



MEDIA ADVISORY

2006 BIG EAST INDOOR TRACK & FIELD CHAMPIONSHIPS PREVIEW

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Contact: Ben Fairclough, bfairclough@bigeast.org

DATE: Feb. 18-19, 2006
TIME: 11:00 a.m. Saturday, 8:30 a.m. Sunday (ET)
LOCATION: Athletics Field House, Akron, Ohio

A new era of the BIG EAST Indoor Track & Field Championships is set to begin this weekend, when the 27th edition of the event will be held at the Athletics Field House on the campus of the University of Akron. The BIG EAST welcomed new members to the league on July 1, 2005. DePaul, Louisville and Marquette's men's teams and Cincinnati, DePaul, Louisville, Marquette and USF women's teams bring a tradition of success to the league, which is already loaded with some of the top individual and team talent in the country. The two-day event will begin at 11:00 a.m. ET on Saturday, Feb. 18, with events slated to continue through 5:40 p.m. ET. Sunday's events will begin at 8:30 a.m., and the awards ceremony at 3:00 p.m. ET will conclude the weekend. The Notre Dame men's team captured its second BIG EAST Championship in three years in 2005 after garnering 182 total points. The Pittsburgh women earned 161.50 points en route to winning the third title in program history. Both teams figure to be in the running for repeat performances in 2006.

WOMEN'S PREVIEW

- The **Pittsburgh** women's team is expected to once again vie for a conference championship despite losing **Kimberly Lyles**, **Tamara McGill** and **Amanda Walker** to graduation last year. The three athletes accounted for four of Pitt's seven individual BIG EAST titles in 2005. Senior **Maureen McCandless**, who was named the Women's Most Outstanding Track Performer after winning the 3,000m and 5,000m events, and senior **Marissa Dudek**, who captured the pole vault title last season, are expected to anchor another talented Panther team. In addition, sophomore **Shantea Calhoun** will enter the event with the league's second best performance marks this season in the 60m and 200m events, and junior **Julianna Reed** has the best mark in the 500m.

- **Notre Dame**, which finished in second place, 21.5 points behind Pittsburgh in last year's conference championship, could claim the team's first title since 2002 this season. Several of the team's top performers at last season's conference championship are back and hope to improve this season. Senior **Okechi Ogbuokiri** is the reigning champion in the 400m. Junior **Maryann Erigha** finished in second in both the 60m and 200m events last season, but enters at the top of the league's performance list as the only athlete to post NCAA Provisional marks in both events. Freshman **Mary Saxer** has burst onto the pole vault scene with a 4.05m jump at the Notre Dame Invitational. The NCAA provisional mark is the nation's 11th best performance thus far, and is also the league's top mark.

- **Rutgers' Shameka Marshall** is in line to lead the Scarlet Knights to a significant improvement from last year's seventh place team finish at the BIG EAST Championships. The senior and reigning long jump champion with a 6.24m mark last season, Marshall is among the top league performers in the long jump 60m hurdles and 60m this season. She has already automatically qualified for the NCAA Championships in the long jump with a 6.49m leap. The Scarlet Knights' 4x800m relay team has the fastest league time this season (9:14.07), and senior **Cylerli Ash** has posted marks listed among the league's top five in the 20 lb. weight throw and shot put. Senior Kahima Liverman can also be among the top three in the triple jump, where she has a season-best 12.32m performance.

- Much of the league's best individual and team talent lies in the distance events, where **Providence**, **Georgetown**, and **Villanova** all have athletes listed among the nation's best. Providence's **Mary Cullen** (Sr.) has posted the nation's fastest times in the 1 mile run (4:39.31), 3000m run (9:01.33) and 5000m run (15:39.43). Her teammate, sophomore **Meghan Owen**, is second on the national performance list in the 1 mile (4:39.60). Last year's champion in the 1,000m and mile run, **Marina Muncan** (Sr.) of Villanova, is currently ranked seventh nationally in the mile (4:42.18) and fourth in the 3000m (9:10.32). Muncan is also part of the nation's top distance medley team, which automatically qualified for nationals with a 11:05.08 time. Georgetown's sophomores **Maggie Infeld** and **Elizabeth Maloy** are listed at No. 8 and 18, respectively in the mile and are two legs of the distance medley team listed at No. 9 (11:16.34) nationally.

MEN'S PREVIEW

- The **Notre Dame** men's team will lean heavily on **Kurt Benninger** in pursuit of its third BIG EAST title in four years. Benninger, who as a junior captured individual titles in the 3000m and mile run, is listed third nationally and has automatically qualified for the NCAAs in both events as a senior. The Irish have outstanding depth in the 400 meter and 800 meter events in addition to the mile run, 3000m and 5,000m. Senior **Ryan Postel** is third in the league in the 400m at 47.56, and junior **Thomas Chamney** provisionally qualified for nationals with the conference's second best mark at 1:48.49 in the 800m. Sophomores **John Cavanaugh** and **Adam Currie** are fifth and sixth in the 800m as well. Members of ND occupy the No. 6-8 positions in the league performance lists for the mile in addition to Benninger, and senior **Tim Moore** is among the league's top five in the 3,000m (No. 5) and 5,000m (No. 4), where the Irish are listed at Nos. 4-6.

- Last season's Most Outstanding Field Performer on the men's side, **Trevor O'Grady** headlines a talented **Rutgers** squad that is looking to be crowned BIG EAST Champion for the first time in school history. RU finished second as a team last season with 168.50 points. O'Grady, a senior who won the heptathlon with 5,168 points, last season, has already provisionally qualified for the NCAA Championships with a total of 5,277 pts. this season. **Sam Segond**, the 2005 conference champion in the 35lb. weight throw, is expected to vie for top honors in the throwing events. Several other members of the Scarlet Knights are listed among the top of the league's performance lists, with most of them coming in the sprint events. Junior **Joe Porter** will key that group as the nation's No. 11 200m runner with a time of 21.23. He is also fourth in the BIG EAST in the 60m event with a 6.82 time. Sophomore **Jamal Ames** has a NCAA provisional mark of 6.70 in the 60m and is first in the BIG EAST in that event. As a team, Rutgers occupies the top four spots in the 200m and the No. 3-5 spots (in addition to Ames) in the 60m.

- **Pittsburgh** finished third on the men's side in 2005 with 98 team points. Sophomore **Keith Higham** is expected to fill the shoes of teammate **Matt Brousse**, who graduated last year, in the pole vault. Higham currently holds the No. 4 performance in the country with a NCAA provisional jump of 5.47m. **Sam Bair** will anchor the track events for UP. He currently sits at No. 6 nationally in the mile run with a 4:00.14 time, which is a school record. In addition, **Justin Clickett** holds a provisional mark of 18.26m in the shot put, which is the league's best throw this season. Sophomore **Mike Wray** has the league's fastest time in the 60m HH.