



222 Third Street SE Ste. 423
Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52401
[Phone] (319) 366-4845
[Fax] (319) 366-4911
www.iowaconference.com

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Contact: Joshua Schroeder
jschroeder@iowaconference.com
319-366-4845

2009 IOWA CONFERENCE VOLLEYBALL PREVIEW

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA . . . Simpson College, which finished second in the Iowa Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (IIAC) volleyball standings in 2008, is the coaches' pick to win the 2009 IIAC title. The Storm received seven first-place votes and a second-place vote, totaling 71 points in the IIAC Volleyball Coaches' Poll.

Loras College, which won its first Iowa Conference volleyball title last season, collected the two remaining first-place votes and is second with 64 points. Loras was voted second on five other ballots. **Central College**, a 17-time conference champion that had a streak of 12 consecutive titles snapped by the Duhawks, is third with 56 points. The Dutch received two second-place votes and four third-place votes. **Luther College**, which tied for fourth last season, was voted into the fourth-place position by the coaches with 52 points. The complete 2009 IIAC Volleyball Coaches' Poll follows.

Rank	School (1st place votes)	Points	2008 Record
1	Simpson (7)	71	20-15, 7-1 IIAC
2	Loras (2)	64	32-5, 8-0 IIAC
3	Central	56	21-15, 6-2 IIAC
4	Luther	52	19-15, 4-4 IIAC
5	Cornell	41	16-16, 3-5 IIAC
6	Wartburg	38	11-24, 4-4 IIAC
7	Buena Vista	31	7-22, 2-6 IIAC
8	Coe	23	11-23, 1-7 IIAC
9	Dubuque	20	4-30, 1-7 IIAC

New Coaches: **April Elsbernd** is the new coach at Dubuque. Elsbernd comes to Dubuque after spending last season as head coach at Iowa Central Community College. A 2003 Coe graduate, she spent three years as an assistant at Cornell and another as an assistant at Western Technical College in La Crosse, Wis. She replaces **Cole Tallman**.

National Rankings: **Simpson** opens the 2009 campaign in a tie for 25th-place in the American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA) Division III Coaches Top 25 Preseason Poll. Defending NCAA Division III national champion Emory is ranked No. 1. No other Iowa Conference schools is among those receiving votes.

2009 Schedule: The 2009 schedule opens Tuesday, Sept. 1, with Luther playing a pair of matches in the Twin Cities against St. Catherine and Macalester, while Central plays at Grand View and Cornell is at Monmouth. The 2009 Iowa Conference schedule opens with two matches Tuesday, Sept. 8 – Coe at Buena Vista and Loras at Luther – and two others Wednesday, Sept. 9 – Wartburg at Dubuque and Cornell at Simpson. Central has a bye during the opening week of league play.

Conference Tournament: The top six teams following the regular season round-robin schedule qualify for the 2009 Iowa Conference Tournament with an automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament on the line. The IIAC Tournament is November 6-7, hosted by the top seed.

Team-By-Team Preview: A brief preview for each Iowa Conference team follows.



Buena Vista University Beavers 7-22 overall, 2-6 IIAC (7th)

Head Coach (season): Heather Noll (2nd)
Record at School (yrs): 7-22 (1)
Career Record (yrs): same

IIAC Titles (last): n/a
IIAC Tourney Titles (last): n/a

Starters returning/lost – 5 / 3
Letterwinners returning/lost – 13 / 2
All-IIAC players returning – 1 (Vondrak)
All-IIAC hon. mention returning – 0

Buena Vista returns five starters and 13 letterwinners from last season's 7-22 team that finished seventh in the Conference with a 2-6 record. The Beavers will be led by junior middle hitter **Katie Vondrak**, a two-time Second Team All-Conference selection. Vondrak ranked second in the league with a 3.57 kills per set average and third with a .328 hitting percentage. She also ranked second on the team with 61 total blocks. Junior outside hitter **McKenzie Moore** ranked second on the team with 22 service aces, third in kills with 178, and fourth in digs with 178. Junior outside hitter/defensive specialist **Samantha Narveson** led the Beavers in digs with 319, a figure that ranked her eighth among IIAC players. Narveson also had a team-high 27 service aces.

Buena Vista head coach **Heather Noll** says, "Rebuilding is still the name of the game at Buena Vista. Even though we graduated two seniors from last season and lost an Honorable Mention All-Conference middle blocker (**Kelli Luitjens**) due to injury, we look to keep improving our match play. We will still be a very young, yet determined team. As for the IIAC, it will be very competitive as it is every year. Matches will be close as will the standings. The toughest teams will prevail."



