Pitman, NJ—After winning the 2005 NJAC regular season championship and advancing to the NCAA Division III Regional Championship game for the second consecutive season, Rutgers University-Camden has been selected as the 2006 preseason softball favorite in the New Jersey Athletic Conference. The Scarlet Raptors, who finished their 2005 campaign with an overall record of 35-8-1, are seeking their second league title since the inception of the NJAC softball championship back in 1983.

Rutgers-Camden was selected to finish first on six-of-the-ten ballots cast by the league’s head coaches. Under the direction of 11th-year head coach Carl Taylor, the Scarlet Raptors have posted an overall record of 172-110-2. Rutgers-Camden won the 2005 regular season race with a league-best 12-3-1 NJAC record, but fell to William Paterson in both the NJAC Tournament Championship game and the NCAA Regional title game. Camden returns two all-conference players including junior catcher Mo Baney, and the 2005 NJAC Pitcher of the Year in senior right-hander Michelle Schlichtig.

The defending NJAC Champions, William Paterson University was selected to finish second and received four first place votes. Under the direction of 12th-year head coach Hallie Cohen, the Pioneers have posted a record of 290-150-2, including a 2005 mark of 37-11-1. Overall, Cohen’s career head coaching record stands at 485-295-3. The Pioneers captured the NJAC crown as the second-seed in the conference tournament and proceeded to win the NCAA Regional and advance to the NCAA Division III National Championship Series. Paterson returns four all-conference players including sophomore pitcher Diana Schraer, senior catcher Mindy Coxe, junior shortstop Alicia Albert and junior second baseman April Sardinas-Wyssling.

Rowan University, which finished the 2005 season with a 25-14 overall record, placed third in the poll. Tenth-year head coach Kim Wilson has led the Profs to a 278-103 record during her tenure in Glassboro and has produced an overall career coaching mark of 342-160. Rowan returns a league-high five all-conference players including sophomore third baseman Kristin Wallace, senior pitcher Colleen Oswald, senior outfielder Kate Lavin, junior first baseman Jamie Assini, and the 2005 NJAC Rookie of the Year in sophomore second baseman Lauren Navarro.

Ramapo College, under the direction of eighth-year head coach Ben Allen, was selected to finish fourth. Under Allen, the Roadrunners have posted an overall record of 190-94, including a 28-14 mark in 2005. Ramapo returns four all-conference players including senior outfielder Andrea Pastiglione, junior first baseman Elizabeth Choma, senior catcher Lisa Rizzo, and the 2005 NJAC Player of the Year in senior outfielder Erica Moore.

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The College of New Jersey, which finished 24-14 in 2005, was selected to finish fifth. The Lions return three all-conference players including junior pitcher Jessica Kohut, sophomore outfielder Christina Lizzi, and senior catcher Kristin Meister. Under the guidance of 11th-year head coach Sally Miller, TCNJ has posted an overall record of 289-11-2.

Montclair State University, under the leadership of 16th-year head coach Anita Kubicka, was selected to place sixth. Kubicka has led the Red Hawks to a 473-180-2 overall record during her tenure, including a 28-9-1 mark in 2005. Montclair returns two all-conference players in senior pitcher Athanasia Totaro and sophomore third baseman Jackie Ferranti.

Kean University, which returns two all-conference players in senior utility player Michelle Baiera and sophomore shortstop Johanna Hedler, was selected to finish seventh. Under the direction of seventh-year head coach Margie Acker, the Cougars have posted an overall mark of 91-124-1, including an 18-21 record in 2005.

The coaches’ dark horse selection, Richard Stockton College was tapped to place eighth. The longest-tenured of all the NJAC softball coaches in her 20th season, Val Julien has produced an overall record of 291-351-2, including a 25-15 overall record in 2005. Stockton returns a pair of all-conference players in senior catcher Amy Carragino and senior first baseman Tara Barker.

New Jersey City University, which returns to the NJAC in 2005, was selected to place ninth. The Gothic Knights are led by third-year head coach Bridgette Quimpo, who has guided NJCU to a 27-45 mark during her tenure, including a 16-21 record in 2005.

Rutgers University-Newark, which is led by new first-year head coach Lauren Peloquin, was tapped to place 10th. The Scarlet Raiders, who finished the 2005 campaign with a 13-23 overall record, return one all-conference player in senior second baseman Meghan Shapiro.

The 2006 NJAC Tournament will feature an expanded field and a new format. The top six regular season finishers will advance to the double-elimination tournament which will begin at campus sites on Tuesday, May 3. All six of the participating teams will then travel to the site of the top-seed where the remainder of the tournament will be conducted from Friday, May 6 through Sunday, May 8. The winner of the NJAC Tournament receives the conference’s automatic qualification to the NCAA Division III National Championship Tournament.