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Azusa Pacific Projected For Fourth GNAC Football Title In Preseason Poll

PORTLAND, Ore. – A season removed from an undefeated conference slate and its first trip to the NCAA Division II Playoffs, Azusa Pacific is the unanimous pick to repeat as champions in the 2017 Great Northwest Athletic Conference Preseason Football Coaches Poll.

The Cougars, who received all five first place votes in the poll, went 9-3 overall in 2016 and finished off an unblemished 8-0 conference mark to earn its third GNAC championship since joining the conference in 2012. They are also ranked No. 13 in American Football Coaches Association (AFCA) Division II Preseason Poll.

2017 GNAC Preseason Football Coaches Poll

Team (1st Place Votes)	2016 Record (Finish)	Pts.
1. Azusa Pacific (5)	9-3, 8-0 GNAC (1st)	25
2. Central Washington	7-3, 6-2 GNAC (2nd)	20
3. Humboldt State	6-5, 3-5 GNAC (Tie 3rd)	14
4. Western Oregon	4-6, 3-5 GNAC (Tie 3rd)	11
5. Simon Fraser	0-10, 0-8 GNAC (5th)	5

Votes awarded on a 5-4-3-2-1 basis.

Azusa Pacific enters the season having won nine straight games against GNAC opponents and an eight-game win streak on its home field. The Cougars will play six of its 11 games in 2017 at the Citrus Bowl.

Central Washington was the unanimous pick to finish second to the Cougars again, collecting all five second place votes for 20 points. Humboldt State was picked third with 14 points, followed by Western Oregon in fourth (11 pts.) and Simon Fraser in fifth (5 pts.). Both Central Washington and Humboldt State received votes in the AFCA Preseason Poll.

While Azusa Pacific proved potent on offense, leading the GNAC with 435 points and outscoring opponents by an average of 20 points per game, the Cougars won on defense. They led the GNAC with 192 points allowed and 334.1 yards allowed per game and was among the leaders in NCAA Division II in interceptions (23), red zone defense (.559), scoring defense (16 points allowed per game) and sacks (4.17 per game).

The Cougars return 58 players from the 2016 championship squad, including 15 starters. Senior quarterback **Andrew Elffers**, the reigning GNAC Offensive Player of the Year, threw for 2,120 yards and 21 touchdowns while also rushing for seven more touchdowns. Elffers was intercepted just three times and his 1.1 interception percentage set a GNAC single season record. Junior running back **Kurt Scoby** was a First Team All-GNAC selection after rushing for 56.5 yards per game with five touchdowns while sophomore **Weston Carr**, the 2016 GNAC Freshman of the Year, caught 48 passes for 75.4 receiving yards per game and nine touchdowns. First team offensive lineman **Joe Kupcikevicius** and junior center **Sakalaia Hungalu** anchor a line that allowed just 22 sacks.

On defense, senior safety **Taliuaki Suliafu** was a First Team All-GNAC selection after he finished with 61 tackles, 9.5 tackles for loss and 5.5 sacks. Senior defensive end **Jason Schwartz** also made the first team list thanks to 47 tackles, nine sacks and a forced fumble. The Cougars also return a pair of Second Team All-GNAC performers in senior defensive end **Conrado Simpson** (20 tackles, 8.5 for loss, 5 sacks) and junior linebacker **Aaron Berry** (107 tackles, 6 for loss).

Central Washington made marked improvement in **Ian Shoemaker's** third season as head coach. After going 5-5 in 2015, the Wildcats improved to 7-3 overall and 6-2 in conference play. Central Washington put together the top passing offense in the league, averaging 303.7 passing yards per game, while ranking sixth in Division II with a 166.07 pass efficency rating. On the ground, the Wildcats limited opponents to 81.3 rushing yards per game, which ranked fifth among Division II programs.

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The Wildcats will have to adjust to life without a pair of key speciality players, including quarterback Justin Lane and wide receiver/return specialist Jesse Zalk. Senior tight end **Kyle Self** earned Second Team All-GNAC honors after he caught 29 passes for 312 yards and four touchdowns. Junior **James Moore**, a Second Team D2CCA All-Super Region 3 selection, anchors an experienced offensive line.

