

No. 2 Alabama Leads Field For 2010 NFCA Leadoff Classic

January 28, 2010

STARKVILLE, Miss. – The second-ranked Crimson Tide of Alabama will headline the 23-team field for the 2010 NFCA Leadoff Classic that will feature six teams ranked in the USA Today/NFCA Preseason Top 25 Poll, along with four other teams that garnered votes.

The 15th edition of the classic will take place on Feb 26-28 at the South Commons Complex in Columbus, Ga.

No. 4 Michigan, No. 13 Georgia Tech, No. 20 Massachusetts, No. 23 Florida State and No. 24 Louisiana-Lafayette are the five other ranked teams that will play in this year's event, along with Nebraska, Iowa, Mississippi State and Southern Illinois who received votes in the season's first poll.

Rounding out the field this year will be Arkansas, Auburn, Central Florida, Hofstra, Illinois, Illinois State, Iowa, Kent State, Maryland, Mississippi Valley State, North Carolina State, Radford and Virginia Tech.

Fifteen of the 23 teams at this year's classic qualified for postseason play last year, with four of those teams advancing to super regionals and three of the teams making it all the way to the Women's College World Series.

After winning the 2008 Leadoff Classic, Michigan will enter this year's classic as the defending champions, with last year's event being cut short due to rain and snow.

Each team will play five games at this year's event and the team with the best record at the end of the weekend will be crowned the 2010 NFCA Leadoff Classic champion.

Tickets for the 2010 NFCA Leadoff Classic can be purchased through the Columbus Sports & Events Council by calling (706) 660-1996. Three-day tournament passes are just \$25 for adults and \$15 for children 12 & under, while daily rates are \$10 for adults and \$7 for children. Tickets for youth or military groups of 10 or more are also available, at just \$5 per person.

Information about this year's participants:

Alabama

Coach Patrick Murphy's Crimson Tide returns five starters from last season's 54-win team. Alabama lost in the semifinal round of the WCWS, falling to Florida. The Tide placed second in the Southeastern Conference regular season race.

Alabama returns senior All-American Charlotte Morgan and junior all-American Kelsi Dunne. Morgan hit a team-best .406 with 11 home runs and 59 RBIs last season. Dunne was the staff ace with a 28-5 record and 1.63 ERA. Dunne and Morgan combined to appear in 71 games last season, with 46 total victories and a pair of saves.

Arkansas

Coach Mike Larabee makes his debut this season as coach of the Razorbacks. Larabee inherits 15 letter-winners and five returning starters from last season's 27-29 team. UA did advance to the postseason, dropping a pair of games in the Norman Regional.

Senior outfielder Jessica Bachkora is the squad's leading returning hitter. Last season, Bachkora hit .270 with five home runs and 26 RBIs. On the mound, senior right-hander Miranda Dixon returns, after winning 17 games a season ago.

Auburn

The Tigers look to make a run at the Southeastern Conference championships thanks to deep, veteran pitching staff. Auburn returns the entire pitching staff from last season's 30-29 team. The year ended with a 1-2 mark in the Atlanta Regional. Overall, AU returns five starters and 12 letter-winners.

Senior right-hander Anna Thompson recorded a 15-17 mark last season with 2.28 ERA and 269 strikeouts in 199.1 innings pitched. Sophomore left-hander Jenee Loree returns after going 12-10 with a 2.49 ERA in 174 innings of work. Senior right-hander Holly Ragsdale also appeared in 11 games, posting a 3-2 record for Coach Tina Deese.

Central Florida

The Golden Knights look for a return to the postseason, after a near miss a year ago. After playing in its second regional ever in 2008, UCF fell short a year ago, posting a 27-27 overall record. Fresh off her 300th win at the school, Coach Renee Luers-Gillispie returns eight starters and 10 letter-winners from last year's squad.

Junior shortstop Tiffany Lance returns after hitting a team-best .350 with four home runs and 27 RBIs a season ago. Junior catcher Abby McClain hit .333 with a team-best 16 doubles and five home runs last season. Senior right-hander Ashleigh Cole returns in the circle. Cole posted a 17-8 record, 2.42 ERA and three shutouts last season.

Florida State

Coach Lonni Alameda's Seminoles will be trying to take the next step this upcoming season. FSU finished 44-16 last year, placing second in the Tallahassee Regional. The Seminoles did achieve the best Atlantic Coast Conference finish ever, compiling a 17-4 mark.

