

2009 LEADOFF CLASSIC

Twenty-one Teams Vying for LOC Title

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Twenty-one of the nation's top collegiate softball teams, including three 2008 Women's College World Series participants, will converge on Columbus, Ga., Feb. 27-March 1 for the 2009 NFCA Leadoff Classic.

Alabama, Louisiana-Lafayette and Virginia Tech each will head to Columbus after making WCWS runs a year ago. The three teams lead a list of 15 NCAA regional squads who will compete in the 14th annual tournament at South Commons Stadium and Complex.

In addition to the three WCWS competitors, Michigan, Houston, Northwestern and Georgia earned super regional berths, while DePaul, Florida State, Georgia Tech, Hofstra, UMass, Mississippi State, Long Island and LSU each competed in regional action. Illinois State, Nebraska, Ohio State, Penn State, South Carolina and Southern Illinois round out the 20-team field.

Ten of the teams in the field finished in the top 25 in the final 2008 USA Today/NFCA Division I Top 25 Poll, with Alabama leading the way at No. 4. Louisiana-Lafayette, Virginia Tech and Michigan also finished in

the top 10, coming in at Nos. 6, 8 and 9, respectively, while Northwestern finished the year 12th, Houston 13th, Georgia at No. 17, followed by LSU at No. 18, DePaul at No. 22, and UMass ranked 25th.

The tournament field also includes two new inductees into the NFCA Hall of Fame, DePaul's Eugene Lenti and Mississippi State's Jay Miller, as well as 2009 inductee Bill Edwards of Hofstra.

Michigan won last season's Leadoff Classic. Michigan and Tennessee each finished the event with 5-0 marks, but Michigan earned the title via run differential.

The 2009 edition of the Leadoff Classic will follow the format that was first utilized in the 2008 tournament, as the three-day event will feature only scheduled head-to-head competition with a champion determined by number of wins and a tiebreaker formula.

Games are scheduled to begin Friday and Saturday at 11 a.m., 1:30 p.m., 4 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. Sunday's slate includes games at 10 a.m., 11 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. (All times EST).

Tickets for the tournament can be purchased through



the Columbus Sports and Events Council at (706) 660-1996 or at the gate. Tournament passes are available for \$25 for adults and \$15 for children age 12 and under. Daily ticket prices are \$10 for adults and \$7 for children. Youth groups of 10 or more will receive a special discounted price of \$5 per person.

For more information on the tournament, visit www.nfca.org/classic/division1.

ALABAMA



The Crimson Tide returns eight starters from last year's 58-8 squad. Alabama placed second in the Southeastern Conference and advanced to the WCWS, before bowing out to Arizona State in the national semifinals.

NFCA All-Americans Charlotte Morgan, Kelley Montalvo, Brittany Rogers and Kelsi Dunne all return from that squad.

Rogers led the team with a .452 average. Morgan was tops with 19 home runs and 79 RBIs. In the circle, Morgan was 18-2 with a 1.24 ERA, while Dunne was 26-6 with a 1.46 ERA.

DEPAUL



The 2009 Blue Demons hope to garner a WCWS berth for the fifth time ever and third time in five seasons. This past year, veteran coach Eugene Lenti was inducted into the NFCA Hall of Fame. Lenti is on pace to record his 1,000th career victory during the 2009 season.

Senior third baseman Amber Patton returns to the Blue Demons, after leading the team with a .403 average last season. Ace pitcher Becca Heteniak also returns. A junior right-hander, Heteniak was 33-8 with a 1.37 ERA last season. DePaul finished 51-18, losing in the Evanston Regional a season ago.

FLORIDA STATE



Florida State ushers in a new era with Lonni Alameda as the new coach of the Seminoles. Alameda replaces Dr. JoAnne Graf, who retired after 30 years of coaching and 1,437 career victories. The Seminoles were 38-28 last season, including a 1-2 showing at the Tuscaloosa regional.