Central Washington will be solid on defense with the return of the GNAC Defensive Player of the Year, **Kevin Haynes**. The senior linebacker earned D2CCA All-America honors after finishing with 100 total tackles and 19 tackles for loss. Senior defensive back **Jackson Huerta** also earned First Team All-GNAC honors with 70 tackles and a pair of forced fumbles. The duo is joined by Second Team All-GNAC senior linebacker **Sean Elledge** and sophomore defensive back **Darien Williams**, an honorable mention selection.

Picked to repeat as champions in 2016, Humboldt State was hampered by a season-ending injury to wide receiver **Chase Krivashei** and a mid-season injury that limited All-American running back **Ja'Quan Gardner**. Despite the injuries, the Lumberjacks cotninued to be an offensive force that led the conference with 460.2 yards of total offense per game and 157.6 rushing yards per game. Humboldt was also potent from the air with senior quarterback **Robert Webber** throwing for 297.3 yards per game and 25 touchdowns. Of the Lumberjacks' five losses, three were by 10 points or less.

The Lumberjacks' dynamic offensive trio returns for their senior seasons. Gardner repeated as an All-American selection despite the injury, carrying 249 times for 1,300 yards and 18 touchdowns. His 179.2 all-purpose yards per game ranked 14th in Division II. Krivashei, a First Team All-GNAC selection in 2015, caught 23 passes for 318 yards and three touchdowns before his injury. He racked up 926 receiving yards with 15 touchdowns the season before. Webber earned Second Team All-GNAC selection in 2016. The three are protected by an experienced offensive line, anchored by three-time GNAC Offensive Lineman of the Year and All-American **Alex Cappa**. The HSU defense continues to mature and will be led by by senior linebacker **Jeff Shott**, who earned Second Team All-GNAC honors after finishing with 72 tackles, 5.5 for loss.

Western Oregon started the 2016 season with a shocker, taking down Division I-FCS Sacramento State 38-30 in both teams' season opener. The Wolves, however, hit a skid in October as they lost three of their final four GNAC games. Western Oregon finished 2016 averaging 338.9 yards of total offernse per game, the majority of which came in the air with an average of 251.4 passing yards per game. The Wolves were one of the top special teams programs in the GNAC, averaging 22.1 yards per punt return.

The Wolves return eight starters on offense, all of whom played key roles in 2016. Senior **Paul Revis** was a First Team All-GNAC selection as both a wide receiver and a return specialist after leading Division II with an average of 24.3 yards per punt return and leading the GNAC with 105.7 receiving yards per game. Also back is the dual-quarterback threat of seniors **Nick Duckworth** and **Phillip Fenumiai**. Fenumiai averaged 138.7 passing yards per game with 10 touchdowns while Duckworth averaged 182 yards per game in six games with nine touchdowns.

Western Oregon is bolstered on defense by returning First Team All-GNAC junior linebacker **Bo Highburger**, who finished second in the GNAC with 111 tackles and was 12th in Division II with 6.3 solo tackles per game. Highburger is joined Second Team All-GNAC senior linebacker **Tyler Johnson** and senior honorable mention defensive lineman **Michael Kluge**.

After going winless over its first two seasons under head coach **Kelly Bates**, Simon Fraser hopes the third year will be the charm. The Clan returns a total of 45 players and the majority of its starters on both offense and defense. Simon Fraser will have to replace its top speciality players, however, with the graduation of defensive standouts Jordan and Justin Herdman and wide receiver Ante Milanovic-Litre.

Simon Fraser will anchor its offense around a pair of Second Team All-GNAC selections in senior wide receiver **Justin Buren** and junior running back **Jalen Jana**. Buren caught 47 passes for 630 yards while Jana carried 92 times for 464 yards while making 30 receptions for another 130 yards. Junior quarterback **Miles Richardson** returns after completing 169 passes for 1,600 yards in 2016. Junior defensive lineman **Kyle Wilson**, a Second Team All-GNAC selection, and junior Honorable Mention All-GNAC lineman **Brad Lyons**, will be looked upon to step into defensive leadership roles.