Junior right-handed pitcher Sarah Hamilton is a key returnee. A third-team all-American last season, Hamilton posted a 20-7 record with 0.83 ERA last season en route to ACC Pitcher of the Year honors. In 201.2 innings of work, she had 311 strikeouts. Offensively, FSU will look to senior outfielder Carly Wynn, who hit a team-best .337 with 11 doubles and 34 RBIs last season.

Georgia Tech

Coach Sharon Perkins returns 16 letter-winners and six position players for the defending Atlantic Coast Conference champion Yellow Jackets. Georgia Tech finished 46-15 last season, capturing the Atlanta Regional before losing to eventual national champion Washington in Super Regional play.

This season the GT offensive attack should be led by senior second baseman Jen Yee and sophomore shortstop Kelsi Weseman. Yee hit .415 with a team-best 16 home runs and 43 RBIs last season. Weseman hit .406 with nine home runs and 48 RBIs. In the circle, junior right-hander Kristen Adkins returns. Adkins was 24-7 with 28 complete games, five shutouts and a 1.69 ERA last season.

Hofstra

Coach Bill Edwards and the Pride will be out to start a new streak this season. A remarkable run of 11 straight conference tournament titles came to an end last season. A year after winning a school-record 48 games in 2008, a youthful Pride squad finished 26-21 last season, missing out on postseason play.

In the year ahead, Hofstra returns the bulk of its offense and a pair of pitchers. Offensively, senior first baseman Michele DePasquale returns, after hitting a team-best .359 with 55 base hits and 30 RBIs last season. Junior third baseman/pitcher Sara Michalowski hit third-best .285 last season, while appearing in nine games inside the circle. Sophomore right-hander Erin Wade returns, after posting a 6-6 mark in 17 appearances and 10 starts a year ago.

Illinois

The Illini are coming off their best season since 2004. Illinois finished fifth in Big Ten play, while compiling a 29-17 record. Coach Terri Sullivan's squad earned the school's third berth in regional play, bowing out in regional play in Columbia, Missouri. Six starters and 14 letter-winners return from that squad.

Junior infielder Danielle Zymkowitz returns, after hitting .401 with a team-best 63 base hits last season. Junior outfielder Hollie Pinchback and senior outfielder Hope Howell also return as the Illini has back its top three hitters from last season. In the circle, sophomore right-hander Monica Perry returns, after winning 24 games in her freshman campaign.

Illinois State

Coach Melinda Fischer's Redbirds return six starters 12 letter-winners from a team that finished 24-26. After making regional play in 2006 and 2007, ISU tries to make another a run at the Missouri Valley Conference and a return to postseason.

Junior infielder Abby Olson returns, after hitting .338 with a team-best 11 home runs and 30 RBIs last season. Senior shortstop Niki Stansell returns after hitting .322 with a team-best 56 base hits a year ago. In the circle, the Redbirds will rely on sophomore Jordan Birch, junior Chrissy Burton and sophomore Megan Warner. That trio combined to pitch more than 193 innings a year ago.

Iowa

The Hawkeyes begin the year, eyeing another run at the Big Ten championship. Coach Gayle Blevins begins her 24th season, hoping to build off last year's 42-16 finish. The Hawkeyes dropped a pair of games in the Atlanta Regional. In 2008, Iowa hosted a regional for the eighth time under Blevins. Iowa has appeared in the WCWS four times under her watch.

Senior infielder Katie Brown is the squad's leading returning hitter. Brown hit .346 with 12 doubles, seven home runs and 33 RBIs last season. Junior Chelsey Carmody hit .333 with 59 base hits last season. In the circle, senior Amada Dust returns. A year ago, Dust recorded a 16-4 mark with 1.90 ERA. She struck out 120 batters in 140 innings of work.

Kent State

Coach Karen Linder's Golden Flashes look for a return to postseason play. After winning back-to-back Mid-American Conference titles and appearing in back-to-back NCAA regional tournaments, KSU slipped to a 25-26 overall record this past season. Kent State has a solid nucleus on offense, giving the team promise entering the year ahead.

