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Yellowjackets Narrow Favorites In Baseball Preseason Coaches Poll

PORTLAND, Ore. – Fresh off its first-ever GNAC Championships title and a trip to the NCAA Division II West Regional, Montana State Billings enters the season atop the 2020 Great Northwest Athletic Conference Preseason Baseball Coaches Poll.

Under the direction of first-year head coach **Derek Waddoups**, the Yellowjackets were selected as the preseason favorites with four first-place votes and a total of 33 points. The Yellowjackets finished last season 33-20 overall and 30-10 in conference play to claim the GNAC regular-season title before going undefeated to win the GNAC Championships.

2020 GNAC Preseason Baseball Coaches Poll

Team (1st Place Votes)	2019 Record (GNAC)	Pts.
1. Montana State Billings (4)	33-20 (30-10, 1st)	33
2. Western Oregon (1)	30-13 (26-11, 2nd)	31
3. Northwest Nazarene	24-24 (20-17, 3rd)	22
4. Central Washington (1)	16-31 (13-27, Tie 5th)	15
Saint Martin's	21-32 (15-25, 4th)	15
6. Concordia	15-34 (13-27, Tie 5th)	10

Votes awarded on an 6-5-4-3-2-1 basis.

Following closely behind the Yellowjackets, Western Oregon is picked second with 31 points and one first-place vote. The Wolves return 20 players and five position starters from last year's team that finished in second place with a 26-11 conference mark (30-13 overall).

Looking to make it to the GNAC Championships in back-to-back seasons, Northwest Nazarene is picked third with 22 points. Central Washington and Saint Martin's are tied for fourth with 15 points apiece while Concordia rounds out the poll in sixth place and 10 points.

Montana State Billings rode an 11-game winning streak at the end of the regular season to secure the GNAC regular-season title and the No. 1 seed in the GNAC Championships. The Yellowjackets saw 13 players earn all-conference honors in 2019, including six first-teamers. The Yellowjackets' loaded lineup led the conference in slugging percentage (.533), runs scored (407), hits (554) and RBI (370) en route to an NCAA West Regional appearance.

The Yellowjackets will look to senior first baseman **Daniel Cipriano** to lead the way. The reigning GNAC Player of the Year, Cipriano led the GNAC with a .405 batting average, a .528 on-base percentage and a .827 slugging percentage while collecting 68 hits, 59 runs, 18 home runs and 52 RBI on his way to earning Second Team All-American honors by the Division II Conference Commissioners Association (D2CCA). He was also named a Third Team All-American by the American Baseball Coaches Association (ABCA) and the National Collegiate Baseball Writers Association (NCBWA).

Also returning for the Yellowjackets is senior catcher **Andrew Schleusner** and junior shortstop **Wyatt Setian**. Schleusner earned First Team All-GNAC and NCBWA Honorable Mention All-West Region honors as a designated hitter last year, finishing with a .293 batting average, 44 hits, 24 runs and 29 RBI. Setian was also selected to the All-GNAC First Team before moving on to earn selection to the All-West Region Second Team by the D2CCA, ABCA and NCBWA. He batted .327 and led the conference with 71 hits and 19 doubles.

The Yellowjackets will need to restock its starting rotation after losing Steen Fredrickson and Jarrod Molnaa. Senior **Keven Mackintosh** is in a prime position to emerge after recording a 5-3 record, a 5.46 earned run average and 61 strikeouts a year ago.

Western Oregon won 11 of its final 12 games of the season to advance to the GNAC Championships for the seventh consecutive year under head coach **Kellen Walker**. The Wolves are without six all-conference selections from last year, including Alex Roth, the 2018 and 2019 GNAC Pitcher of the Year. Returning to the mound is senior **Connor McCord**, who finished the season with a 2.33 earned run average and a .182 opponent batting average in 11 appearances and five starts. McCord earned First Team All-GNAC honors as a utility player in 2019 as he also finished with a .303 batting average, 43 hits, eight home runs and 42 RBI with time as a first baseman.