All five GNAC programs will be in action on week one of the season. Western Oregon opens the year on Thurs., Aug. 31, and will look to beat their third Division I foe in four years at Idaho State. The remainder of the openers take place on Sat., Sept. 2, with Central Washington at Texas A&M Kingsville, Azusa Pacific at West Texas A&M and Simon Fraser at NAIA rival Arizona Christian. Humbolst State plays the lone home game, hosting CETYS of Mexico in a rare exhibition contest.

GNAC Football Team Capsules Follow On Next Page

2017 GNAC Football Teams At A Glance

AZUSA PACIFIC
Head Coach: Victor Santa Cruz (Hawaii, 1995, 68-52, 12th Season)
Assistant Coaches: Cesar Rivas-Sandoval (Assistant Head Coach/Defensive Coordinator), Rudy Carlton (Offensive Coordinator/Quarterbacks), Bo Beatty (Whips & Bandits), Richard Brown (Wide Receivers), Ben Buys (Running Backs/Run Game Coordinator), Gabe Higerd (Special Teams/Strength & Conditioning), Matt Johnson (Tight Ends/Halfbacks), Jackie Slater (Offensive Line), Manuko Tuifua (Defensive Line), Justin Riddle (Director of Football Operations), Tyler Davis (Defensive Assistant), Ronald Douglas (Defensive Assistant), Jake Thomas (Defensive Assistant)
2016 Overall Record: 9-3 **GNAC Record (Finish):** 8-0 (1st)
Total Players Returning: 58 (30 Offense, 26 Defense, 2 Special Teams)
Starters Returning: 15 (9 Offense, 5 Defense, 1 Special Teams) **Starters Lost:** 8 (2 offense, 6 Defense)
Basic Offense: Spread **Basic Defense:** Eagle

Top Offensive Returners: Andrew Elffers (QB, Sr., GNAC Offensive Player of the Year, 160-257-3, 2,120 yds., 21 TD, 62.3 completion pct., 354 rushing yds., 7 rushing TDs), Kurt Scoby (RB, Jr., First Team All-GNAC, 111 rushing attempts, 621 yds., 5.6 yards per carry, 5 TD, 17 receptions, 91 receiving yds., 1 receiving TD), Weston Carr (WR, So., GNAC Freshman of the Year, 48 receptions, 905 yds., 18.9 yards per catch, 9 TDs), Joe Kupcikevicius (OL, Sr., First Team All-GNAC), Sakalaia Hungalu (C, Jr., First Team All-GNAC).

Top Defensive Returners: Taliuaki Suliafu (SS, Sr., First Team All-GNAC, 61 tackles, 38 solo, 9.5 tackles for loss, 5.5 sacks, 2 INT, 3 fumbles recovered), Jason Schwartz (DE, Sr., First Team All-GNAC, 47 tackles, 18 solo, 9 sacks, 1 forced fumble), Conrado Simpson (DE, Sr., Second Team All-GNAC, 20 tackles, 10 solo, 8.5 tackles for loss, 5 sacks, 1 forced fumble), Aaron Berry (LB, Jr., Second Team All-GNAC, 107 tackles, 51 solo, 6 tackles for loss, 1 INT, 1 fumble recovery).

Top Returning Special Teams: Jacob Hall (P/K, Jr., Second Team All-GNAC, 40.4 yards per punt avg., 14-17 PATs, 2-6 FGs).

Key Losses: Josiah Thropay (TE), C.J. Broussard (CB), Tyree Davis (CB/KR), Mykal Walker (LB).

Key Freshmen Newcomers: Andrew Anderson (TE, 6-3, 245, La Mirada, Calif. – La Mirada), Isaiah Cordova (CB, 6-0, 180, Fresno, Calif. – Clovis North), Lamario Howard (DB, 6-1, 180, Rialto, Calif. – Eisenhower), Andrew Kaufusi (LB, 6-1, 220, Honolulu, Hawaii – Kaiser), Josh Olave (DB, 5-11, 175, San Marcos, Calif. – Mission Hills), Tyler O'Neil (DE, 6-6, 235, Long Beach, Calif. – Long Beach Poly), Micah Roth (LB, 6-3, 210, Murrieta, Calif. – Calvary Murrieta)

Key Transfers: Jesse Hanckel (QB, 6-4, 200, So., Sun Valley, Calif. – Pasadena CC), Hunter Petlansky (QB, 6-3, 200, So., Livermore, Calif. – Columbia Univ.), Gavin McDaniel (RB, 5-8, 175, Jr., Coppell, Texas – Univ. of Washington), David Jimenez (DT, 6-2, 295, Jr., Hacienda Heights, Calif. – Mt. San Antonio CC), Robbie Polimeni (DL, 6-2, 265, So., La Quinta, Calif. – Coll. of the Desert), Brandon Garcia (K, 6-0, 185, Jr., Chino Hills, Calif. – Mt. San Antonio CC).

