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For Immediate Release
January 30, 2018

Defending NEC Champion Bryant Tabbed Preseason Men's Lacrosse Favorite

Somerset, NJ -- The Northeast Conference (NEC) men's lacrosse coaches have tabbed defending tournament champion Bryant as the unanimous pick to repeat in 2018. The Bulldogs have won five out of the last six conference titles.

Hobart, the 2017 NEC regular season champion and the only team other than Bryant to win an NEC tournament title in the last six seasons, was selected to finish second. Robert Morris claimed the third spot while Saint Joseph's and Sacred Heart were tabbed fourth and fifth, respectively. Mount St. Mary's and Wagner rounded out the seven team poll.

Mike Pressler's team went 4-2 in conference play last season before defeating Robert Morris in the semis and Hobart in the title match. Bryant then went on to knock out Monmouth, 10-7, in the NCAA opening round before falling to top seeded Maryland, 13-10, in the first round.

2017 Northeast Conference Men's Lacrosse Preseason Coaches Poll

1. Bryant (6)
2. Hobart
3. Robert Morris
4. Saint Joseph's
5. Sacred Heart
6. Mount St. Mary's
7. Wagner

First place votes in parentheses

Senior faceoff specialist **Kenny Massa (Huntington, NY/Elwood John Glenn)** returns to the Bulldogs after collected All-NEC first team honors in 2017. Massa led the NEC in both face-off percentage (.584) and ground balls per game (6.32) to rank 15th in the country in both categories.

Another 2017 All-NEC first teamer, **Tom Kennedy (Farmingdale, NY/Farmingdale)**, will lead the Bulldog midfield after totaling 24 goals and 15 assists last year.

The Bulldogs also return their second leading scorer from a year ago in senior attackman **Cam Ziegler (Carlsbad, CA/La Costa Canyon)**. The Californian totaled 31 goals and 47 points on the year.

Hobart and fifth-year head coach Greg Raymond return 2016 NEC Rookie of the Year and 2017 All-NEC second team honoree **Chris Aslanian (Westfield, NJ/The Hun School of Princeton)**. Aslanian, a junior, was the second-leading scorer for the Statesmen last season with 26 goals and 23 assists. Hobart also brings back face-off specialist **Andrew Spallanzani (Clarkstown, NY/Don Bosco Prep)**. The senior FOGO went 118-for-219 at the X (.539) to land him on the NEC second team as well.

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Drew McMinn, the 2017 NEC Coach of the Year, will benefit from having all six of his All-Conference honorees back in action for Robert Morris in 2018, including NEC Rookie of the Year **Ryan Smith (Burlington, Ontario/Nelson)** and first team goalie **Alex Heger (Carmel, IN/Carmel)**, who enters his junior season.

Saint Joseph's will look to get back to its winning ways that included three straight NEC regular season titles from 2014-16. The Hawks and seventh-year head coach Taylor Wray will benefit from the return of attacker **Mike Rastivo (South Setauket, NY/Ward Melville (Choate Rosemary Hall (CT)))**, who missed the 2017 season with an injury. Rastivo was the 2016 NEC Player of the Year and has racked up 105 career goals.

The 2018 regular season will begin on Saturday, February 3 and conference action starts up on Saturday, March 17. The 2018 NEC Men's Lacrosse Championship will be held on May 3 & 5, hosted by the top seed.

About The Northeast Conference

Now in its 37th year, the Northeast Conference is an NCAA Division I collegiate athletic association consisting of 10 institutions of higher learning located throughout six states. Media coverage of the NEC extends to four of the largest markets in the United States - New York (#1), Pittsburgh (#23), Baltimore (#27), and Hartford/New Haven (#30). Founded in 1981 as the basketball-only ECAC Metro Conference, the NEC has grown to sponsor 22 championship sports for men and women and now enjoys automatic access to 14 different NCAA Championships. NEC member institutions include Bryant, Central Connecticut, Fairleigh Dickinson, LIU Brooklyn, Mount St. Mary's, Robert Morris, Sacred Heart, St. Francis Brooklyn, Saint Francis U and Wagner. For more information on the NEC, visit the league's official website (www.northeastconference.org) and digital network (www.necfrontrow.com), or follow the league on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat, all @NECsports.