

Northeast Conference

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Familiar Favorite Lock Haven Tops NEC Field Hockey Preseason Poll *Three-time defending champion Lady Eagles Expected to Lock Up Another Title*

Somerset, NJ -- Lock Haven stands as the unanimous favorite to capture a fourth consecutive Northeast Conference field hockey crown. The Lady Eagles garnered eight first-place votes to finish atop the NEC's preseason coaches' poll for the fifth year in a row, the results of which were released by the league office on Thursday.

After coming up one victory shy of the NEC Tournament title each of the previous two seasons, Rider garnered the lone remaining first-place vote and finished second in the annual survey of the league's nine head coaches. Quinnipiac and Sacred Heart, who along with Lock Haven and Rider comprised last season's NEC Championship field, finished third and fourth, respectively, in the voting. Saint Francis (PA) claimed fifth place followed by Monmouth in sixth and Robert Morris in seventh. Poised for its inaugural season of NEC competition, Bryant was tabbed for eighth place while Siena rounded out the preseason prognostication in ninth.

Although preseason projections are sometimes turned upside down come season's end, the first-place vote-getter in each of the past four polls has gone onto capture either the regular season or tournament championship, and, at times, both. The 2004 Quinnipiac Bobcats were the last preseason favorite to walk away empty-handed. Lock Haven, picked third, finished atop the regular season standings that season, and Rider, selected second, won the tournament.

Lock Haven (19-4, 7-0 NEC) has encountered little difficulty in living up to the preseason favorite moniker it has so frequently owned since joining the league in 2004. The Haven has lost to a conference opponent only twice in five seasons as a NEC member. The Lady Eagles, who open their season against Georgetown followed by games at Longwood and Penn State, begin their NEC title defense on October 2 against the last team to have beaten them in conference play. The Haven's current 23-match NEC win streak (17 regular season, 6 tournament) began following a 1-0 loss to Quinnipiac on October 2006.

No Northeast Conference team suffered a larger loss than Lock Haven this past offseason when three-time Player of the Year Blair Wynne graduated. Despite losing the league's leading scorer from each of the past two seasons, the Lady Eagles remain the NEC favorite thanks to the deep arsenal built by veteran head coach Pat Rudy. The two-time NEC Coach of the Year welcomes back all-NEC first team forwards **Amy Hordendorf (Topton, PA/Brandywine Heights)** and **Suzann Hobart (Lewisberry, PA/Red Land)**. The former tied Wynne for the league lead in goals (20) last season while the latter amassed the NEC's fourth-highest point total (34 – 10 G, 14 A). Reigning NEC Defensive Player of the Year **Alanna Lewis (Trinidad & Tobago/Southeast Port-of-Spain)** possesses a variety of tools, including a hard shot that resulted in two goals during last year's NEC final. Goalkeeper **Erin Terreson (Robesonia, PA/Conrad Weiser)** hasn't been tested much during her first two seasons, but has shown she can make the big save when needed. Her .748 save percentage ranked second amongst NEC goalies in 2008 and she held the opposition scoreless during six of her 22 starts between the pipes.

Rider (13-7, 6-1 NEC) has beaten every Northeast Conference opponent it has faced since the start of 2007, except for Lock Haven. The Broncos have succumbed to the three-time NEC Champions on four occasions in the past two years with two of the losses coming in the NEC Tournament final. Returning for her 10th season, head coach Lori Hussong looks to reclaim the crown the Broncos won thrice during her first five seasons at the helm. Rider, which has contested every NEC Championship Game this decade except for the 2006 installment, lost a pair of accomplished scorers with the graduation of all-NEC

2009 Northeast Conference Field Hockey Preseason Coaches Poll

1. Lock Haven (8)
2. Rider (1)
3. Quinnipiac
4. Sacred Heart
5. Saint Francis (PA)
6. Monmouth
7. Robert Morris
8. Bryant
9. Siena

First place votes in parentheses

(2009 NEC Field Hockey Preseason Poll Release; 1-of-2)

Central Connecticut State University • Fairleigh Dickinson University • Long Island University
Monmouth University • Mount St. Mary's University • Quinnipiac University
Robert Morris University • Sacred Heart University • St. Francis (NY) College
Saint Francis (PA) University • Wagner College • Bryant University (2012-13)

forwards Tricia Crotty and Diana Celebre, but the return of sophomore **Virginia Egusquiza (Gexto, Spain)** is enough to make any coach smile. The 2008 NEC Rookie of the Year started all 20 games as a freshman and claimed a spot on the NEC All-Tournament Team.

Rider's recent run is also a product of stalwart defense. The Broncs surrendered a total of two goals during their seven-game regular season NEC slate last year thanks, in part, to the play of senior goalie **Lyndsie Johnson (Gibbsboro, NJ/Eastern)**. Rider's netminder posted a league-high six shutouts in 20 games on her way to leading the NEC in goals-against average (1.12) and save percentage (.800). Defensive-minded **Margaret Ecke (New Egypt, NJ/New Egypt)** is set for her third season in Lawrenceville after earning all-NEC credentials in both the backfield and midfield as an underclassman.

