

TCNJ Tabbed Favorite In 2020 NJAC Softball Preseason Coaches Poll

PITMAN --- The College of New Jersey, which went 17-1 in conference play last year and captured its 12th NJAC title overall and first since 2000, garnered eight first-place votes and was selected the preseason favorite in a poll of the league's head coaches.

Rowan earned two first-place votes and has been picked to finish second in the 2020 standings. Kean, Ramapo, and Montclair State round out the top five, with the Red Hawks named this year's dark horse team. Stockton, Rutgers-Camden, Rutgers-Newark, William Paterson, and NJCU round out the remainder of the preseason poll.

NJAC softball, traditionally one of the league's strongest sports, looks to impress on a national level once again this season. Rowan is currently listed as No. 14 in the National Fastpitch Coaches Association preseason poll, and TCNJ enters the 2020 campaign at No. 19 nationally.

Both squads, along with Kean, earned NCAA Tournament berths last season with the Profs winning the Cambridge Regional in thrilling fashion as they defeated host MIT 1-0 in 10 innings in the regional championship game. TCNJ and Kean also hosted the regional round last year.

A number of highly regarded players are back, including all three 2019 major award winners, two All-Americans, 14 All-Region players, and eight NJAC All-Conference First Team selections along with all but two All-Conference Second Team selections.

Kean's Caroline Ratti, the reigning NJAC Player of the Year and All-American, returns for a fifth season after batting .401 last year with an NJAC-leading 33 stolen bases and 57 runs scored. Reigning Pitcher of the Year Alanna Namit from TCNJ returns to the circle for the Lions after going 15-3 last year with a league-best 1.21 ERA. Rowan's Morgan Zane, the reigning Rookie of the Year, is also back after ranking second in the NJAC in total bases last year and batting .390 with the fifth-highest slugging percentage (.617) in the conference.

Also returning is All-American Lauren Conroy from TCNJ, last year's NJAC hitting leader with a .444 batting average. She also led the NJAC with 52 RBI, seven more than the next highest.

In total, three of the top four hitters in the conference return. In addition to Conroy, Montclair State all-region duo Amber Powers (.425) and Blake Saperstein (.424) are back. Ramapo's Carli Egan, who also earned all-region last season, was sixth in hitting with a .419 clip at the plate.

Four of the five all-conference pitchers return to the circle. In addition to TCNJ's Namit, fellow Lion Eliza Sweet and Rowan pair Lauren Shannon and Jesse DeDomenico will be on the field in 2020. Shannon earned First Team at-large honors last year, and both Sweet and DeDomenico were Second Team honorees last year. Shannon went 11-6 with a 1.53 ERA, and Sweet went 15-4 with a 1.84 ERA. DeDomenico led the NJAC with 167 strikeouts while going 19-8 overall with a 2.23 ERA.

Stockton, also slated to make the NJAC Tournament field this season with a sixth-place prediction, returns two of its three top hitters. All-Conference First Team first baseman Alexandra Cosenzo returns after hitting .310 with a team-high 28 RBI last year is back, as is Meg Murzello who went .341 with 16 stolen bases.

NJAC all-conference honoree Vanessa Archibold looks to lead William Paterson once again after leading the Pioneers with a .398 average and 45 hits. Rutgers-Newark's Jackie Lara, a Second Team utility pick last year, does it all for the Scarlet Raiders as she pitched the majority of games and recorded a team-high

80 strikeouts while contributing at the plate. Rutgers-Camden's Nina Arroyo, also a Second Team pick last year, led the Scarlet Raptors with a .341 average with 30 hits and 13 RBI. For NJCU, Dulce Almonte looks to lead the Gothic Knights once again after posting a team-high .309 batting average with 30 hits.

The 2020 NJAC Championship is slated to begin on Tuesday, April 28, at the site of the higher seeds. The tournament then shifts to Kean for the weekend portion from May 1-3. The championship game, which determines the conference's automatic qualifier to the NCAA Tournament, is slated for Sunday, May 3.

2020 NJAC Softball Preseason Poll *(first place votes in parentheses)*

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