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 For Immediate Release

Grand Valley State Picked to Win 2004 GLIAC Baseball Title

Lakers Seek Second Straight League Title and Return Trip to Division II World Series

BAY CITY, Mich. -- The head baseball coaches of the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (GLIAC) chose Grand Valley State University to win the league's 2004 championship.

Grand Valley State, defending GLIAC co-champion, received six of eight possible first-place votes and tallied 60 points. Ashland University, who finished second in the Conference during the regular season, earned two first-place votes and 52 total points.

Saginaw Valley State University placed third in the poll with 50 points and one first-place vote. The Cardinals finished third in the GLIAC's regular season and earned conference co-champion honors in 2003.

Wayne State University edged out Mercyhurst College for fourth place in the poll by three points. The Warriors earned 41 points while the Lakers tallied 38.

The University of Findlay, Gannon University, and Hillsdale College placed sixth, seventh, and eighth, respectively, though the teams were separated by a total of two points. The Oilers garnered 26 points, followed by the Golden Knights with 25 points, and the Chargers with 24 points. Northwood University rounds out the poll with eight points.

Each of the GLIAC's nine coaches ranked the teams in the GLIAC, but were not allowed to rank their own team. The first-place team on each ballot received eight points, while the second-place team received seven points, etc.

In 2003, the GLIAC held a postseason tournament for the first time since 1994. The top four teams, according to conference record, earned berths to the league tournament. Grand Valley State hosted the tournament as the top seed, with Ashland (2), Saginaw Valley State (3), and Hillsdale. Grand Valley State and Saginaw Valley State advanced to the Championship game before it was cancelled due to inclement weather. This season's tournament is scheduled for May 6 - 8.

GLIAC baseball teams open the 2004 conference season on Saturday, Mar. 20.

2004 GLIAC Preseason Baseball Coaches Poll		
Rank	School (first-place votes)	Points
1.	Grand Valley State (6)	60
2.	Ashland (2)	52
3.	Saginaw Valley State (1)	50
4.	Wayne State	41
5.	Mercyhurst	38
6.	Findlay	26
7.	Gannon	25
8.	Hillsdale	24
9.	Northwood	8

2003 GLIAC Baseball Final Standings		
Place	School	Record (GLIAC)
1.	Grand Valley St. ..	41-14-1 (20-6-1)*
2.	Ashland	37-20-1 (22-7-1)
3.	Saginaw Valley St. ...	30-17 (17-11)*
4.	Hillsdale	24-20 (16-12)
5.	Wayne State	22-26 (10-16)
6.	Gannon	20-28 (11-19)
	Findlay	15-33 (11-19)
8.	Mercyhurst	21-32 (10-18)
9.	Northwood	19-27 (9-18)

* - GVSU and SVSU were named GLIAC Tournament co-Champions after the championship game was cancelled due to inclement weather.

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The following are season previews on each of the GLIAC's Nine Baseball Teams:

Ashland University: The Eagles bring back six starters from last year's 37-20-1 team that claimed a fifth straight trip to the NCAA playoffs. Leading that veteran contingent is senior catcher Josh Gaub, the 2003 GLIAC player of the year. Gaub hit .402 with two homers and 38 RBI. Two other heavy hitters are senior centerfielder Brandon Cornell and senior shortstop-third baseman Eric McDaniel. Cornell hit .377 with eight homers and 45 RBI and McDaniel checked in at .338 with seven roundtrippers and 45 RBI. Gaub, Cornell and McDaniel were first team All-GLIAC and first team All-North Central Region selections.

The Eagles must replace the top four starters from last year's pitching staff. One key returnee is junior lefty Ryan Douglas. He led the GLIAC in appearances (22) was third in saves (3), seventh in strikeouts (58) and eighth in opponents' batting average (.251).

This will be the youngest team head coach John Schaly, now in his seventh season at Ashland, has had. Schaly has won 40 or more games three times in his Ashland tenure and twice has guided the Eagles to the NCAA Championships in Montgomery, AL.

University of Findlay: The Oilers return 17 letterwinners from the 2003 team in their quest for the GLIAC title. Under first-year head coach Troy Berry, who takes over the reigns for Jim Givens, Findlay has also added 18 newcomers to the roster including 14 freshman and four transfers.

Junior Rob Talpas (Westerville, Ohio) is back after missing the 2003 season due to shoulder surgery and looks ready to resume his everyday duties behind the plate. The two-time All-GLIAC honorable mention batted .400 during the 2002 season. Sophomore second baseman Kenny Beamer (Green, Ohio) and junior third baseman Travis Smith (Bryan, Ohio) will return to anchor an infield that fielded at a .954 clip last year.

Senior T.J. Muehlfeld (Edon, Ohio), junior Scott Kromer (Bloomdale, Ohio) and sophomore Christopher Antonides (Troy, Ohio) return to the Findlay starting rotation. Beamer and freshman Jaden Caskie (Bluffton, Ohio) are also likely to start games on the hill.

Grand Valley State University: The GVSU baseball team will look to build on its success from the 2003 campaign when the Lakers won the GLIAC regular season title and advanced to the NCAA DII World Series after winning the NCAA DII North Central Regional crown. GVSU finished with a school-best 41-14-1 record overall and a 20-6-1 GLIAC mark.

