

FOR RELEASE
MONDAY, JULY 30, 2012

CONTACT: Cody Bush
 Phone: (931) 221-7561
 e-mail: bushc@apsu.edu

San Diego picked to win 2012 Pioneer Football League race

ST. LOUIS – The University of San Diego and Drake University, the defending Pioneer Football League co-champions, were picked to finish first and second, respectively, in the league’s preseason coaches’ poll, Monday.

The upcoming 2012 season marks the 20th year for the Pioneer Football League – the nation’s only non-scholarship, football-only NCAA Football Championship Subdivision conference.

San Diego received eight of a possible nine first place votes and 79 of 81 possible points as coaches were not allowed to vote for their own team in the poll. Drake received one first place vote and 71 possible points. Both the Toreros and Bulldogs finished the 2011 campaign with identical 7-1 records, San Diego winning the regular-season meeting between the two teams. The two teams will meet again in 2012 with Drake hosting San Diego in an Oct. 6 contest.

Jacksonville was picked to finish third with 65 points. Dayton picked up the remaining first-place vote and 56 total points to finish fourth in the preseason poll. Campbell rounded out the poll’s top half with 45 points for fifth place.

Marist (6th, 42 points), Butler (7th, 34), Morehead State (8th, 27), Davidson (9th, 20) and Valparaiso (10th, 11) rounded out the PFL Preseason Poll.

The league will announce its preseason All-PFL teams Tuesday.

San Diego earned a share of its fourth PFL title with a 7-1 mark last season. Head Coach Ron Caragher’s sixth season at San Diego will see 12 starters return, including six on the defensive side of the ball. Among those defensive returnees will be junior defensive lineman Blake Oliaro, the 2011 PFL Defensive Player of the Year and a consensus preseason All-America selection, who posted 15 sacks last season and finished fourth among FCS athletes with 1.36 sacks per game. The Toreros only return five offensive starters from last season’s team, but that quintet includes junior quarterback Mason Mills, junior running back Kenny James and sophomore wideout Brandon White who each ranked among the team’s leaders statistically last season.

Drake gained a share of its fifth PFL crown with a 7-1 mark, losing only to co-champion San Diego in the fourth game of the PFL schedule last season. Fifth-year head coach Chris Creighton returns 12 starters from last season’s team, with six returning on each side of the line. Senior quarterback Mike Piatkowski returns after claiming 2011 PFL Offensive Player of the Year honors last season with 2,934 passing yards last season and a 151.4 pass efficiency rating that ranked 11th among FCS passers. Defensively, Drake defensive end Brandon Coleman returns after posting 12 sacks in 2011 and he will be joined by sophomore linebacker Travis Merritt who was the league’s 2011 Freshman Defensive Player of the Year.

Jacksonville has finished among the league’s top three each of the past four seasons with quarterback Josh McGregor behind center. However, head coach Kerwin Bell begins his sixth season without the Dolphins’ all-time passing leader behind center. McGregor, wideout Josh Philpart and running back J.J. Laster were among nine offensive starters Jacksonville lost from last season’s team that finished third. The Dolphins defense will be asked to hold the line with eight starters returning, including senior defensive lineman Mike Mayoral who led the team with 6.5 sacks and junior defensive lineman Luidji Michel who was third on the team with 5.3 tackles per game.

Dayton will return the majority of last season’s squad that finished fifth in the PFL regular-season race. The Flyers return 12 starters and sixth-year head coach Rick Chamberlin will have his top three offensive specialists – sophomore quarterback Will Bardo, sophomore wideout Branden Johnson and senior running back Taylor Harris – returning for the

Pioneer Football League 2012 Preseason Coaches’ Poll		
<i>Team</i>		<i>Points</i>
1.	San Diego (8)	79
2.	Drake (1)	71
3.	Jacksonville	65
4.	Dayton (1)	56
5.	Campbell	45
6.	Marist	42
7.	Butler	34
8.	Morehead State	27
9.	Davidson	20
10.	Valparaiso	11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First-place votes in parentheses. • Nine points awarded for a first-place vote, with one point less for each succeeding place. • Coaches were not allowed to vote for their own team. 		

