



Aug. 9, 2018
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Third Time's The Charm: Clan Favorites To Defend GNAC Title

PORTLAND, Ore. – Fresh off a second consecutive conference title and its sixth championship in the past eight years, Simon Fraser enters the 2018 campaign as unanimous favorites to defend its title in the 2018 Great Northwest Athletic Conference Preseason Men's Soccer Coaches Poll.

The Clan received all seven first-place votes as they return seven starters from last year's club. Seattle Pacific, coming off a second-place finish in 2017, was picked second with 35 points. Montana State Billings was selected third (32 pts.), followed by Western Washington (30 pts.), Northwest Nazarene (25 pts.), Concordia (14 pts.) and Saint Martin's (11 pts.).

2018 GNAC Preseason Men's Soccer Coaches Poll

Team (1st Place Votes)	2017 Record (Finish)	Pts.
1. Simon Fraser (7)	11-3-4 (7-2-3, 1st)	49
2. Seattle Pacific	11-5-1 (7-4-1, 2nd)	35
3. MSU Billings	9-10-0 (6-6-0, Tie 3rd)	32
4. Western Washington	6-6-5 (5-4-3, Tie 3rd)	30
5. Northwest Nazarene	8-6-3 (5-4-3, Tie 3rd)	25
6. Concordia	5-10-2 (4-7-1, 6th)	14
7. Saint Martin's	2-14-1 (2-9-1, 7th)	11

Votes awarded on 7-6-5-4-3-2-1 basis.

Simon Fraser led all teams in goals, shots and fewest goals allowed last season. Finishing with a mark of 11-3-4 (7-2-3 GNAC), the team outshot opponents by a 278-115 margin and scored 2.11 goals per game. It only lost two regular season matches, both in GNAC action (at Concordia and at Montana State Billings). The conference title was the program's sixth since joining the GNAC in 2010.

The Clan return a host of standouts, including brothers **Marcello Polisi** and **Matteo Polisi**. Marcello was named the GNAC Player of the Year as a freshman a year ago, starting all 18 matches and logging nearly 1,500 minutes for head coach **Clint Schneider**. Matteo, meanwhile, earned all-conference and GNAC Freshman of the Year honors after tallying 10 goals and four assists in his first season in Burnaby.

Now in his senior season, midfielder **Mamadi Camara** is back after being named First Team All-GNAC and United Soccer Coaches All-West Region. Camara helped his side dominate the middle of the pitch while also scoring six goals in 2017. Defender **Michael North**, midfielder **Kyle Jones** and forward **Connor Glennon** are all back this year after receiving all-conference honors. They will join defender **Jeff Cadman** who started 17 games as a sophomore last season.

Taking the majority of second-place votes is Seattle Pacific. The Falcons finished 2017 with an 11-5-1 record and at one point put together a five-match unbeaten streak.

Five starters are back from the team that dropped just five matches, including sophomore midfielder **Jose Benavides**. Benavides was an All-GNAC Honorable Mention recipient as a freshman and will look to lead Seattle Pacific to its sixth NCAA Division II Tournament berth since 2011. Bolstering the Falcons defense will be keeper **Kary Whitney**, returning for his senior season after starting 16 matches in goal a year ago.

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Head coach **Mark Collings'** side led the GNAC in goals per game and assists last year and it will look for more of the same this season.

After finishing in a tie for third in 2017, Montana State Billings was voted to the same spot this season.

The team's 36 goals were bested only by Simon Fraser as its strong offensive attack has become a staple under the guidance of head coach **Alex Balog.**

This season should offer more of the same as **Guillaume Kremer** returns for his senior season. Keller scored nine goals last year and earned All-GNAC First Team and D2CCA All-West Region Second Team honors. He will be joined by fellow senior **Ricardo Palomino** (All-GNAC Honorable Mention in 2016 with six goals), who will be attacking from the forward position once again after missing nearly all of last year with an injury.

Following closely behind is Western Washington, snagging fourth place in this year's preseason poll. The Vikings finished in a tie for third in 2017.

Six starters are back from that club, headlined by midfielder **Georg Cholewa.** A freshman last season, Cholewa was named All-GNAC Honorable Mention after pacing the Vikings with consistency from the center of the pitch. Senior midfielder **Drew Barker** is also back after redshirting last season.

A stout defensive effort carried Western Washington at times a year ago and similar results will be expected from senior defenders **Garrett Strawn** and **Stephen Jinneman.** Their team finished second in the GNAC a year ago with just 1.41 goals allowed per game.

