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## Vikings Top Preseason Coaches' Poll After Deep Run

PORTLAND, Ore. – The 2021-22 national runners-up are picked to be the class of the GNAC.

After making a run that culminated with an appearance in the Division II championship game, Western Washington is the clear favorite of coaches in the 2022-23 GNAC Women's Basketball Preseason Coaches Poll.

The Vikings received eight of 10 possible first-place votes, for a total of 98 points. Alaska Anchorage (84 points) and Montana State Billings (81 points) are picked second and third in the conference with each receiving one first-place vote.

### 2022-23 GNAC Preseason Women's Basketball Coaches Poll

Team	2021-22 Record	GNAC Record (Place)	Pts.
1. Western Washington (8)	25-6	10-4 (1st)	98
2. Alaska Anchorage (1)	20-7	12-4 (2nd)	84
3. Montana State Billings (1)	17-12	10-5 (5th)	81
4. Central Washington	24-8	13-5 (3rd)	67
5. Simon Fraser	12-14	8-8 (6th)	59
6. Northwest Nazarene	18-10	12-6 (4th)	55
7. Seattle Pacific	12-18	7-11 (7th)	42
8. Saint Martin's	13-14	4-12 (9th)	27
9. Western Oregon	9-17	5-13 (8th)	22
10. Alaska	3-20	2-15 (10th)	15

Votes awarded on a 11-10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1 basis.

Conference finish order in 2021-22 determined by Points Rating System.

Central Washington is predicted to finish fourth (67 points) followed by Simon Fraser (59 points), Northwest Nazarene (55 points), Seattle Pacific (42 points), Saint Martin's (27 points), Western Oregon (22 points) and Alaska (15 points).

Western Washington put together a stellar 2021-22 season, racking up 25 wins, a GNAC regular-season championship, a West Region title and a run to the Division II championship game. The Vikings started and ended their season on strong notes. They went on a 10-game winning streak to tear through the opening portion of their schedule and closed out the regular season by winning eight of their last 10 contests.

The Vikings' defense led the conference last season, limiting opponents to a GNAC-best .348 field goal percentage that ranked 15th in Division II and a .243 three-point percentage that ranked fourth in Division II. They were tough on the boards as well, leading the conference by outrebounding opponents by an average of 8.2 per game and ranking 24th in Division II with 1,257 total rebounds.

Western Washington has every chance to build off its highly successful 2021-22 campaign this season, returning all five starters and 10 players from its GNAC championship-winning roster. The returning Vikings are led by Honorable Mention All-GNAC player **Brooke Walling** who returns after being named to the NCAA Elite Eight All-Tournament Team and the NCAA West Regional Tournament MVP. Walling averaged 10.8 points and led the team with 7.8 rebounds per game to go along with 38 total steals. Conference Defensive Player of the Year and Second Team All-GNAC guard **Avery Dykstra** also returns for Western Washington. Dykstra dished out a team-leading 78 assists and averaged 6.4 points per game.

Alaska Anchorage is expected to maintain its position in the standings from last season after going 12-4 in conference play (20-7 overall) and falling to the eventual West Region title-winners in the NCAA West Regional. The Seawolves will have a solid foundation to build from as they return three starters and eight players overall. Alaska Anchorage took advantage of opponents' mistakes, leading the conference with

331 steals and a 6.15 turnover margin. Capitalizing on those opportunities allowed the UAA to compile a +7.5 scoring margin, second-best in the GNAC.

Leading the way for the Seawolves is Anchorage native **Jahna Hajudukovich**. The senior guard started all 27 of UAA's games last season and is the top returning scorer for the Seawolves. She averaged 7.7 points per game and led the team with a .378 three-point field goal percentage. Senior guard **Nicole Pickney** was another major contributor, averaging 7.6 points per game.

After placing fifth in the conference standings last year, coaches predict that Montana State Billings will continue its climb up the GNAC standings and finish two places better in third. Yellowjackets head coach **Kevin Woodin** became the winningest coach in MSUB women's basketball history last season with 291 wins and has every reason to expect more success in the 2022-23 campaign with five starting players returning to the roster. That includes First Team All-GNAC guard **Taryn Shelley** who led MSUB with a .500 field goal percentage and 15.4 points per game. She is joined by last year's Second Team All-GNAC honoree and GNAC Newcomer of the Year **Cariann Kunkel**, who racked up 55 assists while averaging a 12-points-per-game.

Montana State Billings was one of the best teams in the conference at limiting second-chance scoring last year, averaging 32.8 defensive rebounds per game. The Yellowjackets were also one of the best passing teams in the GNAC with a conference-best 1.2 assist/turnover ratio and ranked third with 15.4 assists per game.

Central Washington is tabbed to finish in fourth place, narrowly behind MSUB in voting by three points. The Wildcats won the championship last season, defeating regular-season champion Western Washington in the GNAC Championships Final. High-powered offense was a key for CWU on its championship run, leading the conference in scoring with an average of 73.6 points per game and a .343 three-point field goal percentage.

Leading the Wildcats on the court will be **Samantha Bowman** who was named Second Team D2CCA All-American, First Team D2CCA All-West Region, First Team All-GNAC and the GNAC Championships MVP. Bowman was a force to be reckoned with, averaging 16.2 points per game and leading Division II with 15.9 rebounds per game (477 total). She also led Division II in double-doubles (26) and defensive rebounds per game (11.4).