Central College Dutch 21-15 overall, 6-2 IIAC (3rd)

Head Coach (season): Kent Clayberg (7th)
Record at School (yrs): 152-63 (6)
Career Record (yrs): same

IIAC Titles (last): 17 (2007)
IIAC Tourney Titles (last): 10 (2007)

Starters returning/lost – 4 / 2+libero
Letterwinners returning/lost – 15 / 3
All-IIAC players returning – 1 (Ripperger)
All-IIAC hon. mention returning – 1 (Jennings)

Central returns four starters and 15 letterwinners from last season's 21-15 team that finished third in the league with a 6-2 mark. Senior outside hitter **Michelle Ripperger**, a First Team All-Conference pick last year, led the Dutch with 316 kills (2.47 per set) while hitting .254. Senior middle hitter **Lindsay Jennings**, an honorable mention All-Conference selection, averaged 2.09 kills with a .257 attack percentage and 0.88 blocks per set. Also returning are junior right-side hitter **Ashley Ellingson** and sophomore setter **Maggie Snyder**. Ellingson ranked fourth on the team in kills with 220 kills, while Snyder was second on the team with 388 assists and added 119 digs.

Central head coach **Kent Clayberg** says, "We were young and talented a year ago. We're coming into this season much stronger physically and much more comfortable with the tempo of the college game. We'll miss the leadership of last year's seniors, but this group also has great chemistry and leadership and is ready to step into the gap lift the program to another level."

"I like where the Iowa Conference is going – we've got several programs on the rise that will bring our league back to the forefront of NCAA prominence. Strengthening our depth is good for everybody. The league is full of very good coaches with talented squads – this will be a fun season. Simpson should probably get the nod as favorite with so many starters returning, but Loras, Cornell, and Luther have the bulk of their lineups back and will certainly be in contention."



Coe College Kohawks
4-30 overall, 1-7 IIAC (t-8th)

Head Coach (season): DeAnn Woodin (4th)
Record at School (yrs): 50-50 (3)
Career Record (yrs): same

IIAC Titles (last): n/a
IIAC Tourney Titles (last): n/a

Starters returning/lost – 2 / 7
Letterwinners returning/lost – 2 / 7
All-IIAC players returning – 0
All-IIAC hon. mention returning – 0

Coe returns only two starters and two letterwinners from last season's 4-30 team that finished tied for eighth in the Conference with a 1-7 record. Sophomore **Kaitlin McClimon** played in 126 sets last season, posting 157 kills, 80 digs, and a team-high 96 total blocks. Junior defensive specialist/outside hitter **Katy Heater** tied for third on the team last season with 281 digs, a 2.63 dig per set average in 107 sets last season.

Coe head coach **DeAnn Woodin** says, "We have a very young, energetic and committed group of student-athletes this season. We know we are going to have to step up against some talented veteran opponents, and we're ready for the challenge. We're looking forward to another season of highly competitive IIAC matches."



Cornell College Rams
16-16 overall, 3-5 IIAC (6th)

Head Coach (season): Jeff Meeker (8th)
Record at school: 110-121 (7)
Career Record (yrs): 171-186 (11)

IIAC Titles (last): n/a
IIAC Tourney Titles (last): n/a

Starters returning/lost – 6+ libero / 0
Letterwinners returning/lost – 11 / 2
All-IIAC Players returning – 1 (Dudgeon)
All-IIAC hon. mention returning – 1
(Boehmer)

Cornell returns all six starters plus the libero and 11 letterwinners from last season's 16-16 team that finished sixth in the Conference with a 3-5 record. The Rams will be led up front by seniors **Laura Dudgeon** and **Kristin Paczosa**. Dudgeon, a middle hitter who earned First Team All-Conference and honorable mention All-Region player last season, ranked second in the IIAC in hitting percentage (.334) and sixth in kills (358). Paczosa, an outside hitter who earned Second Team All-Conference honors in 2007, ranked second on the team in kills (2.73 per set), aces (39), and digs (2.79 per set), and third in blocks (0.48 per set). Dudgeon (1,017) and Paczosa (972) rank second and third, respectively, on Cornell's career kills list, trailing only Kori Sims (1,151). Junior setter **Hannah Boehmer**, an honorable mention All-IIAC pick last year, set Cornell's single-season record for assists (1,118) and tied the school's single-match record for aces (8). She led the Conference in aces (0.49 per set) and ranked third in assists (9.3 per set). Sophomore libero **Caiti Hladky** ranked third in the IIAC in digs (4.2 per set) as a freshman.