Coming in fifth place is Northwest Nazarene, which will be looking to capitalize on last season's third-place finish. The Nighthawks return seven starters and 17 letterwinners from that club.

No returning keeper had as many shutouts as **Jacob Hillyer** did as a freshman in 2017. Rreplicating that kind of success by the Nighthawks defense will be huge if they figure to finish in the upper half of the conference once again. Also back is forward **Jake Levine** (five goals and three assists in 2017) and midfielder **Aleksa Mitrovic,** both of which are coming off campaigns that earned them All-GNAC honors.

After a campaign that saw Concordia finish 5-10-2, the Cavaliers return a conference-leading nine starters in an effort to improve on last year's sixth place finish. The most notable returners are forward **Nick Evans** and defender **Lewis Coates** as both were named to the All-GNAC Second Team at the conclusion of last season.

Concordia also brings back head coach **Dan Birkey** for a 31st season of coaching in 2018. Birkey has posted a career record of 379-197-33.

Saint Martin's rounds out the voting after going 2-14-1 last season. The 2018 squad will be headlined by last season's GNAC Newcomer of the Year as forward **Brandon Madsen** is back and will look to parlay some of the brilliance from a 16-goal campaign into some good fortune this year. Madsen's 0.94 goals per game ranked sixth nationally in Division II.

Fellow junior **Sebastian Navarro** returns as well, bolstering a strong back line for the Saints. Navarro finished 2017 ranked third nationally in assists per game at 0.69.

All seven GNAC teams will begin regular season action on August 30-31 against non-conference opponents. Conference play is slated to start on September 20.

Team Capsules On Following Pages



2018 GNAC Men's Soccer Teams At A Glance

CONCORDIA

Head Coach: Dan Birkey (Warner Pacific, 1979, 379-197-33, 31st Season)

Assistant Coaches: Andrew Duvall, Jeremiah Doyle

2017 Overall Record: 5-10-2

Conference: 4-7-1 (6th)

Letterwinners Returning: 19

Starters Returning/Lost: 9/2

Returning Starters: Nick Evans (F, Jr., All-GNAC Second Team, 4 Goals, 5 Assists), Lewis Coates (D, So., All-GNAC Second Team), Michael Hatch (M, Sr., 2 Goals, 2 Assists), Kieran McMinn (F, Jr., 4 Goals, 4 Assists), Noah Swigart (F/M, Jr., 3 Goals), Christian Thyron (F, Jr., 3 Goals, 2 Assists), Santeri Ihamoutila (D, So., 1 Goal), Paul Seydel (F, So.), Foster Gbogbo (M, So.).

Other Key Returners: Reggie Reyes (D, So., 2 Goals, 2 Assists), Alec Dunkeld (F, So., 3 Goals, 1 Assist).

Key Losses: Brady Sanders (M), Benoit Bouillant (GK).

Key Freshmen: Liam Kiger (M/F, 5-11, Portland, Ore. -- Westview), Dane Kiger (M, 5-10, Portland, Ore. -- Westview), Takumi Jankovsky (M, 6-0, Portland, Ore. -- Westview), Loic Baures (F, 5-11, Portland, Ore. -- Cleveland), Nicholas Denley (D, 5-7, McMinnville, Ore. -- McMinnville), Erik Johnson (GK, 5-11, Eugene, Ore. -- South Eugene), Kenneth Symmes (GK, 5-11, Sammamish, Wash. -- Skyline).

Key Transfers: Axel Lonnfors (D, Jr., 6-1, Helsinki, Finland – Univ. of Texas-Rio Grande Valley), Brandon McCurtain (D, Jr., 5-10, Portland, Ore. – Campbell Univ.), Garrick Gargurevich (M, Jr., 5-9, Tigard, Ore. – Portland CC).

MONTANA STATE BILLINGS

Head Coach: Alex Balog (Christian Brothers, 2007, 35-41-15, 6th Season)

Associate Head Coach: Thomas Chameraud

Assistant Coaches: Fernando Perez, Tom Lohmann

2017 Overall Record: 9-10-0

Conference: 6-6-0 (3rd)

Letterwinners Returning: 10

Starters Returning/Lost: 5/8

Returning Starters: Guillaume Kremer (M, Sr., All-GNAC First Team, D2CCA All-West Region 2nd Team, 9 Goals, 5 Assists), Ricardo Palomino (F, Sr., All-GNAC Honorable Mention in 2016), Lucas Battistotti (D, So., All-GNAC Honorable Mention, 1 Goal, 3 Assists), Dana Kowacheck, F, Sr., 1 Goal, 1 Assist), Adam Hepburn (M, Sr.).

