

MINNESOTA NEARLY UNANIMOUS

Gophers easily top 94X WCHA Preseason Media Poll; Bjugstad runaway choice for Player of the Year

A year after surprising many by winning the WCHA's MacNaughton Cup Championship, the Minnesota Golden Gophers are a nearly-unanimous pick of WCHA media to win the league. The annual 94X WCHA Preseason Media Poll, released Wednesday, shows the Gophers easily outdistancing the rest of the league.

A panel of 25 members of the WCHA media voted on a predicted order of finish, along with a handful of individual honors.

Minnesota received a whopping 24 of 25 first-place votes. Defending WCHA playoff champion North Dakota had the other first-place vote and finished a distant second. Denver came in third, followed by Wisconsin and Minnesota Duluth. St. Cloud State claimed the final "home-ice" position in the preseason balloting.

Minnesota junior forward Nick Bjugstad was a runaway choice for the Preseason Player of the Year. He also anchors the media's second annual Preseason All-WCHA Team, where he is joined at forward by Wisconsin junior Mark Zengerle and St. Cloud State senior Ben Hanowski. The defensemen on the team are Denver's Joey LaLeggia and Nick Jensen of St. Cloud State. Sam Brittain of Denver and Josh Thorimbert of Colorado College tied for the goaltending nod.

For the second straight year, the media chose North Dakota's Rocco Grimaldi as Preseason Rookie of the Year. Grimaldi took a redshirt after an injury-ravaged season, and he is again eligible for rookie honors.

Teams were scored under a standard system of 12 points for a first-place vote, 11 for second, and so on. The number listed with each team is the number of points that team averaged per vote.

94X WCHA PRESEASON MEDIA POLL

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

1. Minnesota (24 first place votes) ... 11.92 poll average
2. North Dakota (1) ... 10.76
3. Denver ... 9.92
4. Wisconsin ... 7.8
5. Minnesota Duluth ... 6.88
6. St. Cloud State ... 6.84
7. Colorado College ... 6.08
8. Nebraska Omaha ... 5.48
9. Michigan Tech ... 5.2
10. Minnesota State ... 3.6
11. Bemidji State ... 2.48
12. Alaska Anchorage ... 1.04

PRESEASON PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Nick Bjugstad, forward, Minnesota (16 votes)

Others receiving more than one vote: Erik Haula, forward, Minnesota (4); Mark Zengerle, forward, Wisconsin (3)

PRESEASON ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

Rocco Grimaldi, forward, North Dakota (8 1/2 votes)

Others receiving more than one vote: Nic Kerdiles, forward, Wisconsin (5); Jordan Schmaltz, defenseman, North Dakota (2 1/2); Brady Skjei, defenseman, Minnesota (2); Andy Welinski, defenseman, Minnesota Duluth (2)

PRESEASON ALL-WCHA TEAM

Forwards

Nick Bjugstad, Minnesota (20 votes); Mark Zengerle, Wisconsin (17); Ben Hanowski, St. Cloud State (8)

Others receiving more than one vote: Danny Kristo, North Dakota (7); Erik Haula, Minnesota (6); Rylan Schwartz, Colorado College (5); Corban Knight, North Dakota (3)

Defensemen

Joey LaLeggia, Denver (20 votes); Nick Jensen, St. Cloud State (9)

Others receiving more than one vote: Nate Schmidt, Minnesota (7); Wade Bergman, Minnesota Duluth (3)

Goalie

Sam Brittain, Denver and Josh Thorimbert, Colorado College (7 1/2 votes each)

Others receiving more than one vote: Juho Olkinuora, Denver (3), Joel Rumpel, Wisconsin (2)

The following media members took part in the 94X Preseason Media Poll.

David Ahlers, KKAR Radio/University of Nebraska-Omaha; Stephen Anderson, Daily Mining Gazette; Andy Baggot, Wisconsin State Journal; Tyler Buckentine, USCHO.com; Mike Chambers, Denver Post; Bruce Ciskie, KZIO Radio/Bulldog Radio Network; Chris Dilks, Western College Hockey; Shane Frederick, Mankato Free Press; John Gilbert, WCHA.com; Kurt Haider, KENI Radio; Mick Hatten, St. Cloud Times; Dirk Hembroff, WKMJ Radio; Jack Hittinger, Bemidji Pioneer; Ken Landau, 103.9 FM The Eagle Radio; Don Lyons, Leighton Broadcasting/St. Cloud; Todd Milewski, USCHO.com; Dan Myers, Minnesota Hockey Magazine; Jess Myers, 1500ESPN.com; Joe Paisley, Colorado Springs/Colorado College; Kevin Pates, Duluth News Tribune; Chris Peters, United States of Hockey; Brian Posick, WIBA Radio/Badger Radio Network; Chad Purcell, Omaha World Herald; Brad Schlossman, Grand Forks Herald; Jay Stickney, 102.3 ESPN Radio.

94X is the broadcast home of UMD Bulldog men's hockey. The full 37-game schedule, plus playoffs, can be heard on KZIO-FM, which is 94.1 in the Twin Ports, and 104.3 FM in the surrounding area. All games will also be broadcast on KBAJ 105.5 in the Grand Rapids area, and KAOD 106.7 FM in Babbitt, and on the internet at www.94xrocks.com.