

FOR 10:00 a.m. RELEASE

DATE: October 21, 2010

CONTACT: Sara Naggar, Director of Communications (snaggar@bigeast.org)

Connecticut Picked to Win 2010-11 BIG EAST Regular-Season Title

NEW YORK, N.Y. – The University of Connecticut, the two-time defending NCAA Champion and the four-time defending conference champion, was picked to win the 2010-11 BIG EAST women's basketball regular-season title. The unanimous selection was made by the league's 16 head coaches, who were not permitted to select their own teams. Connecticut has claimed 16 league championships, 18 regular-season titles and has won both titles in the same season 14 times, all during the past 29 years of BIG EAST women's basketball. West Virginia earned the other first-place vote.

Connecticut was followed by West Virginia in the second spot. Georgetown was chosen third, with Notre Dame and St. John's close behind in fourth and fifth, respectively. DePaul was picked to finish sixth, followed by Rutgers (seventh), Louisville (eighth) and Syracuse (ninth). Marquette rounded out the top ten schools, followed by USF, Providence, Pittsburgh, Villanova, Cincinnati and Seton Hall.

The Huskies won their seventh national championship in 2010 to cap their second straight undefeated season. They carry a Division I record 78-game winning streak into 2010-11. It was UConn's fourth perfect season in program history. The Huskies enter the year having won either the BIG EAST regular-season or championship titles in each of the last 17 seasons. UConn has also advanced to the NCAA Regionals in each of the last 17 seasons and is coming off three straight Final Four appearances.

Connecticut is led by two-time Wade Trophy winner Maya Moore (18.9 points), who returns for her senior season. A member of the USA Basketball Women's World Championship Team, Moore is the fastest player in school history to surpass 2,000 points needing just 108 games. The 2010 Final Four Most Outstanding Player, Moore has totaled 2,168 career points. Junior guard Tiffany Hayes (10.2 points, 3.3 rebounds) also returns along with senior guard Lorin Dixon (2.9 points, 61 assists). Sophomore guard Kelly Faris (4.1 points, 3.7 rebounds) should see an expanded role.

West Virginia had a strong 2009-10 campaign posting a program-high in wins as they went 29-6, 13-3 BIG EAST play. The Mountaineers advanced to the title game of the BIG EAST Championship for the second time in school history (also accomplished in 2006). This year they return eight letterwinners and all five starters. West Virginia finished the year ranked No. 16 in the USA Today Poll and No. 10 in the Associated Press Poll. The final rankings were the school's highest since 1991-92. West Virginia also advanced to the NCAA Championship for the third time in the last four years. Senior guard Liz Repella returns after leading the Mountaineers with 13.9 ppg and 70 3-pointers last season. She is joined by redshirt-senior G/F Korrine Capbell, who led the team with 7.4 rebounds per game and six double-doubles.

Georgetown returns three starters from last year's NCAA Championship qualifying team, including BIG EAST Freshman of the Year Sugar Rodgers. Coming off their best season in more than a decade, the Hoyas have posted back-to-back 20-win seasons. Georgetown led the league in steals (12.9) and turnover margin (+8.1), while ranking second in 3-point field goals (6.3 per game). Georgetown also begins the year with a 15-game home court winning streak dating to March of 2009. Rodgers, a sophomore guard, led the Hoyas last year with 17.6 ppg and is joined by senior guard Monica McNutt who averaged 11.2 points per game last season with 66 3-pointers.

Notre Dame, picked to finish fourth, is returning a solid core, including All-BIG EAST Second Team pick Skylar Diggins. Notre Dame will welcome three talented freshmen. The newcomers include consensus prep All-America guard and USA Basketball gold medalist Kayla McBride, Canadian National Team forward Natalie Achonwa and two-time Michigan Player of the Year Ariel Braker. It is the second consecutive season the Irish have added a McDonald's All-American (Diggins). Notre Dame set numerous attendance records last season, ranking fourth in the nation as the Irish averaged 8,377 fans, including a school-record six sellouts. ND expects to challenge those figures again. Diggins returns after averaging 13.8 ppg, 4.1 rpg, 3.2 apg and 2.6 spg last season.

