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For Immediate Release Contact: Debbie Davis (<u>ddavis@c-usa.org</u> or 214.774.1353) Wednesday, July 31, 2013

Rice Tabbed As C-USA Preseason Volleyball Favorite

Senior outside hitter McKenzie Adams of UTSA voted Preseason Player of the Year.

IRVING, Texas - If Conference USA Preseason Volleyball Poll is any indication about how the upcoming season will play out then fans should expect a very competitive race for the 2013 regular season title. Five teams earned first-place votes and only eight points separate the top three programs.

Headlining the list of 15 teams is Rice. The Owls received three first-place votes and tallied 200 points, while three-time defending C-USA regular season champion Tulsa and UTSA tied for second place with 192 points. The Golden Hurricane picked up four first-place votes to the Roadrunners two.

North Texas claimed three first-place votes and scored 175 points for fourth, followed by UTEP, Middle Tennessee, UAB and Marshall rounding out the top half of the poll. MT, host of the 2013 C-USA Volleyball Championship, picked up the final two first-place votes.

Earning C-USA Preseason Player of the Year accolades and All-C-USA Preseason honors is UTSA senior MCKENZIE ADAMS (Schertz, Texas). The 6-3 senior outside hitter was named 2012 Western Athletic Conference Player of the Year, American Volleyball Coaches Association All-America Honorable Mention and All-West Region. Adams became the first Roadrunner to earn All-America accolades and became the third player in WAC history to be named Player of the Week five times during last year. She finished second in the league with 4.85 points and 4.33 kills per set averages, while her mark of 3.84 digs per set ranked fourth.

Joining Adams on the preseason list is teammate **ANNIE KUNES** (Fontana, Wis.). The 5-6 defensive specialist was tabbed 2012 WAC Libero of the Year and was named to the WAC All-Freshman Team. She led the league with 5.05 digs per set and her 5.39 digs per set in conference matches ranked fourth all-time in league history for a single season. She amassed 500 stops last season, including a season-high 29 in a four-set victory against Denver on Nov. 8.

UTSA returns 10 letterwinners, including five starters, from a team that finished 21-9 (.700) overall and 13-5 in conference play.

Rice will be led by a pair of Preseason All-C-USA selections in senior setter **MEGAN MURPHY** (Plano, Texas) and junior middle blocker **JILLIAN HUMPHREY** (Shoreacres, Texas). Murphy, the 2012 C-USA Setter of the Year and All-C-USA First Team selection, averaged 11.04 assists per set a year ago. She was named C-USA Setter of the Week five times during her junior season and posted a triple double (10K/58A/10D) against UAB on Sept. 23. Murphy ended the year earning AVCA All-America Honorable Mention, All-Midwest Region and C-USA All-Academic merits.

Humphrey appears on her first preseason team after earning All-C-USA Second Team accolades. She ended the year tied for second in C-USA in blocks (1.18) and ranked 12th in hitting percentage (.269). Humphrey was named C-USA Defensive Player of the Week once in 2012.

Rice tallied a 19-12 record a year ago and finished second in the C-USA race with a mark of 12-4. The Owls return their setter, libero and 10 letterwinners.

With three first-place votes, five returning starters plus the libero, North Texas aims to build on its school-record tying 26 wins (26-12) from a year ago. The Mean Green won the Sun Belt Conference West Division crown for the second time in three years with a league record of 9-5.

Leading this crew in its first year with the league will be All-C-USA Preseason honorees **CARNAE DILLARD** and **COURTNEY WINDHAM**.



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Dillard, a 5-8 sophomore from San Antonio, earned SBC Freshman of the Year, All-Sun Belt First Team and All-Tournament honors in 2012. She was the only Division I player to record more than 550 kills, 275 digs and 90 blocks. Dillard's 552 kills ranked second nationally among freshmen and appears fourth-best in UNT records. She ended the season by averaging the second most kills per set in the league with 4.09. The outside hitter was named the National Freshman of the Year in the January issue of *Cobra Magazine*, a publication that celebrates African-American volleyball players.

Windham (Cypress, Texas) also appeared on the 2012 All-Sun Belt First Team. The 6-3 senior outside hitter led the league with 1.28 blocks per set, ranked seventh in kills per set with 3.11 and was eighth with a .305 attack percentage. In conference matches, Dillard improved to second in kills with 4.47 per set.

Pushing Dillard in the Sun Belt standings was sophomore **CHELSEA ROSS** (Murfreesboro, Tenn.) of Middle Tennessee. Ross ranked third in kills per set with a 4.06 average. The 5-11 sophomore outside hitter earned all-conference second team honors and was named Offensive Player of the Week twice. In conference matches, Ross averaged 3.98 kills and 2.67 digs per set. As a team, the Blue Raiders went 10-23 and 7-8 in league play.

Marshall senior **LAURA DER** (Clarksville, Ind.) earns her first preseason honor after being named to the All-C-USA First Team and All-Midwest Region Honorable Mention squad a year ago. The 5-9 outside hitter ranked among the NCAA Top 25 in kills (4.39/21st) and points per set (4.96/22nd). Der is also a 2012 C-USA All-Academic honoree. Marshall finished 18-13 for the 2012 season with an 8-8 Conference USA record.

CORI MARTONE of Tulane, Tulsa's **KELLIE CULBERTSON**, UAB's **SAM SKINNER** and **XITLALI HERRERA** of UTEP rounds out this year's All-C-USA Preseason Team.

Martone, a 6-0 middle blocker, was a All-Conference USA Second Team selection a year ago after ranking eighth and ninth, respectively, with 3.46 kills and 4.02 points per set. The senior from Baton Rouge, La., was named C-USA Player of the Week on Sept. 17.