Cornell head coach **Jeff Meeker** says, "We are looking forward to the 2009 season as we are excited about the challenge of competing in the Iowa Conference. With outstanding senior leadership and starters returning at all positions, our expectations are high. Our Cornell team will need to learn how to win key points in close sets for us to make a move in the conference standings. The conference will prove to be deep making for exciting volleyball every week."



University of Dubuque Spartans
11-23 overall, 1-7 IIAC (t-8th)

Head Coach (season): April Elsbernd (1st)
Record at School (yrs): first season
Career Record (yrs): 15-22 (1)

IIAC Titles (last): 2 (1995)
IIAC Tourney Titles (last): 2 (1995)

Starters returning/lost – 4 / 2
Letterwinners returning/lost – 7 / 4
All-IIAC players returning – 0
All-IIAC hon. mention returning – 1
(Green)



Loras College Duhawks
32-5 overall, 8-0 IIAC (champion)

Head Coach (season): Teresa Kehe (4th)
Record at School (yrs): 65-41 (3)
Career Record (yrs): same

IIAC Titles (last): 1 (2008)
IIAC Tourney Titles (last): 2 (2008)

Starters returning/lost – 3 / 4
Letterwinners returning/lost – 7 / 6
All-IIAC players returning – 0
All-IIAC hon. mention returning – 1
(Murphy)

Dubuque returns four starters and seven letterwinners from last season's 11-23 team that tied for eighth in the Conference with a 1-7 record. The Spartans return three of their top five attackers from last season. Senior middle blocker **Katelyn Hermann** led the team with 343 kills last season, ranking seventh in the league. She also ranked sixth in the IIAC with a .269 hitting percentage and added 103 digs, 83 total blocks, and 33 service aces. Sophomore outside hitter **Bailey Abele** was second on the team with 263 kills. Abele was also the team leader in digs with 351. Sophomore setter/defensive specialist **Kristin Mortenson** was second on the team in assists with 432, ranking ninth in the league (5.4 per set). Sophomore right-side hitter **Carly Green** was an honorable mention All-IIAC selection after posting 171 kills and 73 blocks.

Dubuque head coach **April Elsbernd** says, "I'm looking forward to challenging conference competition every week. Every year, top-to-bottom, the Iowa Conference remains solid and I am looking forward to coaching and learning from my peers in the league. We have 10 freshmen joining our squad with a couple looking to be impact players for us. My focus since my arrival has been teaching the returners to work hard in the off-season and enter the season ready to compete. The Spartans' opening tournament will be a good challenge for us."

Loras returns three starters and seven letterwinners from last season's 32-5 team that won the school's first Iowa Conference Championship with a perfect 8-0 record, its second IIAC Tournament title, and advance to the NCAA Division III Volleyball Championship. Anchoring the Duhawks' back line will be junior libero/defensive specialist **Morgan Murphy** and senior defensive specialist **Michelle Bahl**. Murphy, an honorable mention All-Conference selection, led the team with 391 digs and 35 service aces, while Bahl added 323 digs and 22 service aces. Up front, Loras returns junior outside hitter **Julianne Lord** and junior outside hitter **Danielle Lewis**. Lord ranked fourth on the team with 177 kills (1.9 per set) and added 111 digs, while Lewis ranked third in kills with 225 (2.1 per set) and fourth in blocks with 49.

Loras head coach **Teresa Kehe** says, "We are very excited about the 2009 volleyball season because the Conference is sure to be a very close race again this year. Our competitive schedule will certainly challenge us to raise our level of play and help us improve our overall program."



Luther College Norse
19-15 overall, 4-4 IIAC (t-4th)

Head Coach (season): Jane Gibbs (3rd)
Record at School (yrs): 34-30 (2)
Career Record (yrs): same

IIAC Titles (last): n/a
IIAC Tourney Titles (last): n/a

Starters returning/lost – 5 / 1
Letterwinners returning/lost – 9 / 2
All-IIAC players returning – 0
All-IIAC hon. mention returning – 3
(Skoglund, Cory, Hamlin-2007)

Luther returns five starters and nine letterwinners from last season's 19-15 team that finished tied for fourth in the Conference with a 4-4 record. Injuries will have a significant effect on the Norse lineup this season. Senior libero **Anna Simonson**, a Second Team All-Conference selection, will miss the year after undergoing shoulder surgery during the summer. However, the Norse regain the services of 2007 honorable mention All-IIAC defensive specialist **Grayce Hamlin**. Hamlin, a senior, who led Luther with 576 digs two years ago. Sophomore outside hitter **Emily Cory**, a 2008 honorable mention All-Conference selection, produced a team-high 438 kills last season, ranking third in the IIAC. She also recorded 98 digs and 49 blocks. Senior outside hitter **Tiffany Kruse** ranked second on the team in both digs (438) and kills (293), while posting a team-high 45 aces. Sophomore middle hitter **Taylor Skoglund**, another 2008 honorable mention All-IIAC selection, ranked third on the team with 289 kills and posted a team-high .284 attack percentage.