Quinnipiac (5-13, 3-4 NEC), a three-time league champion, has been a consistent contender for the NEC crown throughout Becca Kohli's coaching tenure. The only head coach the Bobcats have ever known, Kohli last celebrated a NEC crown in 2003, but has brought her team back to the conference tournament in three of the five years since. Quinnipiac loses three of the four all-NEC performers, including reigning NEC Goalkeeper of the Year Jenna Grossman, who sparked last year's run to the postseason. The good news is all-conference first team defender **Katie Van Norstrand (Derry, NH/Pinkerton Academy)**, one of four Bobcats to start all 18 games a season ago, joins a pair of key offensive contributors on the list of returnees. Starting 11 of 18 games in what was her first season as a regular, senior **Mackenzie Liptak (Schuylerville, NY/Schuylerville Central)** finished as the team's leading scorer (8G, 1A). Sophomore forward **Kaitlyn Notorianni (Clarks Summit, PA/Abington Heights)** scored a couple of key markers as a rookie, none more important than an overtime game-winner at Saint Francis (PA) that propelled the Bobcats into the postseason.

Sacred Heart (7-12, 5-2 NEC) has yet to miss out on the NEC Tournament this decade and hopes 2009 will be no different. Like its aforementioned Nutmeg State rival, Sacred Heart loses three of its four all-NEC selections from 2008. The most daunting task awaiting the Pioneers is finding a way to compensate for the loss of reigning NEC Offensive Player of the Year Carisa Eye and her 74 career goals. Head coach Chris Blais has had little trouble assembling talent during her eight-season tenure at the helm and she has an experienced midfield to build upon this season. Junior **Dana Luhrs (Milford, PA/Delaware Valley)** and senior **Whitney Russo (Waterville, ME/Waterville)** both appeared in all 19 games last year with the latter starting every one and earning second team all-NEC accolades.

Saint Francis (PA) (3-15, 2-5 NEC) made its first-ever NEC Tournament appearance two years ago and now looks for its first postseason berth under second-year head coach Stacey Bean. Academic All-American goalkeeper Erin Reifsteck and forward Belen Albanes, two main catalysts from the Flash's 2007 run, graduated this past May, but Bean has brought in seven newcomers to help fill the void. Sophomore **Calie Wilke (Durban, South Africa/Danville Park Girls)**, who worked her way into the starting lineup midway through last season, has the ability to shoulder some of the scoring load. The return of all-NEC second team midfielder **Allison Severage (Garwood, NJ/Arthur L. Johnson)** will help the Flash's playoff push, but goalkeeper remains a question. Bean will audition three netminders with the hope of finding a reliable replacement for Reifsteck.

Monmouth (3-15, 2-5 NEC) began the decade with three consecutive postseason appearances, but the Hawks have not played past the regular season finale since 2002. Third-year head coach Carli Figlio has seen her team come up one game shy of a NEC Tournament berth in each of her first two seasons as well as in 2006 when she served as an assistant. Looking to get her team over the hump, Figlio will have help from a pair of accomplished veterans in her lineup. Fifth-year senior **Enza Mazza (Oceanport, NJ/Shore Regional)**, the team's leading scorer (4G, 2A), brings her second team all-NEC credentials back to the midfield. Meanwhile, returning starter **Sarah Keppel (Northampton, PA/Northampton)** anchors the backline in front of goalkeeper **Melissa Katz (Tinton Falls, NJ/Monmouth Regional [Michigan State])**, who owned a .720 save percentage as a sophomore.

Robert Morris (5-13, 2-5 NEC) has yet to make the postseason since founding its program in 2004, but the Colonials came closest last season when they tied for fifth in the Northeast Conference standings. Third-year head coach Olivia Netzler, who stands as one of the all-time leading scorers in Louisville history, welcomes back her top scorer from a year ago in senior **Jessica Charles (Lancaster, PA/Lampeter-Strasburg)**. Although the graduation of Sam Lawless leaves a void, sophomore **Hayley Botha (Johannesburg, South Africa/St. Mary's)** has big-play potential as evidenced by the key goal she scored in a late-season, 2-1 win over Quinnipiac and the NEC Rookie of the Week award that followed.

Bryant's (2-16) first season in the Northeast Conference will mark the start of Shaunessy Saucier's head coaching career. The former team captain at Maine spent 2008 as an assistant with the Bulldogs. Bryant became somewhat acclimated with its new conference last season, which was one of transition for the Bulldogs, when its schedule included five NEC members. BU won the third game on last year's slate, a 3-2 victory over Mansfield, but it was not until the regular season finale that Bryant notched its first Division I win, 3-1, at Siena.

Siena (1-16, 1-6 NEC) welcomes six freshmen into the program. Third-year head coach Bill Davidson saw sophomore **Sarah Szewczyk (West Ossipee, NH/Kingswood Regional)** make her presence felt as a rookie. The two-time NEC Rookie of the Week rejoins senior forward **Andrea Caso (Carmel, NY/Carmel)** in leading the attack. Caso has started all 31 games over the past two seasons and so has defender **Carolina Hunnewell (Lebanon, NH/Lebanon)**.