CENTRAL WASHINGTON
Head Coach: Ian Shoemaker (Grinnell, 1996, 19-12, 4th Season)
Assistant Coaches: John Picha (Assistant Head Coach/Running Backs), Scott Power (Defensive Coordinator), Chris Fisk (Offensive Coordinator/Offensive Line), Benny Boyd (Special Teams/Defensive Backs), Nate Johnson (Defensive Backs), Brandon Gibson (Wide Receivers), Myles Carelock (Defensive Backs), Josh Stolz (Defensive Line), Greg Stewart (Running Backs).
2016 Overall Record: 7-3 **GNAC Record (Finish):** 6-2 (2nd)
Total Playerss Returning: 45 (20 Offense, 23 Defense, 2 Special Teams)
Starters Returning: 17 (7 Offense, 8 Defense, 2 Special Teams) **Starters Lost:** 10 (4 Offense, 5 Defense, 1 Special Teams)
Basic Offense: Single Back Multiple **Basic Defense:** 4-2 Nickel

Top Offensive Returners: James Moore (OL, Jr., D2CCA Second Team All-Super Region 3, First Team All-GNAC), Reggie Long (OL, Sr.), Kyle Self (TE, Sr., Honorable Mention All-GNAC, 29 receptions, 312 yds., 4 TD), Justin Peterson (WR, Sr., 24 receptions, 397 yds., 2 TD), JoJo Hillel (22-42, 384 passing yds., 5 TD, 33 rushing attempts, 233 yds., 4 TD).

Central Washington Continued On Next Page >>>>

CENTRAL WASHINGTON CONTINUED

Top Defensive Returners: Kevin Haynes (LB, Sr., D2CCA All-American, D2CCA First Team All-Super Region 3, GNAC Defensive Player of the Year, 100 tackles, 68 solo, 19 tackles for loss, 4 sacks), Jackson Huerta (DB, Sr., First Team All-GNAC, 70 tackles, 50 solo, 2 forced fumbles), Sean Elledge (LB, Sr., Second Team All-GNAC, 76 tackles, 44 solo, 5 sacks), Max McIntosh (DB, Sr., Second Team All-GNAC, 61 tackles, 2 INT), Darien Williams (DB, So., Honorable Mention All-GNAC, 37 tackles, 3.5 tackles for loss).

Top Returning Special Teams: Jonathan Kuhn (P, Sr., 37.0 yards per punt avg., 11 inside 20 yd. line.

Key Losses: Tovar Sanchez (DL), Uso Olive (DL), Jesse Zalk (WR/KR), Justin Lane (QB).

Key Freshmen Newcomers: N/A.

Key Transfers: Tyler Hasty (DB, 6-0, 190, Jr., Bellevue, Wash. – Oregon State Univ.), Tommy Hays (QB, 6-4, 200, Jr., Paradise, Calif. – Austin Peay Univ.), Reilley Hennessey (QB, 6-3, 200, Jr., Camas, Wash. – Eastern Washington Univ.), Chase DeMoor (DL, 6-4, 250, Eatonville, Wash. – Coll. of the Siskiyous).