Luther head coach **Jane Gibbs** says, "I am very excited for another highly competitive season of volleyball in the IIAC this fall. After losing two of our top players to graduation and injury, we will have an even greater challenge to compete against the top quality teams we face each week in conference play. I believe our Conference will compete well regionally again this year and hope we get at least two teams into the regional tournament."



Simpson College Storm
20-15 overall, 7-1 IIAC (2nd)

Head Coach (season): Lana Smith (11th)
Record at School (yrs): 200-147 (10)
Career Record (yrs): same

IIAC Titles (last): 7 (2006)
IIAC Tourney Titles (last): 5 (2006)

Starters returning/lost – 6 / 1
Letterwinners returning/lost – 13 / 3
All-IIAC players returning – 4 (Christensen, Schuster, Friesth, Oviatt)
All-IIAC hon. mention returning – 0

Simpson returns all six starters and 13 letterwinners from last season's 20-15 team that finished second in the Conference with a 7-1 record and advanced to the NCAA Division III Volleyball Championship. The Storm will be led by senior setter **Tara Christensen**, a two-time First Team All-Conference and 2008 AVCA Honorable Mention All-America selection, who recorded 1,245 assists, 246 digs, 121 kills, 43 service aces, and 24 blocks last season. Her 9.65 assist per game average ranked second in the IIAC, while her 43 service aces ranked sixth. Simpson also returns senior libero **Brittany Friesth**, senior middle hitter **Whitney Oviatt**, and junior outside hitter **Amy Schuster**. Schuster, a two-time Second Team All-Conference pick, led the team with 366 kills and added 310 digs, 34 blocks, and 32 service aces. Friesth posted a team-high 533 digs, ranking fifth in the IIAC. Oviatt, a Second Team All-Conference pick last season, posted 349 kills and ranked seventh in the league with a .257 attack percentage. Simpson led the IIAC in hitting percentage (.236), assists (11.69/set), kills (13.17/set), and aces (2.62/set).

Simpson head coach **Lana Smith** says, "We have a core of experienced performers returning this fall and will be complimented by some newcomers that will bolster our overall performance. I believe we – as a team – will need to improve with each match throughout the season and be ready to compete at the first whistle each night of conference play. I anticipate the IIAC race will be very tight and exciting to follow."



Wartburg College Knights
11-24 overall, 4-4 IIAC (t-4th)

Head Coach (season): Jennifer Walker (12th)
Record at School (yrs): 241-149 (11)
Career Record (yrs): 244-172 (12)

IIAC Titles (last): 1 (2002)
IIAC Tourney Titles (last): 2 (2003)

Starters returning/lost – 6 / 4
Letterwinners returning/lost – 9 / 6
All-IIAC players returning – 0
All-IIAC hon. mention returning – 1

Wartburg returns six starters and nine letterwinners from last season's 11-24 team that finished tied for fourth in the Conference with a 4-4 record. The Knights will be led by senior libero/defensive specialist **Channing Merchant**. Merchant, an honorable mention All-Iowa Conference pick last season, turned in a league-high 747 digs. Sophomore setter **Brittany Hermesen** became Wartburg's starting setter early in the 2008 season, finishing with a team-high 623 assists to rank sixth in the league. She also added 194 digs and 11 service aces. Sophomore middle hitter **Sophie Swift** was one of four players to start all 35 matches last season. Swift is the top returning attacker from last season, ranking third on the team with 169 kills. She also led the squad in total blocks (84) and solo blocks (19).

Wartburg head coach **Jennifer Walker** says, "Wartburg will once again be a young squad in 2009. We have some very athletic athletes coming in with our freshmen class and anticipate significant contribution from them at the varsity level. We see this as a rebuilding year where we will simply be going day-by-day and continuing to build on the previous day/game/practice. We will certainly be considered as underdogs as we start the season and that's ok by us."

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