The Seminoles return six starters from last season. Junior outfielder Carly Wynn led FSU with a .368 average. Sophomore right-hander Sarah Hamilton and junior right-hander Terese Gober are the top returning pitchers for FSU.

GEORGIA



A youthful Georgia squad nailed down a seventh straight NCAA regional appearance and a second-ever super regional appearance last season. Georgia finished in the Top 20 of the national rankings and pieced together a 46-24 overall record. During the season, Lu Harris-Champer topped the 600 victory mark, including 405 career wins at UGA.

Sophomore infielder Megan Wiggins is the team's top returning hitter. Wiggins earned freshman all-conference honors while hitting .347 with seven home runs and 52 RBIs. Senior utility player Sojourner Moody and sophomore outfielder Taylor Schlopy each return after hitting .300 or better last season. The Bulldogs also return pitchers responsible for all 442-1/3 innings pitched from last season.

GEORGIA TECH



Georgia Tech begins the 2009 season in search of its ninth appearance in NCAA postseason play. A year ago, the Yellow Jackets finished 32-31, placing fourth in the Atlantic Coast Conference, before falling in the Gainesville regional.

Georgia Tech returns five position players and 11 letter winners from last season's squad. Senior outfielder Blair Shimdale is the top returning hitter. Shimdale hit .330 with a pair of home runs and 29 RBIs. First baseman Whitney Haller and catcher Jessica Weaver are also back; each hit 10 home runs last season.

HOFSTRA



The Pride begins the season looking for its 12th straight Colonial Athletic Association regular season championship. A year ago, Hofstra finished 45-13 and hosted the Hempstead regional, falling short with a loss to Arizona in the championship game. At the 2008 NFCA Convention, head coach Bill Edwards was announced as a member of the NFCA Hall of Fame's Class of 2009. His induction will take place this December in Nashville, Tenn.

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Hofstra is expected to be led by junior first baseman Michele DePasquale, senior second baseman Casey Fee and junior outfielder Kris Root. Those were the top three hitters a season ago. In the circle, senior right-hander Kayleigh Lotti is the two-time reigning CAC Pitcher of the Year. A season ago, Lotti compiled a 23-6 record and 1.46 ERA. She finished sixth in the nation in fewest hits allowed, giving up only 3.7 hits per seven innings pitched.

HOUSTON



A veteran-laden Houston squad hopes to improve upon the school's best-ever softball season. Last year, the Cougars finished with a 54-11 record, which included a Conference USA regular season championship. The Cougars advanced to a super regional for the first time in school history. The year ended with a loss to Louisiana-Lafayette at home in super regional play.

This season, the Cougars return 12 letter winners and seven starters, including a pair of All-Americans. Seniors Laurie Wagner and Jessica Valis joined the graduated Angel Shamblin as NFCA All-Americans last season. This trio became the first UH players to earn such a distinction. Shortstop Valis hit a team-best .431, while right fielder Wagner was a close second at .401.

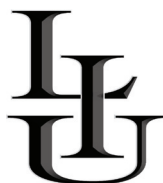
ILLINOIS STATE



Melinda Fischer and the Redbirds of Illinois State look for a return to postseason play after missing out last season. ISU had made back-to-back regional appearances before last season's 28-20 finish. The Redbirds have qualified for regional play six times under Fischer, who is eyeing career win No. 800 in her 27th season as a head coach.

The Redbirds return 14 letter winners, seven starters and the entire pitching staff from a season ago. Junior infielder Kara Nelson hit .401 with four home runs and 25 RBIs last season. Senior pitcher/first baseman Amber Smith hit .349 with eight home runs and 29 RBIs last season. On the mound, Smith was 14-9 with two saves and a 2.10 ERA.

LONG ISLAND



The Blackbirds begin the year aiming for a fourth straight berth in NCAA postseason play. Last season, LIU rolled to a 34-17 overall record, while claiming a third straight Northeast Conference tournament championship. The season ended with a pair of losses in the Hempstead regional.

