



UAM, SOUTHEASTERN TOP INAUGURAL GAC PRESEASON SOFTBALL POLL

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RUSSELLVILLE, Ark. – The Great American Conference softball coaches have selected the University of Arkansas at Monticello and Southeastern Oklahoma State University as the preseason favorites to win the inaugural conference championship.

The Cotton Blossoms and Savage Storm both received a total of 42 poll points. UAM early the majority of the first place votes with five, while also receiving one third place vote and one sixth place vote. Southeastern earned two first place votes, three second place votes and two third place votes.

UAM is coming off its second NCAA regional tournament in the past two seasons after going 46-16 overall last season, culminating the year with a loss to West Alabama in the finals of the Winter Park, Fla. regional. The Cotton Blossoms return All-America pitcher/first baseman Kayla Jackson, who went 29-9 in the circle as a junior last season with a 1.13 earned run average, while also leading the team with a .434 batting average, highlighted by 12 homeruns and 55 runs batted in. UAM returns five other starters from last year's team.

The Savage Storm returns four starters in the field and its best pitcher from last year's 36-19 squad. Among those four returning starters is senior third baseman Sam Vrska, who hit .381 in 55 games as a junior with 14 doubles, nine homeruns and 34 RBI. Audra Rhudy returns for her senior season as well after leading the Savage Storm pitching efforts in 2011, going 20-8 in the circle with a 1.82 ERA.

Following UAM and Southeastern in the preseason poll is East Central University, which received the final first place vote, along with two second place votes, three third place votes and one fourth place vote for a total of 38 poll points. The Lady Tigers went 38-16 last season, and return leading hitter Emily Kennemer, who hit .396 as a junior with 18 doubles, nine homeruns and 42 RBI.

Arkansas Tech University follows in fourth with three second place votes, one third place vote and three fourth place votes for 35 points. The Golden Suns won the Gulf South Conference West Division last season and finished the year 34-19 overall.

The final four of the preseason coach's poll includes Ouachita Baptist University in fifth with 22 points, followed by cross-street rival Henderson State University in sixth with 19 points, Southwestern Oklahoma State University in seventh with 15 points and Southern Arkansas University in eighth with 11 points.

The preseason softball poll was voted on by the league's eight head coaches, who were not allowed to vote for their own team.

The first regular season playing date for the 2012 season is February 1. The inaugural GAC softball championship is scheduled for April 26-28, 2012 at the Bentonville (Ark.) Softball Complex.

Team	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	Total
T1. Arkansas-Monticello	5		1			1		42
T1. Southeastern Oklahoma State	2	3	2					42
3. East Central	1	2	3	1				38
4. Arkansas Tech		3	1	3				35
5. Ouachita Baptist			1	2	1	3		22
6. Henderson State				1	4	1	1	19
7. Southwestern Oklahoma State					3	2	2	15
8. Southern Arkansas				1		1	5	11