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St. John's compiled a 25-7 record last season and finished with its highest win total since 1982-83. The Red Storm also went 12-4 in league play, tying the program mark for most conference wins. The Red Storm added another first by finishing the year No. 18 in the USA Today Poll and No. 15 in the AP rankings. The Red Storm have appeared in the postseason in five of the last six years. St. John's returns nine letterwinners and four starters. The Red Storm also welcome five newcomers to provide depth. Junior forward Da'Shena Stephens, an AP All-American Honorable Mention last season, returns after leading the team last season with 14.3 ppg and 7.6 rpg.

DePaul earned a berth to its eighth straight NCAA Championship and has all five starters back from a team that was 21-12 and 9-7 in the BIG EAST Conference in 2009-10. The Blue Demons welcome back their entire bench minus guard Courtney Webb (2.4 points). The Blue Demons averaged 68.3 points per game, shooting .421 from the field. Senior Deirdre Naughton returns to the Blue Demon bench after the NCAA granted her a sixth season. Sam Quigley was one of eight finalists for the Nancy Lieberman award, which goes to the nation's top point guard, and returns for her senior year under Blue Demons head coach Doug Bruno.

Coming off its 12th NCAA Championship appearance in the last 15 seasons, Rutgers was picked to finish seventh, with three starters and six letterwinners returning this year, but no seniors. Junior guard Khadijah Rushdan will be counted on to increase her scoring, along with classmate and forward Chelsea Lee. Coming off a streak of seven 20-win seasons, the Scarlet Knights finished 2009-10 with a 19-15 overall record last season, including a 9-7 mark in league play, as they made their way to their seventh straight NCAA Championship. Rushdan averaged 9.0 ppg last season, second on the team, to go along with a team-high 3.6 assists per game. Lee added 7.2 ppg and a team-high 7.2 rpg.

Louisville returns four starters and eight letterwinners from a 2009-10 season that saw them go 14-18, a year after appearing in the NCAA title game. With the departure of one starter and six letterwinners, the Cardinals will rely on youth this year as six newcomers join the team. The incoming class of WBCA All-American Shoni Schimmel and McDonald's All-America nominees Shawnta Dyer, Sheronne Vails and Charmaine Tay is regarded as a top-five recruiting class. Junior forward Monique Reid returns after averaging 18.4 ppg and 9.2 rpg.

Despite losing three starters, including All-BIG EAST First Team selection Nicole Michael, Syracuse, picked to finish ninth, returns 10 letterwinners, along with a pair of impact transfers and add four solid freshmen. Coming off a deep run in the WNIT Championship, Syracuse should vie for its second NCAA Championship berth in the last four years. Under the direction of fifth-year head coach Quentin Hillsman, the Orange will challenge for a berth in the NCAA Championship. The Orange finished last season 25-11, with a 7-9 record in BIG EAST action. Senior guard Erica Morrow ranks third on SU's all-time 3-point field goals made (171) and is fourth in steals (2.2 spg).

With seven upperclassmen, including six seniors, and six newcomers, Marquette is looking to build on a 17-win season from last year. The Golden Eagles finished last season 17-16 overall, including a 6-10 record in league play. Junior forward Andi Oordt joins a number of freshmen who were rated among HoopGurlz top 50 rankings. Guard Angel Robinson leads the returners, one of three returning starters, after being named All-BIG EAST Second Team last year. She averaged 11.9 ppg and 4.7 rpg in 2009-10.

USF, picked to finish 11th, is coming off its seventh straight postseason appearance and will be trying for an unprecedented eighth postseason bid for the program, along with the goal of their second NCAA invite. USF went 15-16 last season, but has compiled 42 wins over the past two seasons. Jose Fernandez, who enters his 11th season with the Bulls, adds five transfers to the squad this year. All-BIG EAST Freshman Team members KaNeisha Saunders and Leondra Doomes-Stephens return to lead the squad. Saunders, a forward/guard, averaged 9.6 points and 3.4 assists per game, while Doomes-Stephens, a forward/guard, averaged 7.1 points and 4.3 rebounds per contest.