Grand Valley State lost eight letterwinners, but return 10 including a pair of pitchers that combined for an 18-4 record. Matt Rafeld (8-1, 2.76, 54 SO) and Phil Mixter (10-4, 3.48, 105 SO) earned All-GLIAC honors a year ago and return for their senior seasons. All-GLIAC closer Joe Finnerty (3-1, 8 saves) also returns. GVSU must replace a pair of infielders in Joe Brunink and Tony Pfennig. Brunink became an unexpected departure when the Philadelphia Phillies drafted him in the 15th round of the MLB draft. Versatile All-GLIAC performer Scott Allen (.337, 58 H, 42 R, 6 HR) will play a variety of positions on the infield. Joe Mertes (.321, 51 H, 29 R, 11 HR) returns to the Laker outfield after earning World Series All-Tournament plaudits.

Gannon University: Gannon returns 22 letterwinners from last year's 20-28 squad and hopes to make a run at the GLIAC Tournament in 2004. Third-year head coach Rick Iacobucci will have plenty of experience back as only one starter from last year's team will be missing from the 2004 opening day lineup. Iacobucci has posted a 38-59 record over the last two years after the Golden Knights averaged 36 losses during the previous five seasons.

Nick Leslie (Erie, Pa./McDowell) will be a welcomed sight to Gannon fans after missing the majority of the 2003 campaign. The senior catcher hit .350 with five home runs and 12 RBI in only 12 games. He hit .417 with six home runs and 41 RBI in 2002. Sophomore Ricky Hulsinger (Erie, Pa./Villa Maria) is Gannon's top returning pitcher with a 4.03 earned run average. Junior Josh Leslie (Erie, Pa./McDowell) led the squad in victories with four.

Hillsdale College: Head coach Paul Noce (11th season) and the Hillsdale College baseball team enter the 2004 season on a good note after enjoying a very successful campaign in 2003, which saw the Chargers advance to the GLIAC Tournament after posting a 24-20 overall record with a 16-12 mark in the conference.

On the pitching mound, Hillsdale will be led by last season's GLIAC Freshman of the Year, Corey Krug. As a freshman, Krug posted a 7-1 overall record with a 4.61 ERA and 33 strikeouts in nine appearances. Offensively, the Chargers lose their three top hitters from last season, however, HC still has the services of junior Charlie Krebs, who played primarily at first base in 2003. Krebs hit .342 with three homeruns and a team-leading 34 RBI last season.

Mercyhurst College: Head coach Joe Spano (109-101-2) begins his fifth season at Mercyhurst. The Lakers finished the 2003 season 21-32-0 overall and 10-18-0 in the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (8th).

Mercyhurst returns six starters from last year's squad, including senior OF Dan Coffee, who played in all 53 games a year ago and led the team with a .420 average, and sophomore OF Matt Echan, who stole 22 bases last season and hit .342. Coffee was named to the First Team All-GLIAC and First Team All-Region while Echan was GLIAC Honorable Mention. The pitching staff will be bolstered by the return of junior southpaw J.D. Roewer, who missed all of last year due to injury. Roewer appeared in 12 games in 2002 and struck out 57 in 67.1 innings.

Northwood University: For the Northwood baseball team, a mixture of youth and experience hopes to carry the Timberwolves to an improvement over their 19-27 overall record. Northwood features eight solid seniors on their roster, but they also have 19 underclassmen. Leading the way offensively will be senior David Lamky. He was a first-team All-GLIAC selection a year ago, when he hit .357 with 31 RBI's. Senior Catcher Justin Davis, an honorable-mention All-GLIAC performer a year ago, returns after batting 292 with a team-high four home runs a year ago. Junior Matt Fahr is Northwood's top returning starter. He went 5-4 with a 4.29 ERA last season in nine starts. Sophomore reliever Brett Gehringer will look to pick up off of his outstanding freshman campaign, when he was an honorable-mention All-GLIAC honoree. Gehringer sported a 1.93 ERA in 12 appearances last season. Head Coach Joe DiBenedetto is in his fifth season at Northwood.

Saginaw Valley State University: The Cardinals completed 2003 with a 30-17 record and finished with a 17-11 GLIAC mark under head coach Walt Head, who this season is entering his 22nd season at the helm. The Cardinals return seven starters in the lineup including senior infielder Adam Piggott (Sarnia, Ont.) who batted 320 last season and is the leading returner in the top third of the lineup. Senior Ryan Reid (Sarnia, Ont.) is the leading pitcher returning and posted an 8-3 record with a 4.48 ERA in 2003.

Wayne State University: The Warriors wrapped up the 2003 season with a 22-26 overall record (10-16 GLIAC) and a fifth-place league finish, but now second-year head coach Jay Alexander feels Wayne State will use its best leadership in years to extend its year into post-season play. WSU returns five of its top six hitters including All-North Central Region second baseman Frank Jeney and First Team All-GLIAC infielder Bobby Marten. Jeney had a team-high .363 batting average with 53 hits and five homers while Marten led the Warriors with 11 doubles with a .354 average.

The WSU pitching staff will be a mix of young and old. Senior Miguel Lokuta made seven starts and 13 appearances in which he picked up two wins and a pair of saves for the Warriors and GLIAC Honorable Mention hurler Gary Zielke is back on the mound after his 4-0 mark a year ago.