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BIG WEST MEN'S SOCCER

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Coaches Tag UC Santa Barbara, UC Irvine As Division Favorites

IRVINE, CA – UC Santa Barbara and UC Irvine are the divisional favorites in the race for Big West men's soccer supremacy, according to the eight coaches in their annual preseason poll released Wednesday.

In addition, the coaches selected an 11-player preseason all-conference team, which included three Gauchos and three Anteaters.

The North Division is expected to belong to UC Santa Barbara. The Gauchos collected first-place votes on seven ballots for 30 points. Cal Poly, which also has three players on the preseason all-conference team, picked up the other first-place vote and finished second with 22 points. UC Davis was third with 17 points and Sacramento State fourth with 11.

Tallying 26 points to lead the South Division balloting was UC Irvine, which also received five first-place nods. CSUN garnered two first-place votes and 22 points as the runner-up, while 2014 Big West Tournament champion Cal State Fullerton was third with 20. The Titans claimed the lone remaining first-place vote. UC Riverside, which won the South Division last year, was picked fourth with 12 points.

UCSB is vying for its third straight North Division title after finishing 6-2-2 in Big West play in 2014. The Gauchos posted a 10-7-3 overall record, marking the 14th consecutive year the program amassed 10 or more victories. They return seven starters from that squad, including Big West Offensive Player of the Year **Nick DePuy** and two-time first team all-conference selection **Ismaila Jome**. That duo, along with fellow junior **Drew Murphy**, combined for 14 goals and 11 assists. UCSB also benefitted from an outstanding recruiting class that netted Michigan transfer **Ahinga Selemani**, who earned Big Ten All-Freshman Team honors last season. **Tim Vom Steeg** is pursuing two landmark victories entering his 17th season at UCSB – his 200th overall and 100th conference as a head coach in the Big West.

Cal Poly dives into battle under the tutelage of first-year mentor **Steve Sampson**, the former manager of the United States Men's National Team and Major League Soccer's Los Angeles Galaxy. Sampson inherits a veteran club which finished 8-7-4 in 2014 and boasts two marquee award winners – Big West Midfielder of the Year **Chase Minter** and Goalkeeper of the Year **Wade Hamilton**. On pace to break the program's career assist record, Minter recently was named one of 30 candidates for the MAC Hermann Trophy Award, bestowed upon college soccer's player of the year. In addition to Minter and Hamilton, fellow senior **Matt LaGrassa**, twice an All-Big West First Team choice, gives the Mustangs a valuable returning core.

Having made back-to-back forays into the NCAA Tournament Third Round, UC Irvine heads the list of contenders in the South Division. The Anteaters are ranked No. 20 nationally in the National Soccer Coaches Association of America preseason poll. UCI welcomes back first-team all-conference standouts **Eduardo Calzada** and **Michael Sperber**, along with three-year starting goalkeeper **Michael Breslin**. The trio contributed immensely to UCI's program-record tying 16-win season in 2014. CSUN is led by two-time All-Big West First Team defender **Trevor Morley**. Cal State Fullerton returned to the NCAA Tournament for the first time in 14 years as **George Kuntz** used his inaugural season as the program's head coach to lead the Titans to the Big West Tournament title. *College Soccer News* has assigned CSF's incoming recruiting class a No. 16 national ranking.

The preseason all-conference team included a trio from three different squads – Cal Poly (Wade Hamilton, Matt LaGrassa, Chase Minter), UC Irvine (**Mats Bjurman**, Eduardo Calzada, Michael Sperber) and UC Santa Barbara (Nick DePuy, Ismaila Jome, Drew Murphy). Trevor Morley of CSUN and UC Riverside's **Michael Salazar** rounded out the list of preseason honorees.

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2015 Preseason Coaches Poll

NORTH DIVISION

No.	School	Pts.
1.	UC Santa Barbara (7)	30
2.	Cal Poly (1)	22
3.	UC Davis	17
4.	Sacramento State	11

SOUTH DIVISION

No.	School	Pts.
1.	UC Irvine (5)	26
2.	CSUN (2)	22
3.	Cal State Fullerton (1)	20
4.	UC Riverside	12

() First-place votes

2015 Preseason All-Conference Team

Name	School	Pos.	Year
Mats Bjurman	UC Irvine	MF	Senior
Eduardo Calzada	UC Irvine	MF	Senior
Nick DePuy	UC Santa Barbara	F	Junior
Wade Hamilton	Cal Poly	GK	Senior
Ismaila Jome	UC Santa Barbara	MF	Junior
Matt LaGrassa	Cal Poly	MF	Senior
Chase Minter	Cal Poly	MF	Senior
Trevor Morley	CSUN	D	Senior
Drew Murphy	UC Santa Barbara	MF	Junior
Michael Salazar	UC Riverside	F	Senior
Michael Sperber	UC Irvine	MF	Junior