Other key returners for the Wolves are sophomore outfielder **Jacob Maiben** and senior outfielder **Blayze Arcano**, both of whom were second-teamers last year. Maiben had a stellar freshman campaign that earned him selection as the GNAC Freshman of the Year while Arcano started in 41 of the Wolves' 42 games and finished with a .304 batting average.

Finishing the regular season in third place a year ago, Northwest Nazarene (24-24, 20-17 GNAC) has some holes to fill in order to return to the GNAC Championships. The Nighthawks return just three starting position players but have a solid core to build around.

Senior middle infielder **Parker Price** returns for his final season after earning Second Team All-GNAC honors at second base last year, hitting .291 with 50 hits and securing a .965 fielding percentage. Junior pitcher and catcher **Ben Johnson** also returns as the Nighthawks' main utility player. Johnson led the team with a .364 batting average while also contributing a 4.63 earned run average and 39 strikeouts in 58.1 innings pitched.

Central Washington (16-31, 13-27 GNAC) is tied for fourth in the preseason poll with Saint Martin's. The Wildcats finished last season tied for fifth place and were left out of the GNAC Championships for the first time since 2016. **Desi Storey's** Wildcats return 23 players, six position starters and two starting pitchers.

A pair of All-GNAC honorees return to the Wildcats' lineup in senior outfielder **Justin Hampson** and junior infielder **Mitch Lesmeister**. Hampson was a First Team All-GNAC selection last year after he finished with a .317 batting average and a .410 on-base percentage. Lesmeister was a second-team selection, batting .353 with a team-leading 60 hits and 24 RBI. On the mound, senior **Tyler Hoefler** also returns after posting a 2-2 record, a 5.51 earned run average and 51 strikeouts in 11 starts.

Saint Martin's (21-32, 15-25 GNAC) snuck into last year's GNAC Championships as the No. 4 seed. The Saints made it through the consolation bracket and upset second-seeded Western Oregon to advance to the title game, where they would fall to top-seeded Montana State Billings. The Saints return seven position starters and two starting pitchers.

Senior pitcher **Tanner Inouye** is expected to lead the Saints' rotation in 2020. The First Team All-GNAC and D2CCA Second Team All-West Region selection finished with a 4-6 record, a 4.58 ERA, 87 strikeouts and two complete games in 72.2 innings pitched. Returning on the field for the Saints is sophomore first baseman **Aaron Renaud**, who earned second-team honors after he finished with a .319 batting average and a .397 on-base percentage.

Rounding out the preseason poll, Concordia (15-34, 13-27 GNAC) finished last season tied for fifth with Central Washington. The Cavaliers return 20 players, including five position starters, as head coach **Rob Vance's** enters his 22nd season. Leading the group is a pair of honorable mentions in senior shortstop **Damon Peters** (.270 batting average and 44 hits) and senior third baseman **Liam Knowles** (.277 batting average, 49 hits and 41 RBI).

The 2020 season begins on Friday, Jan. 31 with Montana State Billings playing at Point Loma and Central Washington playing at Stanislaus State. Conference play will start on Feb. 28 when the Wildcats host Northwest Nazarene in Ellensburg. The GNAC Championships will run from May 6-8 at Northwest Nazarene University in Nampa, Idaho.