LIU will be youthful this season, with only three seniors on the roster. The Blackbirds should be led by sophomore outfielder/pitcher Lauren Kemp. Kemp hit .320 with a home run and 12 RBIs last season. The entire pitching staff does return from last season. Junior right-hander Blaire Porter (20-10, 1.01 ERA) and senior right-hander Jenny Giles (14-7, 1.70 ERA) combined to work all of the innings for the Blackbirds a season ago.

LSU



Yvette Girouard welcomes 10 newcomers to this year's Tiger squad. LSU finished 44-18 last season, being eliminated by Louisiana-Lafayette in the Baton Rouge regional. LSU won 30 games in the final season of Tiger Park.

Junior outfielder Rachel Mitchell is the team's top returning hitter from last season. Mitchell hit .374 with 11 home runs and 51 RBIs. On the mound, both senior right-hander Dani Hofer (19-8, 1.88 ERA) and junior right-hander Cody Trahan (18-6, 2.24 ERA) return.

LOUISIANA-LAFAYETTE



Louisiana-Lafayette strives for a return to the WCWS. Last season, the Ragin' Cajuns stormed past East Carolina and LSU to win the Baton Rouge regional. They followed that up by upsetting national seed Houston on its home turf to reach the WCWS for the fifth time ever and first time since 2003. The Sun Belt Conference regular season champions finished 52-15 overall.

Junior outfielder Vallie Gaspard is the team's top returning hitter, hitting .404 with 49 runs scored and 11 RBIs. Sophomore first baseman Gabriele Bridges returns after hitting 11 home runs and driving in 41 runs during her freshman campaign. Both sophomore right-hander Ashley Brignac and sophomore right-hander Donna Bourgeois return to the circle this season. The duo combined to win 47 games a season ago.

UMASS



The UMass Minutewomen will field a large group of returnees, as they open defense of the Atlantic 10 championship. A year ago,

2009 LEADOFF CLASSIC SCHEDULE

FRIDAY	STADIUM	FIELD 1	FIELD 2
11:00 a.m.	Houston vs. South Carolina	Mississippi State vs. Ohio State	Louisiana-Lafayette vs. Northwestern
1:30 p.m.	South Carolina vs. Illinois State	Ohio State vs. Hofstra	Alabama vs. Southern Illinois
4:00 p.m.	Northwestern vs. LSU	Florida State vs. Houston	Georgia Tech vs. Louisiana-Lafayette
6:30 p.m.	LSU vs. Georgia Tech	Hofstra vs. Florida State	Virginia Tech vs. Alabama
FRIDAY	FIELD 3	FIELD 4	FIELD 5
11:00 a.m.	Nebraska vs. UMass	Illinois State vs. Long Island	
1:30 p.m.	DePaul vs. Penn State	Michigan vs. Virginia Tech	
4:00 p.m.	Penn State vs. Nebraska	Long Island vs. Mississippi State	UMass vs. Georgia
6:30 p.m.	Georgia vs. DePaul	Southern Illinois vs. Michigan	
SATURDAY	STADIUM	FIELD 1	FIELD 2
11:00 a.m.	Louisiana-Lafayette vs. DePaul	Georgia Tech vs. Illinois State	Virginia Tech vs. Southern Illinois
1:30 p.m.	Alabama vs. Houston	LSU vs. Florida State	DePaul vs. Virginia Tech
4:00 p.m.	Michigan vs. Alabama	Florida State vs. Ohio State	South Carolina vs. Nebraska
6:30 p.m.	Mississippi State vs. Hofstra	Houston vs. Ohio State	Penn State vs. South Carolina
SATURDAY	FIELD 3	FIELD 4	FIELD 5
11:00 a.m.		Georgia vs. Penn State	Nebraska vs. Long Island
1:30 p.m.	Michigan vs. Louisiana-Lafayette		Long Island vs. Northwestern
4:00 p.m.	UMass vs. Mississippi State	Hofstra vs. Georgia	Northwestern vs. Georgia Tech
6:30 p.m.	Southern Illinois vs. UMass	Illinois State vs. LSU	
SUNDAY	STADIUM	FIELD 1	FIELD 2
10:00 a.m.	Penn State vs. Georgia Tech	Alabama vs. UMass	Ohio State vs. Georgia
12:30 p.m.	Louisiana-Lafayette vs. Florida State	Mississippi State vs. Michigan	LSU vs. DePaul
SUNDAY	FIELD 3	FIELD 4	FIELD 5
10:00 a.m.	Long Island vs. Southern Illinois	Northwestern vs. South Carolina	
11:00 a.m.			Virginia Tech vs. Illinois State
12:30 p.m.	Houston vs. Hofstra		

