All-NEC midfielder for the Blackbirds last season.

About The Northeast Conference

Now entering its 34th 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.