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WOMEN'S LEAGUE

PRESS RELEASE



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REIGNING CHAMP UNH FAVORED IN COACHES' POLL ***Boston schools fill out Top Three; Providence College close behind***

The University of New Hampshire juggernaut that rumbled to the NCAA championship semifinals last spring is expected to keep rolling during the 2006-07 season, according to the Women's Hockey East pre-season poll. The Wildcats collected all seven available first-place ballots from league coaches (coaches couldn't vote for their own team), and for good reason. The 'Cats bring back reigning Player of the Year Sadie Wright-Ward, Rookie of the Year Samantha Faber, and Coach of the Year Brian McCloskey. Coupled with top-flight netminder Melissa Bourdon and a stingy defense, UNH is primed for another title run.

Still, don't expect Boston College, Boston University, or Providence College to simply hand New Hampshire the championship trophy. BC Coach Tom Mutch's much-improved Eagles squad knock off perennial powerhouse Providence in last year's Hockey East tournament, the same BC squad that tamed the Wildcats 3-2 in the regular season for UNH's only league loss.

In what has to be considered a mild surprise, the Terriers of BU snuck by the Providence Friars, despite failing to make the tournament semifinals a year ago. Obviously, Hockey East coaches expect great things from Coach Brian Durocher's young squad, which features 24 sophomores and freshmen, including All-Rookie Team goalie Allyse Wilcox. That can't sit well with Coach Bob Deraney's Friars, who saw their three-year title run snapped by the Eagles. But with only three departures from last year's 17-14-4 squad, it won't surprised anyone if the Friars bounce back to be in the thick of the title chase.

Connecticut Coach Heather Linstad also lost three players, but one was first-team Hockey East All-Star Kaitlyn Shain, a senior goalie who almost single-handedly stole an exhibition game from the USA Olympic team last year. Linstad will rely on junior Josette Severyn and sophomore Brittany Wilson between the pipes, and a veteran squad in front of them. Likewise, Northeastern will have a huge spot to fill with the loss of goaltender Marisa Hourihan. Coach Laura Schuler, however, has plenty of experience on offense, with seven senior forwards, and a defense anchored by senior Theresa Ella.

Maine enters the season with a new coach – Lauren Steblen – and a new attitude. Only three players have graduated from last year's 17-9-6 squad, giving Steblen depth and veteran leadership at each position. Vermont's Katie Nichols was among the league leaders in save percentage last year, and first-year Coach Tim Bothwell will have to rely heavily on his senior goalie if the Catamounts are to improve on their 3-29-2 record.

Women's Hockey East Coaches Poll, 2006-07

1) New Hampshire (7)	56 points
2) Boston College (1)	50
3) Boston University	41
4) Providence College	38
5) Connecticut	33
6) Northeastern	25
7) Maine	22
8) Vermont	15

(*) – Indicates first-place votes.

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