HUMBOLDT STATE

Head Coach: Rob Smith (Washington, 1981, 9th Season, 55-42, 27th Season Overall, 165-103-1)
Assistant Coaches: Barry Sacks (Defensive Coordinator/Defensive Line), Cory White (Offensive Line), Bo Montgomery (Linebackers), Damaro Wheeler (Special Teams Coordinator/Secondary), Nick Williams (Inside Wide Receivers/Running Backs), Zach Shultis (Outside Wide Receivers), Eric Eisenberg (Defensive Backs), Jonathon Rowe (Offensive Line/Tight Ends), Andy Laughlin (Defensive Assistant)
2016 Overall Record: 6-5 **GNAC Record (Finish):** 3-5 (Tie 3rd)
Total Players Returning: 56 (27 Offense, 25 Defense, 4 Special Teams)
Starters Returning: 17 (10 Offense, 6 Defense, 1 Special Teams) **Starters Lost:** 10 (3 Offense, 5 Defense, 2 Special Teams)
Basic Offense: Spread **Basic Defense:** 4-2-5

Top Offensive Returners: Ja'Quan Gardner (RB, Sr., D2CCA Second Team All-American, First Team All-GNAC, 249 carries, 1,300 yds., 18 TD), Alex Cappa (OL, Sr., AFCA First Team All-American, Associated Press Little All-American), Robert Webber (QB, Sr., Second Team All-GNAC, 274-430-7, 3,270 yds., 25 TD, 63.7 completion pct.), Chase Krivashei (WR, Sr., 23 receptions, 318 yds., 3 TD, missed final eight games due to injury), Josh Hanson (OL, Sr., Second Team All-GNAC), Sam Madden (OL, Sr.), Richard Doctor (WR/RB, Sr., Honorable Mention All-GNAC, 43 receptions, 493 yds., 4 TD, 48 carries, 152 rushing yds.).

Top Defensive Returners: Jeff Shott (LB, Sr., Second Team All-GNAC, 72 tackles, 38 solo, 5.5 tackles for loss, 1 sack, 1 INT), Connor Cox (LB, Jr., 58 tackles, 25 solo, 3 tackles for loss), Curtis Williams (LB, Jr., 25 tackles, 15 solo, 9 tackles for loss, 7 sacks).

Top Special Teams Returning: Alex Elterman (P/K, Sr., First Team All-GNAC, 57 punts, 42 yards per punt avg., 18 inside 20).

Key Losses: Lucas Govan (OL), Gus Johnson (OL), Cameron Southward (K/P), Cameron Buell (DE).

Key Freshmen Newcomers: Miguel Wharton (RB/WR, Hanford, Calif. – Sierra Pacific), Devon Taylor (OL, Pittsburg, Calif. – Pittsburg), Tariq Wright (DL, Pittsburg, Calif. – Pittsburg), Gabe Quezada (DE, Ceres, Calif. – Central Valley), Bishop Brown (DB, Elk Grove, Calif. – Monterey Trail).

Key Transfers: Daniel Lavulo (LB, Jr., San Mateo, Calif. – Coll. of San Mateo), Malcom Hale (WR, Jr., San Pablo, Calif. – Contra Costa JC), Nathan Trent (OL, Jr., La Palma, Calif. – Fullerton JC), Thaddeus Philyaw (FS, Sr., San Jose, Calif. – Jacksonville State Univ.), Edwin Campbell (LB, Sr., San Jose, Calif. – Concord).

SIMON FRASER
Head Coach: Kelly Bates (Saskatchewan, 2001, 0-19, 3rd Season)
Assistant Coaches: Bryan Wyllie (Defensive Coordinator), Keenan North (Special Teams Coordinator), Vincent Campbell (Offensive Assistant), Dean Valli (Offensive Assistant), Paris Jackson (Offensive Assistant), Quinn Courtney (Offensive Assistant), Robin Weathersby (Defensive Assistant), Jake Oram (Defensive Assistant)
2016 Overall Record: 0-10 **GNAC Record (Finish):** 0-9 (5th)
Total Players Returning: 45 (22 Offensive, 23 Defensive)
Starters Returning: 12 (6 Offensive, 6 Defensive) **Starters Lost:** 10 (5 Offensive, 5 Defensive)
Basic Offense: Pro Style **Basic Defense:** 4-3

Top Offensive Returners: Justin Buren (WR, Sr., Second Team All-GNAC, 47 receptions, 630 yds., 1 TD), Jalen Jana (RB, Jr., Second Team All-GNAC, 92 carries, 464 yds., 3 TD, 30 receptions, 130 receiving yds.), Miles Richardson (QB, Jr., 169-365-18, 1,600 yds., 4 TD).

