

Minnesota State nearly unanimous; but league has parity

Leitner, Stepan named player, rookie of the year

BEMIDJI, Minn. -- With six new teams in the Western Collegiate Hockey Association this season, many predicted more parity in the new-look league.

According to members of the WCHA media, that prediction should hold true -- although most think Minnesota State will finish on top a year after a fantastic season and an NCAA tournament appearance.

The Bemidji Pioneer WCHA Preseason Media Poll shows the Mavericks as a near-unanimous choice to win the league, garnering 22-first place votes. A panel of 25 members of the WCHA media voted on a predicted order of finish, as well as individual awards.

Despite nearly everyone in the media selecting MSU to take first in the league, the disparity between the Mavericks (who earned 244 total points) and the second place team was just 26 points.

Ferris State earned two first place votes and 218 points for a solid second place finish.

Alaska was picked to finish third with 68 points.

The teams in the middle of the pack were separated by 12 points. Bowling Green (149 points) was picked to finish fourth, followed by Michigan Tech (144) and Northern Michigan (137).

Lake Superior State (117) was chosen to finish seventh, Bemidji State eighth (108) and Alaska Anchorage ninth (54). Alabama-Huntsville, who was an independent last season, was picked to finish 10th out of 10 teams with 36 points.

The media also selected the league's Preseason Player and Rookie of the Year, as well as an All-WCHA team.

Minnesota State swept the Player and Rookie of the Year awards. MSU forward Matt Leitner was the league media's near-unanimous pick for preseason Player of the Year; while Mavericks' forward Zach Stepan was the media's pick for preseason Rookie of the Year.

Leitner was also named to the All-WCHA team as a forward along with Bowling Green's Ryan Carpenter and Michigan Tech's Alex Petan.

Defensemen named to the All-WCHA team were Minnesota State's Zach Palmquist and Ferris State's Jason Binkley.

MSU's Stephon Williams was voted the goaltender on the All-WCHA team.

Results

Team (First-Place votes)	Total Points
1. Minnesota State (22)	244
2. Ferris State (2)	218
3. Alaska	168
4. Bowling Green	149
5. Michigan Tech	144
6. Northern Michigan	137
7. Lake Superior State	117
8. Bemidji State (1)	108
9. Alaska Anchorage	54
10. Alabama Huntsville	36

Preseason Player Of The Year

Matt Leitner, F, Minnesota State

Others receiving votes: Garrett Thompson, F, Ferris State; Stephon Williams, G, Minnesota State

Preseason Rookie Of The Year

Zach Stepan, F, Minnesota State

Others receiving votes: Tomas Sholl, G, Bowling Green; Brendan Harms, F, Bemidji State; Mathias Dahlstrom, G, Northern Michigan; Cliff Watson, D, Michigan Tech

Preseason All-WCHA Team

Forwards

Matt Leitner, Minnesota State; Alex Petan, Michigan Tech; Ryan Carpenter, Bowling Green

Others receiving votes: Cody Kunyk, Alaska; Reed Seckel, Northern Michigan; Stephan Vigier, Northern Michigan

Defensemen

Jason Binkley, Ferris State; Zach Palmquist, D, Minnesota State

Others receiving votes: Matt Prapavessis, Bemidji State; Ralfs Freibergs, Bowling Green; Colton Parayko, Alaska; CJ Ludwig, Northern Michigan

Goaltender

Stephon Williams, Minnesota State

Others receiving votes: CJ Motte, Ferris State; Andrew Walsh, Bemidji State.

The following media members took part in the Bemidji Pioneer WCHA Preseason Media Poll:

Justin Bradford, ESPN Radio Nashville; Bruce Cech, KCBF 820/UAF play-by-play; Dave Danis, Northern Michigan play-by-play; Erik Drygas, KCBF 820 AM/UAF color analyst; Drew Evans, BGSUHockey.com; Casey Ford, ESPN Radio UP; Shane Frederick, Mankato Free Press; Kevin Gordon, Bowling Green Sentinel-Tribune; Kurt Haider, KENI News/KTZN Sports/UAA hockey

play-by-play; Dirk Hembroff, 93.5 FM/MTU play-by-play; Dominic Hennig, 97.3 FM/FSU Play-by-Play; Jack Hittinger, Bemidji Pioneer; Dan Kowalski, 97.3 FM/FSU Color Commentator; Budd McLaughlin, AL.com hockey writer; Geof Morris, UAHHockey.com; Kevin Meyers, Bowling Green Radio Sports Organization; Tim O'Donnell, Fairbanks Daily News-Miner; Rob Roos, Sault Evening News; Martin Slagter, Big Rapids Pioneer; Jerry Taylor, ABC10 UP; John Wagner, Toledo Blade; Matt Wellens, Marquette Daily Mining Journal; Kevin Wells, KTUU-Channel 2; Scott Williams, Lakeland Public Television/KBUN Sportsradio, Brandon Veale/Michael Bleach, Daily Mining Gazette