Other Key Returners: Ignacio Crespo (M, Jr., 1 Goal, 1 Assist), Shantik Bedrosian (F, So., 1 Goal, 1 Assist), Guillaume Mameau (M, So., 1 Goal, 1 Assist), Sam Phillips (M, Jr., 2 Assists).

Key Losses: JD Hauenstein (F), Niklas Schregel (M).

Key Freshmen: Pascal Pisarek (D, 5-10, Herne, Germany – Gymnasium Wanne), Austin Shafer (F, 6-0, Jamestown, N.D. -- Jamestown), Aleksandar Garza (GK, 5-11, Pacifica, Calif. – Junipero Serra).

Key Transfers: Ludvig Rhodin (GK, Sr., 5-10, Haganas, Sweden – Univ. of Mary), Hussain Al Haifi (D, So., 5-7, Doha, Qatar – Qatar Univ.).

NORTHWEST NAZARENE

Head Coach: Joel DeLass (Wheaton (Ill.), 2008, 17-11-7, 3rd Season)

Assistant Coaches: Shane Watts, Dane Manley

2017 Overall Record: 8-6-3

Conference: 5-4-3 (Tie 3rd)

Letterwinners Returning: 17

Starters Returning/Lost: 7/4

Returning Starters: Jose Labanino-Ramos (D, Sr., 17 Starts), Jake Levine (F, So., All-GNAC Second Team, 5 Goals, 3 Assists), Rafael Junqueira (F, Jr., 4 Goals, 1 Assist), Jacob Hillyer (GK, So., 37 Saves, 1.42 GAA), Aleksa Mitrovic (M, Sr., All-GNAC Honorable Mention), Daniel Brendel (D, So., 1 Goal, 16 Starts), Carlos Rodriguez-Diaz (M/F, Jr., 2 Goals, 1 Assist), Logan Wood (F, Sr.).

Other Key Returners: Skyler Munroe (F, So., 1 Goal, 10 GP), Cesar Sosa (M, Jr., 10 Starts).

Key Losses: Linus Mansson (D), Michael Bryant (F), Edwin Quiroz (M), Jonathan Bryant (M).

Key Freshmen: Dominic Abdel-Ahad (F, 6-1, Dusseldorf, Germany – Matare-Gymnasium), Ty Iannone (D, 5-10, Phoenix, Ariz. – Desert Vista).

Key Transfers: Eddie Banuelos (M, Jr., 5-8, Yuma, Ariz. – Arizona Western), Colin Andersen (GK, Sr., 5-11, Boise, Idaho -- Lander Univ.).

2018 GNAC MEN'S SOCCER TEAMS AT A GLANCE

SAINT MARTIN'S

Head Coach: Rob Walker, Saint Martin's 1987 (106-255-20, 12th Season)

Assistant Coach: Brandon Scott

2017 Overall Record: 2-14-1

Conference: 2-9-1 (7th)

Letterwinners Returning: 24

Starters Returning/Lost: 8/3

Returning Starters: Griffin Small (GK, Sr., 84 Saves, 5.25 SPM), Steven Chu (M, Sr.), Mamadou Leigh (M, Sr., 1 Goal, 17 GP), Stephen Murray Jr. (M, So.), Sebastian Navarro (D, Jr., All-GNAC Honorable Mention, 1 Goal, 11 Assists), Cayman John (D, So., All-GNAC Honorable Mention, 1 Assist, 16 Starts), Brandon Madsen (F, Jr., All-GNAC First Team, GNAC Newcomer of the Year, D2CCA-All West Region Second Team, 16 Goals, 1 Assist), Jose Marquez (D, So., 1 Goal).

Other Key Returners: Nick Phillips (M, So., 16 GP, 3 Starts).

Key Losses: Kyle Witzel (F), Tim Teipel (D), McKray Kohn (D), Joey Mack (M), Christian Caro (D).

Key Freshmen: Cole Mattson (M, 5-10, Yakima, Wash. – Davis), Arnold Vasquez (F, 5-9, Vancouver, Wash. – Hudson's Bay).

SEATTLE PACIFIC

Head Coach: Mark Collings (Seattle Pacific, 1998, 111-46-30, 11th Season)

Assistant Coaches: Erik Skipper, James Ward, Andy Machin

2017 Overall Record: 11-5-1

Conference: 7-4-1 (2nd)

Letterwinners Returning: 12

Starters Returning/Lost: 5/6

Returning Starters: Kary Whitney (GK, Sr., 1.43 GAA), Sam Malloch (M, Jr., 1 Goal, 3 Assists), Jacob Bohl (D, Sr., 1 Goal, 1 Assist), Jose Benavides (M, So., All-GNAC Honorable Mention, 1 Goal, 1 Assist), Luke Postma (D, Sr.).