Team Capsules Follow On Next Page



2020 GNAC Baseball Teams At A Glance

CENTRAL WASHINGTON

Head Coach: Desi Storey (Central Washington 1994, 626-701-1, 29th Season)

Assistant Coaches: Joel Johnson, Kramer Champlin

2019 Overall Record: 16-31 **GNAC Record (Finish):** 13-27 (Tie 5th)

Total Returners: 23

Total Returning Position Starters: 6

Total Returning Starting Pitchers: 2

Key Returners: Mitch Lesmeister (IF, R/R, 6-1, Jr., Walla Walla, Wash., Second Team All-GNAC, .353 Batting Avg., .469 OBP, .518 Slugging Pct., 9 2B, 5 HR, 24 RBI, 10 SB), Justin Hampson (OF, R/R, 6-3, Sr., Mill Creek, Wash., First Team All-GNAC, .317 Batting Avg., .410 OBP, .467 Slugging Pct., 13 2B, 4 HR, 19 RBI, 11 SB), Tyler Hoefer (P, R/R, 6-2, Sr., Delta, B.C., 2-2, 5.51 ERA, 50.2 IP, 51 K).

Key Losses: Jacob Forrester (P, Second Team All-GNAC), Connor Stevenson (P, Honorable Mention All-GNAC), Robert Ball (C).

Top Freshmen: Austin Ohland (C, R/R, 5-11, Chesterfield, Mo. – Lafayette).

Top Transfers: Michael Copeland (OF, L/L, 6-0, Vancouver, Wash. – Mt. Hood CC), Dillon Larsen (P, L/L, 6-2, Ellensburg, Wash. – Univ. of Virginia).

CONCORDIA

Head Coach: Rob Vance (Pacific (Ore.), 1987, 428-615-2, 22nd Season)

Assistant Coaches: Jeff Bard, James Threw, Gerhett Moser, Brian Grant

2019 Overall Record: 15-34 **GNAC Record (Finish):** 13-27 (Tie 5th)

Total Returners: 20

Total Returning Position Starters: 5

Total Returning Starting Pitchers: 1

Key Returners: Dominic Enbody (C, L/R, 6-2, Jr., Wilsonville, Ore., Honorable Mention All-GNAC, 42 GP, .285 Batting Avg., 35 Hits, 14 Runs, 10 2B, 1 HR, 15 RBI, .407 Slugging Pct.), Liam Knowles (IF, L/R, 6-5, Sr., Albany, Calif., Honorable Mention All-GNAC, 49 GP, .277 Batting Avg., 49 Hits, 25 Runs, 9 2B, 5 HR, 41 RBI, 18 BB, .435 Slugging Pct.), Damon Peters (IF, R/R, 5-11, Sr., Cornelius, Ore., Honorable Mention All-GNAC, 49 GP, .270 Batting Avg., 44 Hits, 40 Runs, 11 2B, 5 3B, 7 HR, 18 RBI, .528 Slugging Pct., .423 On Base Pct.), Jake Wikel (OF, R/R, 5-11, Sr., Redmond, Wash., 45 GP, .232 Batting Avg., 26 Hits, 12 Runs, 5 2B, 2 HR, 9 RBI), Payton Presley (OF, L/R, 5-7, Sr., Cottage Grove, Ore., 45 GP, 19 Hits, 14 Runs, 3 2B, 30 BB), Ryan Gibson (P, R/R, 6-0, Sr., Fremont, Calif., 12 GP, 2-4, 6.45 ERA, 37.2 IP, 28 Runs, 27 ER, 34 Hits, 34 K). Dylan Diaz (P, R/R, 6-3, Jr., Glendora, Calif., Honorable Mention All-GNAC, 15 GP, 1.32 ERA, 3 SV, 27.1 IP, 8 Runs, 4 ER, 25 K, .168 Opponent Batting Avg.)

Key Losses: Eddie Vasquez (IF), Isaiah Hatch (OF/RHP), Trevor Huddleston (OF/LHP), Jeffrey Lusink (LHP), Kaleb Jones (IF).

Top Freshmen: Matt Bergevin (IF, R/R, 6-3, Tempe, Ariz. – Marcos de Niza), Cade Edmondson (C, R/R, 5-10, Wilsonville, Ore. – Wilsonville), Jerry Flores (IF, R/R, 5-8, Salinas, Calif. – Palma), Max Ramirez (P, R/R, 5-10, Los Banos, Calif. – Los Banos), Eric Van Allen (P, R/R, 6-5, Huntington Beach, Calif. – Huntington Beach).