Senior outfielder Leah Archual is the squad's leading returning hitter. In 2009, Archual

hit .312 with a team-best 53 hits and team-best 12 doubles. Senior outfielder Lauren Brocklehurst also returns, after hitting .286 a year ago. In the circle, the entire pitching staff – Kylie Reynolds, Maleeya Coleman and Markie Pozzuto – returns.

Louisiana-Lafayette

The Ragin' Cajuns look for a return to the pinnacle of college softball this season. After advancing to the WCWS in 2008, Louisiana bowed out with a 2-2 record in the Waco Regional last season. The Cajuns, under the direction of co-head coaches Michael Lotief and Stefni Lotief, finished 45-13.

Junior outfielder Katie Smith is the team's top returning hitter. Smith hit .393 with 48 base hits and a team-best 25 stolen bases last season. Smith will be joined in the outfield by senior Vallie Gaspard, who hit .331 with 56 base hits and 13 RBIs last season. In the circle, all but five innings return from last year's staff. Junior right-hander Donna Bourgeois finished 30-9 with a 1.07 ERA last season. Bourgeois struck out 297 batters in 235.1 innings of work.

Maryland

In just five seasons on the job, Coach Laura Watten has transformed the Terps into an Atlantic Coast Conference contender. Now, the challenge is to take the next step and advance to postseason play. Maryland won 36 games in 2008 but was not invited to a regional. A year ago, the squad slipped to 29-26.

This season, six returning starters and 12 total returnees will help Maryland try to take the next step. Junior pitcher/designated player Kerry Hickey returns after being earning all-region honors a year ago. A co-captain, the right-handed Hickey won 12 games and recorded 174 strikeouts as the Terps' top reliever. Offensively, Hickey hit .279 with a team-high 48 hits, seven doubles and 61 total bases.

Massachusetts

Coach Elaine Sortino and the Minutewomen will be looking for a 16th straight appearance in NCAA postseason play. A year ago, UMass finished 41-10, losing to eventual national champion Washington in a 15-inning championship game at the Amherst Regional. UMass won its 21st Atlantic 10 Conference championship a year ago.

Senior outfielder Carly Normandin returns after hitting a team-best .403 with 10 home runs and 37 RBIs. Sophomore second baseman Kyllie Magill is back, following a .316 season with 10 stolen bases. The Minutewomen will have to replace Samantha Salato, who slugged 19 home runs, as well as all-American pitcher Brandice Balschmiter, who threw all but 75 innings for UMass a season ago.

Michigan

Coach Carol Hutchins' Wolverines are getting geared up for another run to the WCWS. Last season, the Wolverines returned to Oklahoma City for the ninth time ever and first time since winning the 2005 national championship. The Wolverines return six starters from the Ann Arbor Super Regional championship squad, which finished 47-12.

Sophomore Amanda Chidester returns after hitting .350 last season, with eight home runs and 58 RBIs. The Michigan power is also back as junior first baseman Dorian Shaw (14 home runs in 2009) and senior third baseman Maggie Viefhaus (10 home runs) return for 2010. In the circle, veterans Nikki Nemitz (28-7, 1.07 ERA) and Jordan Taylor (19-5, 1.40 ERA) both return.

Mississippi State

Coach Jay Miller's Bulldogs look for a fourth straight NCAA regional appearance and ninth berth overall. A year ago, MSU battled past pitching staff injuries to post a 28-28 overall record, including an appearance in the Tallahassee regional. This season, nine positions starters return as the Bulldogs take aim on a Southeastern Conference Western Division title.

Senior catcher Chelsea Bramlett returns. A year ago, Bramlett was named the national catcher of the year. Bramlett hit .486 with 55 runs scored and 54 stolen bases during the 2009 campaign. Another key returnee is sophomore outfielder Ka'ili Smith, who hit .323 last season. In the circle, left-hander Lindsey Dunlap returns after winning 17 games during her freshman campaign. Dunlap struck out 161 while throwing 20 complete games.

Mississippi Valley State

The Delta Devilettes boast a powerful offensive lineup as they will attempt to win an eighth straight Southwestern Athletic Conference championship. A year ago, Coach Lee Smith guided MVSU to a 38-16 overall record. The season ended with a 1-2 mark in the Tuscaloosa Regional.

MVSU will be relying on senior outfielder Rashundra Brass, senior outfielder Haleigh Eubanks and junior first baseman Tiana Parks in the season ahead. Senior left-hander Lisa Jansen is the team's most experienced pitcher.