2012 campaign. The Flyers defense will be led by senior linebacker Colin Monnier, who missed both the 2009 and 2010 seasons, but started all 11 games in 2011 and finished second on the team in both tackles (64) and tackles for loss (nine).

Campbell begins its fifth year and will face the challenge of replenishing its roster with 13 starters from last season's team departing the squad. Head coach Dale Steele returns nine starters and 38 letterwinners from that team and will add 35 newcomers to the mix. The Fighting Camels offense will be hit particularly hard with only senior quarterback Braden Smith returning among the team's leading specialists after passing for 14 touchdowns last season. Campbell's running attack, which led the league with 2,315 yards last season, loses its three leading rushers. Senior defensive back Brandon Chandler returns to anchor the Fighting Camels defense after recording two interceptions last season and leading the team with 814 all-purpose yards last season.

Marist returns the bulk of an offensive unit that finished sixth in program's third season of PFL action. Head coach Jim Parady begins his 21st season as the Red Foxes head coach with the comfort of returning senior starting quarterback Tommy Reilly and junior back-up signal caller Chuckie Looney. They will have junior tight end Anthony Calcagni, a first-team All-PFL selection and the team's second leading receiver, to throw to again in 2012. Senior defensive lineman Terrence Fede leads a group of six Marist starting defensive players returning. Fede was second on the team with 72 tackles but led the Red Foxes in sacks (8.5) and tackles for loss (16) last season.

Butler also will seek answers on the offensive side of the line with only four starters returning. Seventh-year head coach Jeff Voris will see a pair of key pieces return on each side of the ball. Junior running back Trae Heeter, who was the league's fourth-leading rusher last season, returns to anchor an offense that lost its starting quarterback and entire starting wide receiver corps. Senior linebacker Jordan Ridley, who has led the league in tackles for two consecutive seasons, will stabilize a defensive group that returns five starters from last season's squad.

Morehead State lost only 16 letterwinners from last season's team, but 11 of those were starters for head coach Matt Ballard who enters his 19th season. Senior quarterback Zach Lewis returns after putting together the PFL's top passing performance in 2012, as he averaged 325.9 yards per game and passed for 28 touchdowns to lead an Eagles offense that averaged a league-best 36.1 points per game. Morehead State's defense will be in a rebuild mode as the team lost each of its top five tacklers from last season. The Eagles will have their three leading defensive backs returning. Senior Dexter Geohagan, junior Kameron Scott and sophomore Zachary Senvisky return after ranking among the league's top 15 in passes defended.

Davidson ended its 2011 campaign with consecutive PFL victories and will look to carry that momentum into the new season. Head coach Tripp Merritt enters his eighth season with the Wildcats with the bulk of his offensive firepower returning. Junior quarterback Jonathan Carkhuff, senior wide receiver Lanny Funsten and junior running back Chris Gorman each return after starting 11 games last season. However, they will work around a rebuilt offensive line that returns only one starter – junior Adam Kurtz – from last season. Senior linebacker Patrick Moynahan returns after compiling a team-best 72 tackles last season and leads a defense that returns five starters.

Valparaiso enters 2012 seeking to continue last season's forward progress. Head coach Dale Carlson, who is entering his third season with the Crusaders, will have 12 starters returning from last season's team. Leading that group will be sophomore quarterback Eric Hoffman who led the team with 2,300 passing yards. Senior linebacker Cody Gokan and junior linebacker Pat Derback, who were each honorable mention All-PFL selections last season, return after compiling 73 and 87 tackles last season, respectively.

Four PFL squads will kickoff the 2011 campaign, Thursday, August 30, with Butler's trip to Western Illinois highlight the opening night slate. The remaining eight teams begin the campaign, Saturday, Sept. 1.

The 20th season of PFL regular-season action gets underway when all 10 teams open their league slates, Sept. 22.

-PFL-