Top Transfers: Tyson Cooper (OF/P, R/R, 6-0, Sr., Gresham, Ore. – Southern Oregon Univ.), Sasha Jabusch (P, L/L, 5-9, Sr., Kelso, Wash., Concordia Univ., Neb.), TC Strickler (OF/P, L/L, 5-11, So., Peoria, Ariz. – Glendale CC).

2020 GNAC BASEBALL TEAMS AT A GLANCE

MONTANA STATE BILLINGS

Head Coach: Derek Waddoups (Bellevue, Neb., 2004, 1st Season, 0-0)

Assistant Coaches: Riley Drogonsen, Matt Hape

2019 Overall Record: 33-20 **GNAC Record (Finish):** 30-10 (1st, Won GNAC Championships, 0-2 at West Regionals)

Total Returners: 23 **Total Returning Position Starters:** 5 **Total Returning Starting Pitchers:** 2

Key Returners: Daniel Cipriano (1B, R/R, 6-3, Sr., Agoura Hills, Calif., GNAC Newcomer of the Year, GNAC Player of the Year, First Team All-West Region (D2CCA, ABCA & NCBWA), D2CCA Second Team All-American, ABCA & NCBWA Third Team All-American, .405 Batting Avg., 68 Hits, 59 Runs, 15 2B, 18 HR, 52 RBI, .827 Slugging Pct., .528 OBP), Andrew Schleusner (C, R/R, 5-11, Sr., Kalispell, Mont., First Team All-GNAC, NCBWA Honorable Mention All-West Region, .293 Batting Avg., 44 Hits, 24 Runs, 13 2B, 29 RBI, .413 Slugging Pct.), Chris Arpan (3B, R/R, 6-3, Sr., Lake Oswego, Ore., Second Team All-GNAC, D2CCA Second Team All-West Region, NCBWA Honorable Mention All-West Region, .357 Batting Avg., 55 Hits, 35 Runs, 10 HR, 39 RBI, .643 Slugging Pct., 24 BB, .459 OBP), Wyatt Setian (SS, R/R, 5-10, Jr., Post Falls, Idaho, First Team All-GNAC, Second Team All-West Region (D2CCA, ABCA & NCBWA), .327 Batting Avg., 71 Hits, 45 Runs, 19 2B, 12 HR, 48 RBI, .599 Slugging Pct.), Tyler Detloff (OF, R/R, 6-1, Sr., Kennewick, Wash., Honorable Mention All-GNAC, .282 Batting Avg., 31 Hits, 23 Runs, 5 HR, 21 RBI, .527 Slugging Pct.), Keven Mackintosh (P, L/L, 6-2, Sr., Aurora, Colo., Honorable Mention All-GNAC, 5-3, 5.46 ERA, 56 IP, 61 SO, 11 BB).

Key Losses: Steen Fredrickson (P, First Team All-GNAC, ABCA Second Team All-West Region, NCBWA Honorable Mention All-West Region), Jalen Garcia (OF, First Team All-GNAC, D2CCA First Team All-West Region, ABCA & NCBWA Second Team All-West Region), Matt Dillon (OF, First Team All-GNAC, ABCA First Team All-West Region, D2CCA & NCBWA Second Team All-West Region, Third Team CoSIDA Academic All-American), Landon Peterson (C, Second Team All-GNAC), Conner Linebarger (2B, Honorable Mention All-GNAC), Jarrod Molnaa (P, Honorable Mention All-GNAC).

