

Heartland Collegiate Athletic Conference Office

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Pre-Season Baseball Coaches Poll

Transylvania Chosen as Pre-Season HCAC Baseball Favorite

GREENWOOD, IN – The Transylvania University baseball team has been selected as the favorite to claim the 2008 Heartland Collegiate Athletic Conference baseball championship. The Pioneers received 78 total points in the annual HCAC Preseason Coaches Poll.

The poll collects votes from all nine head coaches in the HCAC. Transylvania received six first place votes in the poll. The College of Mount St. Joseph collected the second most votes in the poll and finished with 71 total points and two first place votes. Franklin College finished third in the poll with 54 points and was followed by Anderson University which claimed 53 points and the final first place vote. Manchester College (45 points), Rose-Hulman (39), Bluffton University (34), Hanover College (19), and Defiance College (12) rounded out the poll.

Transylvania will be looking for its second straight conference title in 2008. Transy received some votes in the *Collegiate Baseball Newspaper Preseason Poll* and will look for the schools third straight HCAC Tournament appearance. The Pioneers claimed the 2007 regular season championship with a 16-6 conference mark. Transylvania was 29-12 overall and fell to Manchester and Anderson in the HCAC Tournament. The Pioneers return a host of key components from last season's team including **Mitch Kuczek (Loveland, Ohio/Moeller)**. The senior outfielder ranked among the conference leaders, hitting .432 last season with 13 doubles, 21 stolen bases, 46 RBI, 51 runs, and a .525 on-base percentage.

Also returning to set the table for the heart of the Transy order is junior outfielder **Phil Blakely (Louisville, Ky./St. Xavier)**. The junior hit .368 a year ago with 44 runs scored, 41 RBI, and 12 doubles.

On the mound, Transylvania will be led by All-HCAC first team selection **Adam Wilkins (Louisville, Ky./St. Xavier)**. The junior right handed pitcher was 6-1 on the hill last year with a 3.48 earned run average. Wilkins had 41 strikeouts in 64.2 innings pitched. Senior **Ben Luking (Louisville, Ky./Ballard)** also returns to the mound after collecting an 8-3 mark last season. The right hander posted a 3.92 earned run average and struck out 36 in 80.1 innings.

Mount St. Joseph will be looking for the schools third HCAC baseball title and first since the 2003 season. The Lions claimed the HCAC tournament title for the second straight season last spring, handing Anderson a 6-3 defeat in the final. Leading the way this season will be their returning All-HCAC selections.

Junior shortstop **Nick Weimer (Cincinnati, Ohio/Oak Hills)** and senior first baseman **Seth DeBra (Loveland, Ohio/Milford)** return looking to pick up where they left off last spring. Weimer was second on the Lions with a .365 batting average and added 27 runs, two home runs, and 32 RBI. DeBra hit .361 last season with 23 runs, 13 doubles, and 30 RBI.

The Mount finished 33-11 last season with a 15-7 mark in the HCAC standings. The Mount ended their season with losses to top-ranked Wooster and Ohio Wesleyan in the NCAA Division III Mid-East Regional.

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Franklin College is predicted to finish third and make a strong push for the conference title. The Grizzlies finished with a 23-16 mark last season and posted a 9-10 conference record for sixth place. FC will have key members returning from last year's team. Senior pitcher **Andy Clark (Louisville, Ky./Seneca)** was 5-1 on the mound last season with a 2.77 earned run average, striking out 47 in 68.1 innings pitched. Junior first baseman **Jim Swienconeck (Griffith, Ind./H.S.)** and junior outfielder **Lance Noel (Union, Ky./Ryle)** will be looked upon for an offensive punch. Swienconeck hit .345 last season with 12 doubles, four home runs, and 34 RBI, while Noel led the team with a .392 batting average.

The 2008 baseball season opens on February 24. The HCAC portion of the schedule will begin on March 21 with the HCAC Tournament slated for May 8-10.

2008 HCAC Baseball Coaches Preseason Poll

| <u>Team</u> | <u>Points (first place votes)</u> |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Transylvania | 78 (6) |
| 2. Mount St. Joseph | 71 (2) |
| 3. Franklin | 54 |
| 4. Anderson | 53 (1) |
| 5. Manchester | 45 |
| 6. Rose-Hulman | 39 |
| 7. Bluffton | 34 |
| 8. Hanover | 19 |
| 9. Defiance | 12 |

2008 Baseball Players to Watch

Anderson: Stephen Jones – OF (Sr., Anderson, Ind./Anderson), Brad Lantz – C (Jr., Lapel, Ind./H.S.), Eric Smith – P/1B (Sr., Ft. Wayne, Ind./Bishop Luers)

Bluffton: Ryan Baightel – SS (Sr., Wapakoneta, Ohio/H.S.), Tim Kay – RHP/DH (Sr., Alpharetta, Ga./Blessed Trinity), Curtis Schroeder – C (Jr., Shelby, Ohio/H.S.), Tony Moore – OF (Sr., Elida, Ohio/H.S.), Matt Perkins – RHP (Jr., Convoy, Ohio/Crestview), Cody McPherson – RHP/OF (So., Northwood, Ohio/Millbury-Lake)

Defiance: Tim Pitro – IF (So., Gahanna, Ohio/Lincoln), Brad Timofeev – IF/P (Jr., Oregon, Ohio/Clay), Trey Harris – OF (So., Toledo, Ohio/Start), Dave Jackson – DH (Sr., Blanchester, Ohio/H.S.)

Franklin: Andy Clark – RHP (Sr., Louisville, Ky./Seneca), Jim Swienconeck – 1B (Jr., Griffith, Ind./H.S.), Lance Noel – OF (Jr., Union, Ky./Ryle), Adam Blackburn – SS (Jr., Shelbyville, Ind./H.S.)

Hanover: Joe Cravens – DH (Sr., Hodgenville, Ky./Larue Co.), Will Pappano – OF (So., Tell City, Ind./H.S.), Jake Schwartz – P (So., Kokomo, Ind./Western)

Manchester: Matty Miller – C (Jr., Rochester, Ind./H.S.), Colin Denihan – P (Jr., Columbia City, Ind./H.S.), Kaz Kalita – SS (So., LaPorte, Ind./H.S.), Danner Partridge – OF (Sr., New Haven, Ind./H.S.)

Mount St. Joseph: Seth DeBra – 1B (Sr., Loveland, Ohio/Milford), Nick Weimer – SS (Jr., Cincinnati, Ohio/Oak Hills), John Stritholt – P (Sr., Fairfield, Ohio/Badin), Steve Matre – P (So., Cincinnati, Ohio/Purcell-Marian)

Rose-Hulman: Sam Deters – RHP (Sr., Teutopolis, Ill./H.S.), Derek Eitel – P (So., Marshall, Ill./H.S.), Chandler Kent – 3B/P (So., Antioch, Ill./H.S.), Michael Matsui – P (Sr., Plainfield, Ill./South)

Transylvania: Mitch Kuczek – OF (Sr., Loveland, Ohio/Moeller), Phil Blakely – OF (Jr., Louisville, Ky./St. Xavier), Adam Wilkins – RHP (Jr., Louisville, Ky./St. Xavier), Ben Luking – RHP (Sr., Louisville, Ky./Ballard)

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***For more information on the Heartland Collegiate Athletic Conference and up to date standings, schedules, statistics, and more, log on to the HCAC website at www.heartlandconf.org.

