

SOFTBALL

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MISSOURI VALLEY CONFERENCE

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ILLINOIS STATE NO. 1 IN PRESEASON SOFTBALL COACHES POLL

Southern Illinois Ranks Second, Not Far Behind

ST. LOUIS -- Illinois State was tabbed as the preseason favorite in the annual Missouri Valley Conference softball coaches' poll, announced Monday by the league office.

The defending regular-season champion Redbirds, who garnered 86 votes and six first-place tallies, edged out Southern Illinois by just three points.

The Salukis received the remaining three votes as the conference's top squad.

Melinda Fischer, who enters her 22nd season as the Redbirds head coach, just 20 wins shy of 700 for her tenure at Illinois State, returns seven starters and three pitchers from last season's 38-16 squad that qualified for the NCAA Tournament for the fifth time in school history.

All-MVC performer Stacy Birk is back in the circle for Illinois State while sophomore Amber Smith returns as a preseason all-conference player after becoming the first Redbird rookie to claim All-American honors.

Pitcher Shannon Nicholson should provide a solid 1-2 punch for a Redbird team receiving national notice in the USA Softball preseason poll,

while Birk and preseason all-MVC player Tiffany Prager provide some lineup protection for Smith.

Southern Illinois, receiving votes in two preseason top 25 polls, welcomes back 13 letterwinners, all-conference pitcher Cassidy Scoggins and all-Valley outfielder Krystal Stein to a group looking to punch its fifth-consecutive ticket to the NCAA Tournament.

The Salukis lead the way on the preseason all-conference team with five players from last season's 35-13 team. Preseason all-Valley picks outfielder Tiffanie Dismore, catcher Amanda Clifton and third baseman Lauren Haas solidify a solid SIU lineup.

Wichita State was picked third in this year's poll after being selected as the league favorite in 2006. The Shockers received 71 points in the coaches' poll.

Three Shockers have been named to the preseason all-conference team -- second basemen Brooke Usher, shortstop Britnee Barnett and outfielder Katie McGeeney. Barnett, the 2006 WSU leader in average, hits, runs, runs batted in and slugging percentage, and McGeeney were

Valley Preseason Poll

No.	Team (first-place)	Pts.
1.	Illinois State (6)	86
2.	Southern Illinois (3)	83
3.	Wichita State	71
4.	Missouri State	57
5.	Creighton	54
6.	Indiana State	47
7.	Bradley	33
8.	Drake	30
9.	Evansville	23
10.	UNI	11

voting by coaches, one abstention

first-team all-MVC performers a season ago.

2006 MVC Tournament champion Missouri State was selected fourth in the poll with 57 points. The Bears will be looking to make consecutive trips to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since a three-year run from 1996 through 1998.

All-MVC performer Jessica Smith returns for

2007 Preseason All-Valley Softball Team

Pos.	Name, School	Yr.	Hometown (Previous School)
1B	Brittany Herald, Evansville	Jr.	Old Hickory, Tenn. (Mid. Tenn. St.)
*2B	Tiffany Prager, Illinois State	Jr.	Bloomington, Ill. (Olympia)
*2B	Brooke Usher, Wichita State	Sr.	Katy, Texas (St. Agnes Academy)
3B	Lauren Haas, Southern Illinois	Jr.	Bremerton, Wash. (Olympic)
SS	Britnee Barnett, Wichita State	Jr.	Peoria, Ariz. (Centennial)
C	Amanda Clifton, Southern Illinois	Sr.	St. Louis, Mo. (Cor Jesu Academy)
DP	Jacqueline Vitale, Bradley	So.	Indian Head Park, Ill. (Lyons Township)
UT	Amber Smith, Illinois State	So.	Fairfield, Calif. (Fairfield)
OF	Tiffanie Dismore, Southern Illinois	Jr.	Lafayette, Ind. (McCutcheon)
OF	Katie McGeeney, Wichita State	Jr.	Derby, Kan. (Derby)
OF	Krystal Stein, Southern Illinois	Jr.	Nashville, Ill. (Nashville)
P	Cassidy Scoggins, Southern Illinois	Sr.	Owasso, Okla. (Owasso)
P	Darcy Wood, Indiana State	Jr.	Greenwood, Ind. (Center Grove)

*Received equal votes

the Bears' after a strong freshman season in which she paced MSU in runs scored and tied for third in the Valley. Also back for the Bears are a pair of juniors in pitcher Melissa Porche and third baseman Michelle Armentrout.