Missouri

Missouri will be hard-pressed to top a record-breaking 2009 campaign. In only his third year on the job, Coach Ehren Earleywine carried the Tigers to their first Big 12 championship since 1997 and the school's fourth-ever appearance in the WCWS. Missouri topped the 50-win mark for the first time in program history and shocked national top-seed UCLA in the Super Regional round to advance to Oklahoma City.

Junior outfielder Rhea Taylor returns after earning all-American honors during the 2009 campaign. Taylor hit .404 with a team-high 72 base hits. Sophomore pitcher Chelsea Thomas earned Newcomer of the Year accolades from her team last season. Thomas recorded a 16-7 record with 1.65 ERA. Thomas threw 10 shutouts good enough for 10th place in the Missouri all-time single-season record book.

Nebraska

Coach Rhonda Revelle and the Huskers begin the year in search of their eighth appearance in the WCWS. This season, Nebraska hopes a talented class of newcomers and solid mix of veterans will help the squad better last season's 35-19 mark. After a break-even campaign in Big 12 Conference play, the Nebraska season ended in the Knoxville Regional.

Junior infielder Julie Brechtel is the teams' leading returning hitter. Brechtel hit .313 with six home runs and 28 RBIs last season. In the circle, sophomore right-hander Ashley Hagemann will be counted on heavily after appearing in 24 games her freshman campaign. Hagemann was 6-4 with a 3.07 ERA.

North Carolina State

The Wolfpack looks for a return to postseason play in 2010. N.C. State will try to bounce back from the first losing season in program history. The 2009 season ended with a 23-25 final record. Coach Lisa Navas begins her seventh season with a relatively-youthful squad ready to take the next step in a tough Atlantic Coast Conference.

Junior infielder Alyssa Ishibashi is the team's leading returning hitter. Ishibashi hit .282 last season, with three home runs and 17 RBIs. Both sophomore shortstop Morgan Barbour and senior first baseman Allison Presnell hit a team-best seven home runs each last season. In the circle, senior right-hander Lindsay Campana returns, after posting a 13-11 record with 1.86 ERA a year ago.

Radford

The Highlanders are also looking for an encore to a record-setting season. Fourth-year coach Mickey Dean guided Radford to its first-ever Big South Conference championship and NCAA Regional appearance during the 2009 season. The Highlanders finished 41-15, bowing out with a 1-2 mark in the Chapel Hill Regional.

This year a youthful squad will only have two seniors on its roster – outfielder Hope Creasy and catcher Sarah Himan. Himan placed fifth in the Big South Conference with 63 base hits en route to earning first-team Mid-Atlantic all-region honors. Defensively, Himan threw out 32 percent of all attempted base stealers. Meanwhile, Creasy hit a career-best eight home runs with 25 RBIs in 2009.

Southern Illinois

The Salukis look to battle back into postseason play this year. Entering her 11th season at the helm, Coach Coach Kerri Blaylock guided SIU to five straight regional tournament berths before a pair of near-misses in each of the last two seasons. The Salukis finished 33-13 in 2009, losing in the opening round of the Missouri Valley Conference tournament.

SIU returns a large majority of its offensive firepower, starting with senior second baseman Alicia Garza. In 2009, Garza hit .375 with four home runs and 35 RBIs. Junior outfielder/catcher Chelsea Held also returns. Held hit .356 with a team-best five home runs and team-best 11 doubles last season. In the circle, junior right-hander Danielle Glosson is the lone returnee. Glosson appeared in 25 games in 2009, compiling a 9-7 record with a 2.70 ERA.

Virginia Tech

Coach Scot Thomas, who won his 500th career game in 2009, enters his 15th season, trying to guide the Hokies back to postseason play after a rare miss last season. In 2008, the Hokies made the WCWS earning Thomas' squad their fourth appearance in regional tournament play. A year ago, Tech slipped back to the pack in the Atlantic Coast Conference, completing a 28-28 worksheet.

Senior outfielder Whitney Davis is the top returning hitter for the Hokies. Sophomore first baseman/pitcher Kristin Graham also returns. In the circle, Graham appeared in seven games but will take more of the load in the year ahead with both Kenzie Roark and Abbie Rexrode departing.