Top Freshmen: Luke Bucher (IF/P, R/R, 6-0, Seattle, Wash. – Bishop Blanchet), Mason Powell (IF/OF, R/R, 6-2, Gillette, Wyo. – Thunder Basin), Randy Stultz (IF, R/R, 5-10, Bigfork, Mont. – Bigfork), Mitchell Winter (1B/P, L/R, 6-1, Rio Rancho, N.M. – Rio Rancho), Braelen Pippin (P, R/R, 6-0, Billings, Mont. – Custer County), Nolan Thebiay (P/OF, R/R, 6-4, Wilsonville, Ore. – Wilsonville).

Top Transfers: Tanner Parker (IF, L/R, 5-10, Sr., Spokane, Wash. – Middle Tennessee State Univ.), Nate Bloxham (OF, R/R, 5-11, Jr., South Jordan, Utah – Miles City CC), Dominick Buso (OF, R/R, 5-9, Jr., San Marcos, Calif. – San Diego Mesa Coll.), Mason Abrath (P, R/R, 6-2, Jr., Salt Lake City, Utah – Salt Lake CC), Braeden Bentley (P, R/R, 6-2, Jr., Poway, Calif. – San Diego Mesa Coll.).

NORTHWEST NAZARENE

Head Coach: Joe Schaefer (Point Loma, 2003, 2nd Season, 11th Season Overall, 24-24)

Assistant Coaches: Matt Hollod, Billy Newberry, Rocco Ferrari, Sean Rooney

2019 Overall Record: 24-24 **GNAC Record (Finish):** 20-17 (3rd, 0-2 at GNAC Championships)

Total Returners: 18 **Total Returning Position Starters:** 3 **Total Returning Starting Pitchers:** 1

Key Returners: Parker Price (SS, R/R, 5-10, Sr., Boise, Idaho, Second Team All-GNAC, 48 GP, .291 Batting Avg., 50 Hits, 32 Runs, 4 HR, 27 RBI, 10 SB), Ben Johnson (C/P, R/R, 6-0, Jr., Federal Way, Wash., .364 Batting Avg., 17 RBI, 58.1 IP, 4-4, 4.64 ERA, 39 K), Shawn Grandmont (3B, R/R, 6-1, Sr., Lethbridge, Alta., Honorable Mention All-GNAC, .287 Batting Avg., 33 Hits, 11 2B, 27 RBI, 11 SB), Blake McFadden (LHP, 6-2, Sr., Meridian, Idaho, 0-1, 2.75 ERA).

Key Losses: Kyle Redford (1B, Second Team All-GNAC), Bennett Tabaracci (OF, Second Team All-GNAC), Rocco Ferrari (SS, Second Team All-GNAC), Jesse Hilyard (P, Second Team All-GNAC).

Top Freshmen: Kyle Ethridge (LHP, 6-0, Rancho Cucamonga, Calif. – Los Osos), Quentin Ayers (C, R/R, 5-11, Spokane, Wash. – Mt. Spokane), Isaac Hines (IF, L/R, 5-10, Seattle, Wash. – Kings), Eryk Lopez (RHP, 6-0, Rancho Cucamonga, Calif. – Los Osos), Joel Tornero (LHP, 6-0, West Covina, Calif. – South Hills), Kyle Payne (IF, 5-9, Bellingham, Wash. – Bellingham).

Top Transfers: Ryan Dearing (OF, L/L, 5-10, Jr., Richland, Wash. – Columbia Basin CC), Ty Hueckman (RHP, 6-2, Sr., Burns, Ore. – Univ. of Nevada), Colton Moore (IF, R/R, 6-3, Jr., Provo, Utah – Salt Lake CC), Tyler Tan (RHP, 5-10, Jr., Kent, Wash. – Skagit Valley CC), John Gonzalez (1B, L/L, 6-2, Sr., Riverside, Calif. – Cal State Dominguez Hills).