Culbertson (Long Beach, Calif.) is a two-time All-C-USA Second Team selection. The 5-11 senior ranked 34th nationally in service aces per set with a 0.39 average. She also ranked among the league's best in kills (2.59), points (3.19) and digs (3.42) per set.

Skinner (Birmingham, Ala.) is coming off of a very impressive freshman season where she earned the program's first Conference USA Freshman of the Year honor. The 5-10 outside hitter also was named to the All-C-USA Second Team as well as appear on the league's All-Freshman team. The sophomore averaged 2.61 kills and 3.11 points per set, but in league play her numbers increased to 2.96 kps and 3.52 pps. Skinner was the lone freshman to appear in the league's top 15 in both statistics.

Herrera (Júarez, México) was named to the 2012 AVCA All-America Honorable Mention team and also earned All-C-USA First Team honors. She became the second Miner to earn back-to-back first team accolades and be named All-Midwest Region. The 6-0 senior middle blocker ranked sixth in the league in hitting efficiency with a .301 clip, followed by ranking 10th in points (3.76), 12th in blocks (0.93) and 13th in kills (3.06) per set. Herrera was named C-USA Defensive and Offensive Player of the Week once each and received C-USA All-Academic honors.

The 2013 volleyball campaign is slated to start with a host of tournament play beginning Aug. 30-31. Middle Tennessee will serve as host to the 2013 Conference USA Volleyball Championship, which will take place Nov. 21-24 inside the Alumni Memorial Gym in Murfreesboro, Tenn.





2013 CONFERENCE USA PRESEASON VOLLEYBALL POLL

- 1. Rice (3)
- 2. Tulsa (4)
- 2. UTSA (2)
- 4. North Texas (3)
- 5. UTEP
- 6. Middle Tennessee (2)
- 7. UAB
- 8. Marshall
- 9. FIU
- 10. Tulane
- 11. Southern Miss
- 12. Charlotte
- 13. Florida Atlantic
- 14. Louisiana Tech
- 15. East Carolina

(#) denotes first place votes

2013 CONFERENCE USA PRESEASON VOLLEYBALL TEAM

Student-Athletes	School	Pos.	Ht.	Cl.	Hometown/Previous School
Laura Der	Marshall	OH	5-9	Sr.	Clarksville, Ind./Floyd Central HS
Chelsea Ross	Middle Tennessee	OH	5-11	So.	Murfreesboro, Tenn./Riverdale HS
Carnae Dillard	North Texas	OH	5-8	So.	San Antonio, Texas/Lady Bird Johnson HS
Courtney Windham	North Texas	OH	6-3	Sr.	Cypress, Texas/Baylor
Jillian Humphrey	Rice	MB	6-2	Jr.	Shoreacres, Texas/La Porte HS
Megan Murphy	Rice	S	5-10	R-Sr.	Plano, Texas/Plano West HS
Cori Martone	Tulane	MB	6-0	Sr.	Baton Rouge, La./St. Joseph's
Kellie Culbertson	Tulsa	ОН	5-11	Sr.	Long Beach, Calif./Woodrow Wilson Classical
Sam Skinner	UAB	OH	5-10	So.	Birmingham, Ala./Oak Mountain HS
Xitlali Herrera	UTEP	MB	6-0	Sr.	Júarez, México/Universidad Autonoma de Ciudad Júarez
McKenzie Adams [^]	UTSA	OH	6-3	Sr.	Schertz, Texas/Steele HS/Virginia
Annie Kunes	UTSA	DS	5-6	So.	Fontana, Wis./Big Foot HS

Student-Athletes	School	2012 Top Honors/Averages
Laura Der	Marshall	C-USA First Team 4.39kps 4.96pps 3.05dps
Chelsea Ross	Middle Tennessee	Sun Belt Second Team 4.06kps 4.50pps 2.50dps
Carnae Dillard	North Texas	Sun Belt Freshman of the Year Sun Belt First Team 4.09kps 4.75pps 2.19dps
Courtney Windham	North Texas	Sun Belt First Team 3.11kps 1.28bps .305%
Jillian Humphrey	Rice	C-USA Second Team 1.18bps .269% 3.13pps
Megan Murphy	Rice	C-USA Setter of the Year C-USA First Team 11.03aps 2.52dps
Cori Martone	Tulane	C-USA Second Team 3.46 kps 4.02pps 2.72dps
Kellie Culbertson	Tulsa	C-USA Second Team 2.59 kps 3.19pps 3.42dps
Sam Skinner	UAB	C-USA Freshman of the Year C-USA Second Team All-Freshman Team 2.61 kps 3.11pps
Xitlali Herrera	UTEP	C-USA First Team 3.06 kps 3.76pps .300% 0.93bps
McKenzie Adams [^]	UTSA	WAC Player of the Year WAC First Team 4.33 kps 4.85pps 3.84dps
Annie Kunes	UTSA	WAC Libero of the Year WAC Second Team All-Freshman Team 5.05dps

^ Preseason Player of the Year

Note: Due to a tie, this year's preseason team consists of 12 members instead of 11.



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2013 C-USA Preseason Volleyball Poll

1. Rice (3)	200
2. Tulsa (4)	192
2. UTSA (2)	192
4. North Texas (3)	175
5. UTEP	158
6. Middle Tennessee (2)	152
7. UAB	146
8. Marshall	144
9. FIU	99
10. Tulane	77
11. Southern Miss	76
12. Charlotte	67
13. Florida Atlantic	62
14. Louisiana Tech	33
15. East Carolina	27