Top Defensive Returners: Kyle Wilson (DL, Jr., Second Team All-GNAC, 39 tackles, 16 solo, 13.5 tackles for loss, 5.5 sacks), Brad Lyons (DL, Jr., Honorable Mention All-GNAC, 34 tackles, 21 solo, 12.5 tackles for loss, 5.5 sacks, 1 fumble recovery), Ben Minaker (S, Jr., 55 tackles, 28 solo, 0.5 tackles for loss).

Top Returning Special Teams: Gavin Cobb (KR/PR, 44 kick returns, 889 yds., 20.2 yds. per return).

Key Losses: Justin Herdman (LB), Jordan Herdman (LB), Ante Milanovic-Litre (RB), Felix Gacusana (OL), Evan Telford (OL), Jordan Pugh (DB).

Key Freshman Newcomers: Samuel Couture-Dumas (OL, 6-4, 285, Saint Come, Que. – Champlain-Lennoxville), Hamada Kanaan (OL, 6-3, 300, Fr., London, Ont. – Catholic Central), Jakob Mozill (LB, 6-2, 215, Fr., Saskatoon, Sask. – Centennial Collegiate).

Key Transfers: Dionte' Simon (RB, 6-1, 190, R-Fr., Tacoma, Wash. – Utah State Univ.).

WESTERN OREGON
Head Coach: Arne Ferguson (Western Oregon 1991, 75-54, 13th Season, 28th Season Overall At WOU)
Assistant Coaches: Brian Harris (Offensive Coordinator), Matt Overlin (Special Teams/Wide Receivers), Josh Manning (Offensive Line), Jason Slowey (Dir. Of Football Operations/Linebackers), Miguel Gonzalez (Defensive Backs), Trey Shimabukuro (Quarterbacks), Glen Moa (Defensive Line), Tim Rude (Defensive Line), Jonathan Breland (Running Backs), Tyler Nelson (Offensive Assistant)
2016 Overall Record: 4-6 **GNAC Record (Finish):** 3-5 (Tie 3rd)
Total Players Returning: 78 (38 Offense, 32 Defense)
Starters Returning: 13 (8 Offense, 5 Defense) **Starters Lost:** 6 (2 Offense, 4 Defense)
Basic Offense: Spread **Basic Defense:** 4-3

Top Offensive Returners: Nick Duckworth (QB, Sr., 88-140-6, 1,092 yds., 9 TD, 62.9 completion pct.), Phillip Fenumiai (QB, Sr., 107-214-6, 1,387 yds., 10 TD, 87 carries, 311 yds., 1 rushing TD), Keoni Piceno (WR, Sr., 34 receptions, 333 yds., 1 TD), Paul Revis (WR, Sr., First Team All-GNAC, 70 receptions, 1,057 yds., 8 TD, 15.1 yds. per reception), Steven Long (RB, Sr., 30 carries, 88 yds.), Torrehano Sweet (RB, So., 59 carries, 220 yds., 2 TD), Bryson Dizon (OL, Sr., Second Team All-GNAC), Ron Rose (OL, Sr.), Jacob Zartman (OL, Sr., Second Team All-GNAC).

Top Defensive Returners: Tyler Johnson (LB, Sr., Second Team All-GNAC, 65 tackles, 37 solo, 9.5 tackles for loss, 4.5 sacks, 1 INT), Bo Highburger (LB, Jr., First Team All-GNAC, 111 tackles, 63 solo, 13.5 tackles for loss, 2 sacks, 1 forced fumble, 1 fumble recovery), Nathan Jones (DB, Sr., 50 tackles, 23 solos, 0.5 tackles for loss, 1 INT), Michael Kluge (DL, Sr., Honorable Mention All-GNAC, 18 tackles, 10 solo, 4.5 tackles for loss, 1 sack, 2 fumble recoveries).

Top Returning Special Teams: Paul Revis (KR/PR, Sr., First Team All-GNAC, 16 punt returns, 388 yds., 1 TD, 24.2 yds. per return, 14 kick returns, 321 yds., 22.9 yds. per return).

Key Losses: Andy Avgi (TE), George Swartzlender (DL), Jeremy Moore (DL), Tafatolu Tafai (LB), Danny Hankins (DB), Austin Spencer (DB).

Key Freshman Newcomers: N/A.

Key Transfers: N/A.