Picked to finish 12th, Providence is coming off its first winning season since 1991-92 and returns six letterwinners, including four players who have experience in the starting lineup. Senior forward/guard Mi-Khida Hankins is the team's leading returning scorer (11.0 ppg) and rebounder (5.3 rpg). She played in 29 games last season and is one of the most athletic players in the league. A strong group of newcomers will be asked to contribute right away, as two transfers (Miranda Tate and Teya Wright) become eligible and join junior college addition Rachel Barnes.

Following a record fifth-straight postseason appearance, Pittsburgh enters 2010-11 picked to finish 13th with a veteran core and hopes of advancing to the NCAA Championship for the fourth time in five years. Head coach Agnus Berenato has led the Panthers to five straight winning seasons to go along with five postseason berths. During that span, Pitt has averaged 22 wins per season. With a bevy of seniors, who could leave the program as the winningest class in school history, the Panthers are loaded with experience. Back-to-back NCAA Championship Sweet 16 appearances in 2008 and 2009 have given this team a winning foundation. The Panthers are led by All-BIG EAST Honorable Mention members forward Chelsea Cole and guard Jania Sims. Cole averaged a league-high 11.6 rebounds per game, while Sims averaged 12.9 ppg.

Villanova returns seven letterwinners, including a pair of starters, from a team that posted a 14-16 record in 2009-10. Head coach Harry Perretta, who enters his 33rd season on the Villanova sidelines, will be able to rely on forward Laura Sweeney, who averaged 10.0 ppg and 5.3 rpg last season en route to earning All-BIG EAST Freshman Team honors as well as the league's Sixth Man Award. Center Heather Scanlon returns after averaging 5.5 points per game and 4.5 rpg.

Cincinnati was picked to finish 15th by the coaches. Former Connecticut assistant Jamelle Elliott enters her second season with the Bearcats, the only current BIG EAST women's basketball head coach who also played in the league. She directed the Bearcats to a win in the BIG EAST Championship in her first season. The Bearcats will celebrate their 40th season of women's basketball in 2010-11. Last season, Cincinnati finished the season 12-18, with four conference wins. Senior point guard Shareese Ulis is the Bearcats' leading returning scorer, having averaged 11.4 ppg last season.

Following the departure of 25-year head coach Phyllis Mangina, Seton Hall named Anne Donovan head coach, just the third in program history. A native of Ridgewood, N.J., Donovan is an Olympic gold medalist and Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame member. Most recently she served as head coach of the WNBA's New York Liberty. Donovan takes over a team that finished 9-21 last season. Junior forward Kandice Green returns to lead the team after averaging 12.8 ppg, second on the team, and team-high 8.7 rebounds per game.

The 2011 BIG EAST Women's Basketball Championship returns to the XL Center in Hartford, Conn., for the eighth straight year. After a successful championship in 2010 that saw attendance increases and again was the national leader among other conferences, the five-day, 15-game event returns March 4-8, 2011. All 16 teams battle for the conference title and will earn the league's automatic bid to the 64-team NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Championship.

2010-11 Preseason BIG EAST Coaches' Poll

	Pts.
1. Connecticut (15)	225
2. West Virginia (1)	207
3. Georgetown	186
4. Notre Dame	177
5. St. John's	173
6. DePaul	164
7. Rutgers	131
8. Louisville	125
9. Syracuse	120
10. Marquette	90
11. USF	80
12. Providence	70
13. Pittsburgh	67
14. Villanova	46
15. Cincinnati	43
16. Seton Hall	16

first-place votes in parentheses

The BIG EAST is the largest and most diverse Division I conference in the country. It was formed in 1979 and represents the athletic interests of 16 member institutions including the University of Cincinnati, University of Connecticut, DePaul University, Georgetown University, University of Louisville, Marquette University, University of Notre Dame, University of Pittsburgh, Providence College, Rutgers University, St. John's University, Seton Hall University, University of South Florida, Syracuse University, Villanova University and West Virginia University. The BIG EAST Conference has captured 28 national championships in six different sports and is a founding member of the Bowl Championship Series. For more information on the Conference and its membership, please visit www.bigeast.org.

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