

# Softball Ready For NCAA Regional Competition

*Posted: Thursday, May 8, 2008*

EAU CLAIRE, Wis. - This weekend UW-Eau Claire will play host to a 2008 NCAA Division III Softball Regional Championship, which is set to begin at noon on Thursday at Gelein Field in Carson Park.

Eau Claire serves as one of eight regional sites across the nation in the 59-team NCAA Championship. This is the fifth time Eau Claire has been selected to host a regional, with the previous time being last season.

This year's regional, which has representatives from six different conferences, features Aurora University (Ill.), Illinois Wesleyan University, North Central College (Ill.), Ripon College, Simpson College (Iowa), the University of St. Thomas (Minn.), UW-Eau Claire and UW-Oshkosh.

Top-seeded St. Thomas comes into the tournament ranked third in the latest National Fastpitch Coaches Association (NFCA) poll. The team is making its 16th NCAA postseason appearance, including 11 in the last 12 seasons. The team boasts a 40-3 record this season and has won 25 straight games coming into the weekend. St. Thomas has experienced great success recently, taking home national titles in 2004 and 2005, and a second place finish in 2006. Coach John Tschida has the winningest record in Division III softball history (531-90, .855%) in 14 seasons at St. Mary's and St. Thomas. His eight-year regular season record with St. Thomas is 324-45 and his postseason is 37-7.

UW-Oshkosh, which is ranked 14th in the NFCA top 25 poll, is the No. 2 seed in this year's Eau Claire regional. This is the second straight season Oshkosh has appeared in the tournament and the sixth time overall. The team enters with a record of 28-9 after receiving the Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference's automatic bid to the tournament. Head coach Cindy Suess is in her fourth season with Oshkosh and has an overall record of 114-51-1.

The No. 3 seed in the regional is North Central. The Cardinals are making their eighth appearance in the NCAA tournament after receiving the College Conference of Illinois and Wisconsin's automatic bid. It was the sixth time North Central won its conference tournament. North Central, under head coach Jim Kulawiak, enters this weekend with a record of 29-10. Kulawiak, in his 20th season at North Central, owns a 549-229-3 record.

Simpson College is making its 13th appearance in the postseason tournament and will be the tournament's No. 4 seed after picking up an at-large berth. This is the first time Simpson has been to the NCAA tournament since 2006. In its time in NCAA postseason play, Simpson holds a 35-22 record all-time. Simpson won nationals twice, in 1997 and 1999, playing the games on Gelein Field. The team comes into this weekend with a record of 28-10, and despite losing both of its games in its conference tournament, Simpson won 11 of its final 12 regular season games in the weeks before. Simpson's head coach Henry Christowski is in his 13th season with the team and holds a 424-111-2 record.

Illinois Wesleyan, the regional's No. 5 seed, received an at-large bid to the NCAA Championship this season. This is the eighth time the Titans have been part of the postseason tournament, with the last time coming in 2007 when Titans also competed in Eau Claire. Illinois Wesleyan is ranked 23rd in the latest NFCA poll and brings in a 29-9 record under interim head coach Steve King.

UW-Eau Claire, ranked 25th in the latest NFCA poll, is the sixth seed in regional after receiving an at-large bid to the NCAA Championship. The team, which is coming off a third place finish in last year's national tournament, is 28-11 and finished third at the WIAC tournament. This is the third straight appearance in the national tournament for Eau Claire and the seventh all-time. Head coach Leslie Huntington is in her seventh season with the Blugolds and is looking for her 200th career victory this weekend as she currently holds a record of 197-96.

Aurora, seeded seventh in the regional, is making its 13th appearance in NCAA post season play. The team enters this weekend on a 15-game winning streak, with an overall record of 35-6. Aurora was awarded an at-large berth to this season's tournament after winning its conference's regular season and tournament crown. Head Coach Mike McKenzie, in his fifth season, has an overall record of 177-42-2.

Ripon College comes into the weekend as the No. 8 seed. The Red Hawks have never seen action in NCAA postseason play, advancing for the first time this season with the Midwest Conference's automatic bid. Ripon has won 14 out of its last 17 games to head into regionals with a 20-12 overall mark. The 20 wins represent the third most in school history. Head coach Kelly Witte is in her 13th season with the team and has compiled a record of 191-152 in that time.

Action will get underway at noon on Thursday. St. Thomas will take on Ripon College in game one.

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