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PRESS RELEASE

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NEW HAMPSHIRE FAVORED IN 09-10 WHEA PRESEASON COACHES POLL **~WHEA season officially opens Friday, Sept. 25 at Maine~**

WAKEFIELD, Mass. -- Hockey East Commissioner Joe Bertagna announced the preseason women's coaches poll on Tuesday afternoon via the coaches media teleconference.

The eighth season of WHEA regular-season play will open when Maine hosts Sacred Heart at Alford Arena for a two-game series beginning on Friday, September 25. Conference play will commence a week later on Friday, October 2, as Maine travels to Providence for a 7 p.m. game at Schneider Arena.

It marks the sixth straight season that the New Hampshire Wildcats are favored heading into the season. The 'Cats are coming off their fourth straight WHEA regular-season and tournament championship. UNH garnered 50 points and three first-place votes. The Wildcats return 11 players from last season's team, including senior captain Kelly Paton, who posted a career-high 47 points in her junior season in Durham. UNH will need to replace the loss of Jenn Wakefield, UNH's leading scorer with 49 points as sophomore last year, as she competes with Team Canada for the Winter Olympics.

Boston College (47 pts., 3 FPV) and Boston University (46) were right behind UNH in the second and third spots, respectively, with Providence College (43) garnering two first-place tallies. The Eagles and Terriers finished second and third in the 08-09 standings and should challenge UNH for the regular-season title along with Providence College. BC will have to endure the losses of Molly Schaus and Kelli Stack to the U.S. National Team. Senior Allie Thunstrom and sophomore Mary Restuccia will be asked to carry more of the Eagles offense load, as they combined for 71 points in 08-09. Providence returns three of its top four scorers from last season, along with Hockey East Rookie of the Year Genevieve Lacasse manning the net for the Friars.

Connecticut (31) was voted fifth, while Northeastern came in at the sixth spot with 27 total points. UConn will return 16 letterwinners from a season ago and the Huskies will look to build off of their sixth place finish last year. NU will be led by interim co-head coaches Linda Lundrigan and Lauren McAuliffe, while Huskies head coach Dave Flint serves as an assistant coach with the U.S. National Team.

Vermont (22) and Maine (14) rounded out the pre-season coaches poll. The Catamounts return 87% of their scoring from a season ago, while the Black Bears will return nine of their top 10 scorers from last year's roster.

The regular season will determine the six teams that qualify for the Hockey East Championship Tournament. The third and fourth seeds in the tournament will host a quarterfinal round game on Saturday, Feb. 27 or Sunday, Feb. 28 on their respective campuses. The advancing teams will then be reseeded with the top two seeds to play on the site of the highest seed in the semifinal round on Saturday, March 6. The winners will qualify for the eighth annual Hockey East Championship Game on Sunday, March 7. The championship game will be televised by the New England Sports Network (NESN) and the winner will receive an automatic berth into the 2010 NCAA Tournament.

The Women's Hockey East Association is an eight-team, Division-I college hockey conference which began play in 2002-2003, with offices based in Wakefield, Mass. The league also sponsors an 10 team men's league which began play in 1984-1985.

2009-2010 WHEA PRESEASON POLL

Rk.	Team (FPV)	Pts.
1.	New Hampshire (3)	50
2.	Boston College (3)	47
3.	Boston University	46
4.	Providence (2)	43
5.	Connecticut	31
6.	Northeastern	27
7.	Vermont	22
8.	Maine	14

~WHEA~