Creighton enters the preseason with 54 points in the coaches' poll, good for fifth-place.

The Bluejays enter the season with a few unknowns, namely, who will replace Stephanie Cortese in the circle and who will pick up the offensive slack created with the graduation of all-conference player, Lauren Cisneros?

Coach Brent Vigness secured two junior college All-Americans for the 2007 season, including Amanda Hess, a 26-game winner last season at Mesa Community College.

Jessica Wakasugi returns in the outfield for Creighton after a standout freshman season that saw her lead all MVC rookies with a .369 average in conference play.

Indiana State returns eight starters, preseason all-MVC pitcher Darcy Wood and was selected sixth in the preseason poll with 47 points.

Wood, the 2006 league-leader in strikeouts, racked up 21 wins a season ago and tossed 11 shutouts, tied for the most in the league.

At the plate for Indiana State, senior Stephanie Spychaj and sophomore Meridith Simpson lead the way.

Bradley comes in at seventh in the preseason poll with 33 points while Drake was right behind with 30.

The Braves lost five starters from a team that recorded the first winning season in Peoria since 1995 and will look to rebuild around sophomore pitcher Ashley Birdsong. Birdsong was the team leader in wins, strikeouts, innings and shutouts in 2006.

Lindsay Larry is the top-returning hitter for Drake and will look for help from the Jenna Wilkin, returning from injuries that limited her to seven

2006 FINAL MVC Standings

	Missouri Valley				Overall Records			
	W	L	T	Pct.	W	L	T	Pct.
*#Illinois St.	19	4	0	.826	38	16	0	.704
#Missouri St.	18	4	0	.818	40	17	0	.702
#Southern Ill.	15	6	0	.714	35	13	0	.729
#Wichita St.	11	10	0	.524	35	23	0	.603
#Drake	10	12	0	.455	24	30	0	.444
Indiana St.	12	15	0	.444	25	26	0	.490
Bradley	10	13	0	.435	25	23	0	.521
#Creighton	10	13	0	.435	23	27	0	.460
Evansville	9	18	0	.333	24	26	0	.480
UNI	2	21	0	.087	12	38	1	.245

*Regular-season champs; #MVC Tournament Participant

games in 2006.

The Bulldogs do return nine letterwinners and Cassie Heller, who made 36 appearances in the circle last season, primarily in relief, and threw 133 innings.

Evansville and UNI round out the coaches poll with 23 and 11 votes, respectively.

Just two seniors dot the roster for the Aces, who return sophomore Ashley Hobbs in the circle and one of the league's top hitters in junior Brittany Herald.

Just one letterwinner is gone from last season's squad while 13 return for head coach Gwen Lewis.

UNI welcomes back leading hitter Nikki Ferden and top RBI producer Stephanie Aguero among 10 returning players.

Not among those returning is an experienced pitcher. The Panthers will rely on three players, two without Division I experience, in the circle.

Liz Adams is back in the circle following a knee injury for her junior season.