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UMass finished 42-13, including a 20-0 mark in conference play. The season ended with a pair of losses in the Amherst regional.

UMass returns 15 letter winners and seven starters. Junior infielder Jessica Serio is the team's top returning hitter. Serio hit .365 with 15 doubles and 23 RBIs last season. Senior Whitney Mollica and junior Carly Normandin each hit .300 or better a year ago and are this year's team captains. Senior right-hander Brandice Balschmiter was 31-8 with a 0.66 ERA in the circle last season.

MICHIGAN



The Wolverines hope to return to the WCWS in 2009 after a disappointing ending to the 2008 season. Michigan captured a share of the Big Ten regular season championship and also won a regional tournament played at home. The year then ended with a super regional upset loss at home to Virginia Tech. The Wolverines will look to a nice mix of talented returnees and newcomers, trying to better last year's 52-8 record.

Michigan looks to be led by a pair of veteran captains, senior shortstop Teddi Ewing and junior outfielder Angela Findlay. Ewing hit .347 with a team-best 19 stolen bases last season. Findlay hit .337 with a team-best eight doubles, three home runs and 25 RBIs. The pitching staff includes sophomore right-hander Jordan Taylor (31-4, 0.76 ERA) and junior left-hander Nikki Nemitz (21-4, 1.04 ERA). The duo combined to work all 60 games a year ago for UM.

MISSISSIPPI STATE



New NFCA Hall of Famer Jay Miller returns 11 letter winners and seven starters from last year's 41-22 squad. A year ago, MSU recorded the second most victories in school history, before bowing out in the Tempe regional.

Senior Chelsea Bramlett, the Division I Diamond Sports Catcher of the Year last season, returns after hitting .450 with 52 runs scored, two home runs, 25 RBIs and 46 stolen bases. Sophomore second baseman Ali Bainbridge is back, after hitting .337 with 30 RBIs as a freshman. In the circle, the Bulldogs are expecting a big boost from freshman left-hander Lindsey Dunlap, the Alabama high school player of the year by multiple sources last spring.

NEBRASKA



Nebraska looks for a return to the postseason after a disappointing 25-28 season a year ago. The Huskers barely missed out on the NCAA tournament, falling in the championship game of the Big 12 Tournament to top-seeded Texas A&M. The Huskers have set the standard, reaching the title game of the conference tournament seven times.

Senior outfielder Meghan Mullin led the Huskers with a .347 average, 58 base hits and 20 stolen bases a season ago. Senior infielder Crystal Carwile returns after hitting 12 home runs last year. Senior right-hander Molly Hill appeared in 35 games and recorded 15 victories a season ago.

NORTHWESTERN



The Northwestern Wildcats hope to make a return trip to Oklahoma City this season. A total of 15 letter winners and nine starters return as the Wildcats try to advance to the WCWS. A year ago, the season ended with a 40-16 overall record, Big Ten regular season and tournament titles, as well as a regional title in Evanston. The year ended with two losses to Arizona State in super regional play.