2020 GNAC BASEBALL TEAMS AT A GLANCE

SAINT MARTIN'S

Head Coach: Kelly Gau (Central Washington, 2011, 3rd Season, 29-54)

Assistant Coaches: Joey Swanson, Andy Forgione, Luke Hare

2019 Overall Record: 21-32 **GNAC Record (Finish):** 15-25 (4th, Lost in GNAC Championships Final)

Total Returners: 17

Total Returning Position Starters: 7

Total Returning Starting Pitchers: 2

Key Returners: Tanner Inouye (P, R/R, 6-0, Sr., Honolulu, Hawaii, Second Team All-West Region, First Team All-Conference, 4-6, 4.58 ERA, 1.22 WHIP, 72 IP, 87 K, 26 BB, 2 CG), Ryne Oshiro (IF, L/R, 5-11, Jr., Aiea, Hawaii, Honorable Mention All-GNAC, .283 Batting Avg., 3 HR, 22 RBI, 52 Hits, 10 2B, 21 Runs, .386 Slugging Pct., .333 OBP, .719 OPS), Aaron Renaud (IF, L/L, 5-10, So., Lihue, Hawaii, Second Team All-GNAC, .319 Batting Avg., 1 HR, 26 RBI, 53 Hits, 11 2B, 19 Runs, .416 Slugging Pct., .397 OBP, .813 OPS), Micah McNicoll (IF, S/R, 5-7, Sr., Kaneohe, Hawaii, Honorable Mention All-GNAC, .282 Batting Avg., 2 HR, 16 RBI, 42 Hits, 7 2B, .396 Slugging Pct., .368 OBP, .764 OPS).

Key Losses: Austin Feist (OF, Honorable Mention All-GNAC), Colton Peha (OF, Honorable Mention All-GNAC), Aaron Shoup (P), Clark Streby (P, Honorable Mention All-GNAC), Mickey Walker (P, First Team All-GNAC), Ryan Dorney (P).

Top Freshmen: Troy McCormick (P, R/R, 6-2, Belfair, Wash. – North Mason), Drew Rose (P, R/R, 6-1, South Bend, Wash. – South Bend), Justice Yamashita (P, R/R, 5-10, Honolulu, Hawaii – Maryknoll).

Top Transfers: Derek Alumbaugh (P, R/R, 6-0, So., Winthrop, Wash. – Skagit Valley CC), Ryan Driscoll (P, L/L, 6-3, Jr., West Linn, Ore. – Southwest Oregon CC), Harrison Goebel (P, R/R, 6-6, Sr., Santa Clara, Utah – Pine View).

WESTERN OREGON

Head Coach: Kellen Walker (Point Loma 2006, 212-137, 8th Season)

Assistant Coaches: Grady Wood, Collin Runge, Griffey Halle, Nate Etheridge

2019 Overall Record: 30-13 **GNAC Record (Finish):** 26-11 (2nd, 1-2 at GNAC Championships)

Total Returners: 20

Total Returning Position Starters: 5

Total Returning Starting Pitchers: 1

Key Returners: Connor McCord (P/1B, L/L, 5-9, Sr., Gilbert, Ariz., First Team All-GNAC, First Team All-West Region, .303 Batting Avg., .556 Slugging Pct., 42 RBI, 8 HR), Jacob Maiben (OF, R/R, 5-9, So., Newberg, Ore., GNAC Freshman of the Year, Honorable Mention All-West Region, Second Team All-GNAC, .398 Batting Avg., .544 Slugging Pct., 10 2B), Blayze Arcano (OF, R/R, 5-11, Sr., Ewa Beach, Hawaii, Second Team All-GNAC, .304 Batting Avg., 9 2B, 3 3B, 27 RBI).

Key Losses: Alex Roth (P, GNAC Pitcher of the Year, First Team All-GNAC, First Team All-West Region), Jared McDonald (C, First Team All-GNAC, First Team All-West Region), Griffey Halle (OF, First Team All-GNAC, Second Team All-West Region).

Top Freshmen: N/A

Top Transfers: Jackson Holstad (OF, L/R, 6-3, So., Monmouth, Ore., Chemeketa CC).