Valley Softball Tournament Championships By Team

Team	Titles
Illinois State	5
Missouri State	5
Creighton	4
Drake	2
Wichita State	1
Evansville	1
Indiana State	1
UNI	1
Southern Illinois	1
Western Illinois	3

2007 Valley Upcoming Schedule

February

9	"Illinois St. vs. Oklahoma	12 p.m.
	"Illinois St. at Florida Int'l	5 p.m.
	!!Southern Ill. vs. UNC Greens.	12 p.m.
	!!Southern Ill. at Jacksonville	6 p.m.
	@ ₂ Wichita St. vs. McNeese St.	9:30 a.m.
	@ ₂ Wichita St. vs. Georgia	2:30 p.m.
10	)Drake vs. N. Dakota State	3 p.m.
	)Drake vs. Northern Ill.	7 p.m.
	"Illinois St. vs. Illinois	10 a.m.
	"Illinois St. vs. Louisville	12 p.m.
	@Missouri St. vs. Jackson St.	9 a.m.
	@Missouri St. vs. Ark.-Pine Bluff	1 p.m.
	@Missouri St. at Central Ark.	5 p.m.
	)North Dakota St. at UNI	11 a.m.
	)South Dakota St. at UNI	1 p.m.
	!!Southern Ill. at Jacksonville	1 p.m.
	!!Southern Ill. vs. UNC Greens.	3 p.m.
	@Wichita St. vs. McNeese St.	9:30 a.m.
	@ ₂ Wichita St. at La-Lafayette	12 p.m.
11	)Drake vs. S. Dakota State	2 p.m.
	"Illinois St. Bracket Play	TBD
	@Missouri St. vs. TBD	10 a.m.
	)Northern Ill. at UNI	4 p.m.

	!!Southern Ill. vs. Minnesota	9 a.m.
	@ ₂ Wichita St. vs. Georgia	9 a.m.
	@ ₂ Wichita St. at La-Lafayette	2 p.m.
12	)Drake at UNI	6 p.m.
16	)Illinois St. vs. Idaho State	1 p.m.
	!Illinois St. at Arizona State	7:30 p.m.
	@Missouri St. vs. LSU	5 p.m.
	@Missouri St. at Houston	9 p.m.
	@Southern Ill. vs. Indiana	11 a.m.
	@Southern Ill. vs. Texas State	1 p.m.
17	!UW-Green Bay at Bradley	12 p.m.
	!Western Ill. at Bradley	2 p.m.
	@Creighton vs. Alabama A&M	9 a.m.
	@Creighton at Central Ark.	3 p.m.
	@Creighton vs. Eastern Ill.	7 p.m.
	!Drake vs. UW-Green Bay	10 a.m.
	!Drake vs. Western Illinois	4 p.m.
	]Evansville vs. Miami-Ohio	12 p.m.
	]Evansville at Kennesaw State	4 p.m.
	!Illinois St. vs. UC-Riverside	1 p.m.
	!Illinois St. vs. Iowa	3:30 p.m.
	@Missouri St. vs. Texas State	1 p.m.

	@Southern Ill. at Houston	5:30 p.m.
	@Southern Ill. vs. Centenary	7:30 p.m.
	# ₂ Wichita St. vs. Florida A&M	8:30 a.m.
	# ₂ Wichita St. at South Florida	3 p.m.
18	!UW-Green Bay at Bradley	10 a.m.
	@Creighton Bracket Play	TBD
	@Creighton Bracket Play	TBD
	!Drake at Bradley	2 p.m.
	!Drake vs. Western Illinois	4 p.m.
	]Evansville vs. Georgetown	10 a.m.
	]Evansville vs. Georgia Tech	4 p.m.
	!Illinois St. vs. North Carolina	11 a.m.
	~Indiana St. vs. Ball State	11 a.m.
	~Indiana St. vs. Saint Louis	1:30 p.m.
	~Indiana St. vs. SEMO	4 p.m.
	@Missouri St. vs. Indiana	9 a.m.
	@Missouri St. vs. Centenary	1 p.m.
	@Southern Ill. vs. LSU	11 a.m.
	# ₂ Wichita St. vs. ETSU	10:30 a.m.
	# ₂ Wichita St. vs. Hofstra	5 p.m.