Key returnees for Northwestern include sophomore first baseman Michelle Batts, junior pitcher Lauren Delaney, senior catcher Erin Dryer, junior second baseman Nicole Pauly, sophomore third baseman Robin Thompson and senior shortstop Tammy Williams. Williams hit a school-record .440 en route to Big Ten Player of the Year and NFCA All-American honors. Delaney posted an 18-1 record with 1.25 ERA, while picking up Big Ten Pitcher of the Year honors.

OHIO STATE



Ohio State looks to bounce back in 2009, hoping to challenge for the Big Ten title and then return to postseason play. Last year, a youthful Buckeyes squad played well at times but missed out on postseason play, finishing the season with a 33-23 overall record.

Junior catcher Sam Marder is back to anchor the Buckeyes' offensive attack. A season ago, Marder hit .475 with 14 home runs and 54 RBIs. Junior outfielder Leaf Ledford also returns. Ledford was third on the team hitting, with a .314 average last season. Senior right-hander Kim Reeder returns to anchor the OSU pitching staff. Reeder finished 18-16 with a 2.46 ERA last season. She recorded 200 strikeouts in 222 innings of work.

PENN STATE



The Nittany Lions look to return to the postseason after finishing 34-22 a season ago. Robin Petrini's squad may be able to do just that with a nice mix of solid veterans and a strong incoming class. PSU hopes to take advantage of more run-scoring opportunities in the year ahead.

Senior outfielder Danielle Kinley returns to anchor the PSU offensive attack. Last season, Kinley hit .356 with a team-high 13 doubles and 21 RBIs. Sophomore infielder Desi Giordano is also back, after slapping six home runs a season ago – tops among returnees. Sophomore right-hander Jackie Hill returns to anchor the pitching staff. Hill finished 15-6 with a 2.06 ERA last season.

SOUTH CAROLINA



The Gamecocks hope that a solid group of returnees and a challenging schedule will help USC return to postseason play in 2009. Last year, USC finished 21-26 overall and 8-18 in Southeastern Conference play. The Gamecocks struggled offensively and could not build on a seven-game win streak late in the season.

Senior utility player Ashton Payne is the team's top returning hitter. Payne finished at .346 with a team-high seven doubles and six RBIs last season. Sophomore infielder Jill Semento returns after posting team-highs in home runs (5) and RBIs (18). Sophomore right-hander Krystle Robinson is the lone returnee on the pitching staff.

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS



The Salukis fell short of a return to the postseason in 2008. However, Southern Illinois did win six of its final eight games to finish regular season play with a 30-24 overall record. This season, a veteran-laden SIU squad looks to do much better than that.

Senior third baseman Katie Wagner is the team's top returning hitter. Wagner hit .308 with a team-high nine home runs and 29 RBIs last season. Junior outfielder Katie Wilson stole a team-high 12 bases last season, while junior second baseman Alicia Garza led with nine doubles. The entire pitching staff – sophomore right-hander Danielle Glosson, sophomore right-hander Nikki Waters and senior left-hander Katie McNamara – returns from last season.

VIRGINIA TECH



Scot Thomas and the Virginia Tech Hokies are looking for an encore to the school's most successful softball season. A year ago, the Hokies advanced to the WCWS for the first time ever. VT finished the season with a 49-19 overall record, rolling to the ACC tournament title in Maryland, a regional tournament title in Knoxville, Tenn., and a super regional tournament title in Ann Arbor, Mich.

Senior third baseman Charisse Mariconda is the top returning hitter for the Hokies. Mariconda hit .340 with three home runs and 37 RBIs. Senior outfielder Jenna Rhodes is another top returnee, having hit .304 with a team-best 41 stolen bases last season. VT will have to replace All-American performer Angela Tincher, the team's top pitcher last season. Junior right-hander Heather Lowry and sophomore right-hander Kenzie Roark are the most experienced returnees in the circle.