Other Key Returners: Alex Mejia (D, So., 3 Goals, 2 Assists), Samuel Agyei (F, Jr., 2 Goals), Trevor Lee (M, Jr., 1 Goal, 3 Assists), Titus Grant (F, So., 1 Goal, 1 Assist), Travis Swallow (M, So., 1 Goal).

Key Losses: Gabe Kellum (F), Gabriel Weber (F), Jess Cayetano (M), Chaz Jenkins (D), Mori Tsuchiya (M).

Key Freshmen: Elisha Burbridge (F, 5-10, Loomis, Calif. – Del Oro), Aidan Chaparro (M, 5-9, Spokane, Wash. – North Central).

Key Transfers: Reid Baez (M, Sr., 5-9, Salem, Ore. – Univ. of Portland).

SIMON FRASER

Head Coach: Clint Schneider (Midwestern State (Texas), 2003, 35-7-11, 4th Season)

Assistant Coaches: Kevin Harmse, Tyler Baldock, Nick Dasovic

2017 Overall Record: 11-3-4

Conference: 7-2-3 (1st)

Letterwinners Returning: 16

Starters Returning/Lost: 7/4

Returning Starters: Marcello Polisi (M, So., GNAC Player of the Year, All-GNAC First Team, United Soccer Coaches All-West Region Second Team, D2CCA All-West Region First Team, 1 Goal, 1 Assist), Matteo Polisi (F, So., All-GNAC First Team, GNAC Freshman of the Year, D2CCA All-West Region First Team, 10 Goals, 4 Assists), Mamadi Camara (M, Sr., All-GNAC First Team, United Soccer Coaches All-West Region First Team, 6 Goals, 1 Assist), Michael North (D, Sr., All-GNAC Second Team, United Soccer Coaches All-West Region Third Team, 1 Goal, 5 Assists), Kyle Jones (M, Sr., All-GNAC Second Team, 2 Assists), Connor Glennon (F, So., All-GNAC Honorable Mention, 4 Goals, 4 Assists), Jeff Cadman (D, Jr., 2 Assists, 17 Starts).

Other Key Returners: Rahid Rahiem (M, Jr., 2 Goals), Dzenan Bezdrob (M, Sr., 2 Goals, 1 Assist).

Key Losses: Magnus Kristensen (D), Adam Jones (M), Pascal Schmidt (D), Miguel Hof (GK).

Key Freshmen: Joost Mangert (D, 6-3, Rotterdam, The Netherlands – Montessori Lyceum Rotterdam).

Key Transfers: Eric de Graaf (D, Jr., 6-0, Surrey, B.C. – Univ. of Portland), Florian Langenegger (D/M, So., 6-0, Eberfing, Germany – South Carolina Upstate).

2018 GNAC MEN'S SOCCER TEAMS AT A GLANCE

WESTERN WASHINGTON

Head Coach: Greg Brisbon (Seattle Pacific, 1998, 41-33-16, 6th Season)

Assistant Coach: Kyle Segebart

2017 Overall Record: 6-6-5

Conference: 5-4-3 (Tie 3rd)

Letterwinners Returning: 15

Starters Returning/Lost: 6/5

Returning Starters: Drew Barker (M/F, Sr., 2 Goals, 2 Assists in 2016), Georg Cholewa (M, So., All-GNAC Honorable Mention, 2 Goals, 1 Assist), Drew Farnsworth (F, So., 3 Goals, 1 Assist), Stephen Jinneman (D/F, Sr., All-GNAC Honorable Mention, 3 Goals, 1 Assist), Christian Rotter (F, Jr., 2 Goals, 3 Assists), Garrett Strawn (D, Sr., 1 Goal, 3 Assists).

Other Key Returners: Jose Castillo (F, Sr., 15 GP), Jeremiah Lee (M/D, Jr., 8 Starts), Nick Morgan (D, Jr.), Nick Phillips (M/F, Jr.)

Key Losses: Anthony Dean (F), Luke Olney (M), Colton Ronk (D), Marcus Tinsley (D), Tyler Visten (GK).

Key Freshmen: Gus Diehl (D/M, 5-10, Bellingham, Wash. – Sehome), Dakota Stamnes (M, 5-6, Mount Vernon, Wash. – Mount Vernon), Deondre Sluys (F, 6-0, Poulsbo, WA – North Kitsap).

Key Transfers: Ryan Schaefer (F, Jr., 5-9, Burien, Wash. – Univ. of Denver).