Pitman, NJ—After claiming their fifth consecutive NJAC championship before advancing to the second round of the 2017 NCAA Tournament, Montclair State University has been selected as the favorite to win the 2017-18 New Jersey Athletic Conference Women's Basketball Championship in a preseason poll of the league's 10 head coaches. The Red Hawks will be seeking their sixth straight NJAC title and their seventh conference championship since 1994-95.

The 2016-17 Red Hawks claimed the NJAC regular season crown with a league-best 16-2 conference record en route to a 26-3 mark overall. MSU then went on to claim their fifth straight NJAC title with tournament wins over Rowan and Rutgers-Newark, securing the program's fifth straight NCAA Tournament appearance. An 81-73 NCAA first round win over Westfield State marked the fifth consecutive year that the Red Hawk program has claimed an NCAA Tournament victory. Head Coach Karin Harvey was named NJAC Coach of the Year in 2016-17, marking the third consecutive time and the fourth time in the past five seasons that Harvey has received the honor from her peers. Now in her 11th season at Montclair, Harvey has guided the Red Hawks to an overall record of 222-66, while her career collegiate coaching record stands at 235-80. MSU, which received a league-high six first-place votes in the poll, returns a pair of all-conference performers from its 2016-17 NJAC Championship squad, including senior guard Kate Tobie and the reigning NJAC Player of the Year in senior guard Katie Sire.

Stockton University, which posted a third-place finish in the 2016-17 conference race with a 12-6 mark in league play, was selected to place second and received three first-place votes. The 2016-17 Ospreys finished 17-9 overall after falling to Rutgers-Newark in the first round of the conference tournament. Now in his 26th season as head coach, Joe Fussner has guided the Ospreys to an overall record of 392-273 during his tenure in Galloway. Stockton returns a league-high three all-conference players from its 2016-17 team, including senior forward Najha Treadwell, senior guard Lea Mendolla, and the three-time reigning NJAC Defensive Player of the Year in senior forward Sasha Williams.

Kean University, which finished 16-10 overall in 2016-17, was selected to place third. The 2016-17 Cougars finished as the NJAC regular-season runner-up with a 13-5 record in conference play before falling in the NJAC Tournament semifinals to Rutgers-Newark. Sixth-year head coach Mandy King has guided Kean to an overall record of 66-64 during her tenure in Union, while her career collegiate coaching record stands at 189-180. Kean returns one all-conference player from its 2016-17 NJAC regular season runner-up squad in junior guard Marajiah Bacon.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MONTCLAIR STATE SELECTED AS THE NJAC WOMEN’S BASKETBALL FAVORITE IN PRESEASON POLL OF LEAGUE HEAD COACHES

Montclair State (6)
Stockton (3)
Kean
Rowan
William Paterson (1)
The College of New Jersey
Rutgers-Newark (dark horse)
Rutgers-Camden
Ramapo
New Jersey City

1. Montclair State (6)
2. Stockton (3)
3. Kean
4. Rowan
5. William Paterson (1)
6. The College of New Jersey
7. Rutgers-Newark (dark horse)
8. Rutgers-Camden
9. Ramapo
New Jersey City

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Rowan University, which notched a fourth-place conference finish in 2016-17 with an 11-7 league mark en route to an 18-9 record overall, was again selected to place fourth. The 2016-17 Profs advanced to the second round of the NJAC Tournament with an opening round win over William Paterson before falling to eventual champion Montclair State in the semifinals. Eighteenth-year head coach Gabby Lisella has guided the Profs to a mark of 229-205, giving her 308 career collegiate coaching victories. Rowan returns one all-conference player from its 2016-17 squad in senior guard Summer Crilley.

William Paterson University, led by 25th-year head coach Erin Monahan, was selected to place fifth and received one first-place vote. Monahan has guided her alma mater to an overall record of 457-198, including a mark of 14-12 in 2016-17. The Pioneers return one all-conference player from a 2016-17 squad which finished fifth in the conference regular season in senior forward Tori Woetzel.

The College of New Jersey, which will be led by new first-year head coach Chessie Jackson, was selected to place sixth. Jackson inherits a Lions squad which finished eighth in the 2016-17 NJAC conference race en route to an 11-13 record overall. TCNJ returns one all-conference player from the 2016-17 season in senior forward Nikki Schott.

The coaches’ dark horse selection for the second consecutive season, Rutgers University-Newark was selected to place seventh. Third-year head coach Ashley Cieplicki guided the Scarlet Raiders to a 2016-17 NJAC Tournament run which included upset road wins over Stockton and Kean before falling in the conference title game to Montclair State. Rutgers-Newark returns one all-conference player from a 2016-17 NJAC runner-up squad which finished 12-16 overall in junior guard Faith Ashby.

Rutgers University-Camden, which earned a berth in the ECAC Tournament en route to a 14-12 record overall in 2016-17, was selected to place eighth. Fifth-year head coach Annette Reiter has guided the Scarlet Raptors to 43 victories, giving her 49 career wins on the collegiate level. Rutgers-Camden returns one all-conference player from its 2016-17 ECAC Tournament squad in senior forward Michelle Obasi.

Ramapo College, under the leadership of 10th-year head coach Mike Eineker, was selected to place ninth. Eineker has guided Ramapo to 99 wins during his tenure in Mahwah, giving him 186 collegiate coaching victories for his career. The 2016-17 Roadrunners finished 10-15 overall.

New Jersey City University, led by third-year head coach Robyn Burton, was selected to place 10th. The 2016-17 Gothic Knights finished 4-21 overall.

The 36th season of NJAC women’s basketball will tip-off on Tuesday, November 15 with nine league teams in non-conference action. Conference play will begin just six days later when all 10 league teams participate in their conference-openers on Tuesday, November 21.

The top six finishers in the conference standings will participate in the 2017-18 NJAC Championship Tournament. First round tournament games will take place on Saturday, February 17, with the sixth-seeded team hosting the third-seeded team, and the fourth-seeded team hosting the fifth-seeded team. The top two seeds will each receive a first round bye.

The NJAC Tournament Semifinals will be hosted by the top two seeds on Tuesday, February 20. The two semifinal winners will then advance to the 2017-18 NJAC Championship Game on Friday, February 23, to be contested at the site of the highest remaining seed.

The NJAC Tournament Champion receives the conference’s automatic qualification to the NCAA Division III National Championship Tournament.