Sophomore guard **Valerie Huerta** is the second-highest-scoring returning player for CWU. She averaged 8.2 points per game while shooting 41.9% from the field and 38.5% from three-point range. Central Washington will also look to key transfers **Malia Smith** and **Shelby Blodgett** to bolster the offensive corps without last year's top two offensive threats, Kizzah Maltezo and Kassidy Malcolm.

Simon Fraser is expected to go one better than it did last season in fifth place. The Red Leafs went 8-8 in conference play (12-14 overall) and held the second-ranked scoring offense in the conference at 72.6 points per game. Simon Fraser's passing facilitated a GNAC-leading 17 assists per game. They excelled beyond the three-point arc as well, shooting 31%.

Head coach **Bruce Langford** returns for his 21st season at the helm for SFU and returns three starters and 10 total players. Junior forward/guard **Jessica Wisotzki** heads up the returning Red Leafs after being named a Second Team All-GNAC honoree. She led the team and ranked third in the conference in scoring at 17.3 points per game and shot 46.8% from the field.

The Red Leafs also return starting guard **Georgia Swant** who averaged 8.1 points, 4.2 rebounds and 3.3 assists per game while leading the team in defensive rebounds and assists. Swant was the most consistent presence on the court for Simon Fraser last season, racking up a team-leading 727 minutes.

Northwest Nazarene is picked to finish sixth after losing its three leading scorers. The Nighthawks' offense ranked third in the GNAC last season at 72.4 points per game and was tied for second in the conference with 13.8 offensive rebounds per game.

Honorable Mention All-GNAC guard **Jordan Pinson** leads the returning NNU players ranking fourth in the GNAC with an average of 3.4 assists per game. She shot 35% from the field and led the team at the charity stripe where she shot 77.3%. Junior guard **Emma Clark** who

ranked fifth in the conference with 46 steals in 26 games while also averaging 3.5 points per game. Head coach **Steve Steele** will also look toward junior college transfers **Loy Waid** and **Shwaneece Davis** to make a positive impact.

Coaches predict that Seattle Pacific will maintain its seventh-place form for the 2022-23 season. The Falcons boasted the second-best defense corps in the GNAC last season, allowing 59.2 points per game. The defensive strengths for SPU extended to their own half, ranking second in the conference with a .354 field goal defense percentage and 28.6 defensive rebounds per game.

Head coach **Mike Simonson** will enter his fourth season leading the Falcons knowing that there are starting positions to fill with two starters returning along with nine total players. **Natalie Hoff** is the highest returning scorer for Seattle Pacific after averaging 11 points per game and shooting 43.9% from the field along with a team-leading 18 blocks. **Ashely Alter** also returns after averaging 9.9 points per game and shooting 37.4% from the field.

Saint Martin's is expected to rise in the standings, tabbed for eighth in the preseason poll. The Saints struggled to find offense last season but the defense ranked fifth in the conference by allowing 63.1 points per game. Saint Martin's was also one of the top teams in the conference from the free throw line, shooting 73.2%. The defense was effective at limiting chances from the field as well, holding opponents to just 37.4% to rank third in the GNAC.

Three starting players return for the Saints led by Honorable Mention All-GNAC forward **Rian Clear**, who averaged 12.6 points and 4.5 rebounds per game in her freshman campaign. Her 12.6 points per game ranked No. 10 in the conference and was second only to Claire Dingus for SMU. Saint Martin's head coach **Christy Martin** has brought in experienced talent to help support a corps of young players with junior transfers **Anjel Galbraith** and **Keeli Jade Smith**.

Western Oregon is picked to finish ninth. The Wolves finished in eighth last season with a 5-13 conference record (9-17 overall) and will look to add increased offensive output to a squad that limited opponents to 39.1% from the field. Junior guard **Cali McClave** is the leading returning scorer for the WOU. She averaged 9.7 points per game and netted 136 three-point shots to lead the team. She also led the team with a .833 free throw percentage.

The Wolves will look to transfer **Ally Harman** out of Lower Columbia CC and incoming freshmen **Kylee Arzner**, **Kilyn Dawkins** and **Erika Glenn** to lift the offensive potency of the team.

First-year head coach **Amy Donovan** will look to lift the Nanooks up the standings after being predicted to finish 10th. Donovan inherits four starting players from last year's Alaska team that ranked second in the GNAC with a .277 three-point field goal defensive percentage. Top scorers **Pearle Green** and **Destiny Reimers** return to the court for their sophomore seasons. Green led the team in scoring with an average of 14.8 points per game and 58 three-point buckets while shooting 39% from the field. Reimers wasn't far behind with an average of 11.4 points per game in addition to leading the team in rebounding with an average of 5.8 boards per game.

Donovan will look to build around the young Nanook talent by bringing in juco transfers **Emma McKenney** and **Jayda Van Dyke** out of Lane CC and Independence CC, respectively.

The 2022-23 season begins on Sunday, Nov. 6, when Alaska Anchorage faces La Sierra in Riverside, California. Conference play commences on Monday, Nov. 28 when Alaska hosts Montana State Billings.