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The Notre Dame baseball team will head into the 2002 season as a consensus top-20 team, as the *USA Today Baseball Weekly*/ESPN coaches poll has ranked the Irish 13th in its preseason poll. Notre Dame earlier was ranked fifth in the *Baseball America* preseason poll and 19th in the *Collegiate Baseball* magazine poll.

Notre Dame—which opens practice on Jan. 30, with a Feb. 22 season opener versus Missouri at the New Orleans Classic—was one of nine teams to be ranked 13th or higher in both the *USA Today* and *BA* polls, with the others including consensus No. 1 Stanford and the No. 2-8 teams in the *USA Today* poll: Miami (Fla.), USC, Florida State, Clemson, LSU, Tulane and Nebraska. The rest of the coaches poll top 10 includes South Carolina and Cal State Fullerton, followed by Rice, Texas and Notre Dame.

Notre Dame—which rose to the No. 1 national ranking in both the *BA* and *CB* magazine polls during the 2001 season—returns nine of its top 10 position players from the squad that set the team record for wins in a season (49-13-1). The Irish return their top five leaders in batting average from the 2001 offense that ranked 26th nationally in team batting (.322), plus seven of the top 10 pitchers (two of four starters) from the 2001 staff that ranked sixth in the nation with a 3.22 team ERA. The well-balanced Irish also finished 36th nationally with a .974 fielding percentage in the 2001 season.

Three Notre Dame players have earned preseason All-America honors: senior centerfielder Steve Stanley, junior leftfielder Brian Stavisky and sophomore second baseman Steve Sollmann. The squad's veteran core also includes senior Paul O'Toole and Andrew Bushey, who will split time behind the plate and at third base (O'Toole was a second team all-BIG EAST selection in 2001 while Bushey was a first teamer).

The 2002 Irish roster also includes a highly-touted freshman class that recently was ranked first in the nation by *Baseball America*.

Notre Dame is slated to face USC in a marquee matchup on March 9, in Round Rock, Texas. Two other teams on Notre Dame's 2002 schedule cracked *USA Today's* preseason top 25: 17th-ranked Arizona State and No. 24 Rutgers, which combined with Notre Dame to make the BIG EAST one of just six conference with multiple teams in the preseason coaches poll.

Six other Notre Dame opponents received votes in the preseason poll, led by Midwest rivals Ball State (36th-most votes) and Purdue (44th), plus Virginia Tech, BYU, Florida International and New Orleans.

USA Today Baseball Weekly/ESPN Coaches Poll (2002 preseason)

Team ('01 record)	Vot. Pts (#1)	Final '01 ranking
1. STANFORD (51-17)	1,011 (33).	2
2. MIAMI (53-12)	925 (6).	1
3. USC (45-19)	885 (1)	4
4. FLORIDA STATE (47-19)	856 (1)	10
5. CLEMSON (41-22)	834	14
6. LOUISIANA ST. (44-22-1)	809	9
7. TULANE (56-13)	794	6
8. NEBRASKA (50-16)	671	7
9. SOUTH CAROLINA (49-20)	617	13
10. CS FULLERTON (48-18)	543	3
11. RICE (47-20)	531	12
12. TEXAS (36-26)	481	NR
13. NOTRE DAME (49-13-1)	465	15
14. OKLAHOMA ST. (42-22)	388	NR
15. WICHITA STATE (42-24)	363	NR
16. BAYLOR (37-24)	359	25
17. ARIZONA STATE (37-20-1)	342	22
18. MISSISSIPPI (39-23-1)	330	NR
19. GEORGIA TECH (41-20)	323	21
20. MISSISSIPPI ST. (39-24)	271	17
21. WAKE FOREST (44-18)	261	19
22. FRESNO STATE (41-25)	258	NR
23. FLORIDA (35-27)	139	NR
24. RUTGERS (42-17)	121	NR
25. TENNESSEE (48-20)	105	5

Others receiving votes: North Carolina (77), Texas Tech (59), East Carolina (54), Cal State Northridge (43), Ohio State (42), Georgia (38), Texas A&M (31), Alabama (28), Nevada (27), UCLA (24), *Ball State* (20), Stetson (19), Washington (18), California (18), Arizona (18), Long Beach State (17), Winthrop (15), Houston (14), *Purdue* (11), Central Florida (11), Oral Roberts (8), Pepperdine (7), San Diego (6), *Virginia Tech* (6), South Alabama (5), *Brigham Young* (4), Georgia

Southern (4), San Diego State (4), *Florida International* (3), South Florida (3), Campbell (3), *New Orleans* (1), Southwest Missouri State (1), Illinois (1), Oklahoma (1), Coastal Carolina (1), Louisiana-Lafayette (1).

Teams in italics indicate Notre Dame's 2002 opponents.