



SOFTBALL CAPS BANNER YEAR WITH AN NCAA TOURNAMENT WIN

After claiming its fourth straight Mid-Continent Conference regular-season championship, virtually re-writing the record books and advancing to the NCAA tournament for the first time in school history in 2006, the question for the '07 Southern Utah softball squad was: "How do you top that?"

How about by claiming its second straight Mid-Con tournament title, returning to the NCAA tournament and posting the school's first tourney win – in *any* sport – since the school moved to NCAA Division I competition in 1988?

After finishing second in the league standings – and seeing a string of four straight regular-season championships end – the 2007 Thunderbirds breezed through the conference tournament, allowing just two runs in a three-game sweep of Oakland and Western Illinois, to claim an NCAA tourney berth for the second straight year.

Bobbi Jo Merrill claimed tournament MVP honors while

Erin Niederhauser, Kristina Brooks, Marci Pratt and Cassie Cresswell made the all-tournament team.

At the NCAA tournament, the Thunderbirds squared off against No. 7 Arizona State in the first round and gave the Sun Devils all they wanted before ASU took a 2-1 extra-inning win.

SUU outlasted Cal Poly, 9-4, in their second game of the tourney. Niederhauser went 3-for-4 with a home run and drove in five runs in the victory, while Cresswell homered and drove in three.

SUU had to go right back out and face regional host Brigham Young where the 'Birds wound up losing a back-and-forth game, 10-5.

SUU led 1-0 and 4-1 but BYU scored five runs in the fifth and tacked on two-run innings in the sixth and seventh to hold the Thunderbirds at bay.

SUU capped the season by having six players named to the all-Mid-Con team. In addition to Pratt, **Karli Jensen**, Kennedy, Merrill, Brooks and Niederhauser were selected to the squad.

SMITH COMPLEMENTS ATHLETIC ACHIEVEMENT WITH ACADEMICS

Southern Utah women's soccer athlete **Ashley Smith (Crum)** is used to competing at a high level, having accumulated national and conference awards during her four seasons with the Thunderbirds. However, perhaps her greatest success as a student-athlete came as she was named as one of three valedictorians of the Class of 2007.

The three-year captain donned her cap and gown having maintained a perfect 4.0 G.P.A. in athletic training to compliment her success on the soccer pitch.

Her academic achievements supplement her athletic success on the field with three academic all-Mid-Con honors, a first-team all-Mid-Con honor in 2004 and two academic all-district awards in 2005 and 2006.

Smith led the Thunderbirds in 2004 with 11 points on four goals and three assists and ended her career with five goals and six assists in 70 games with 64 starts.

"As a program, we are extremely proud of Ashley. She has been a model student-athlete during her career here," women's soccer head coach **Brian Stock** said.

Smith was one of more than 30 student-athletes that participated in commencement exercises and one of ten that graduated with honors.





SUU TRACK & FIELD WIN MULTIPLE TITLES

Southern Utah University track and field enjoyed one of its most successful seasons as the men's team completed a "triple crown" year, capturing the cross country and indoor and outdoor track and field Mid-Continent titles.

The women also added an outdoor track and field title to bring the total number of team titles to four.

In addition to the conference titles, 13 athletes qualified for the NCAA Outdoor Track and Field Regional Championships with two moving on to the NCAA Outdoor Track and Field Championships in Sacramento, Calif.

Senior **Jess Baumgartner** became the first All-American since **Natalie Gibson** ('99) in 1999 (400-meter hurdles) with a third-place finish at the NCAA Cross Country National Championships.

Baumgartner is expected to return for his final year of eligibility in cross country this fall and will be the top finisher at the championships returning for the 2007 season.

SUU FOOTBALL

Thunderbirds to face ten ranked teams in '07

Southern Utah University's 2007 football schedule will be a challenging one, to say the least. The Thunderbirds will square off against nine teams that finished the 2006 season ranked in the NCAA Championship Subdivision (Division I-AA) Top 25, while the team's lone Division II opponent was ranked seventh in the final D-II rankings.

Fans in Cedar City will be able to see the Thunderbirds host three of last year's Top 25, including Southern Illinois, which finished last season ranked No. 7, No. 16 Cal Poly and No. 21 McNeese State.

In addition to those three, the schedule includes UC Davis, which spent most of 2006 in the Top 25 before finishing 28th, as well as North Dakota, which finished the season ranked 7th in Division II.

Also included on the schedule are road games at No. 3 Montana, No. 4 Youngstown State, No. 5 North Dakota State, No. 10 Montana State, No. 17 Northern Iowa and No. 22 South Dakota State.

SUU Coach **Wes Meier** said he is upbeat about the opportunity to play such a demanding schedule.

"This will be a hard schedule but to be one of the best I-AA teams you have to play the best," Meier said. "I would rather play the toughest teams rather than the easiest. Our expectations are high, even though we lost some key players and we're still working toward becoming fully-



funded at this level."

The 'Birds open September 1 at Montana. After that, SUU comes home to Eccles Coliseum for a three-game homestand with North Dakota on September 8, Southern Illinois on September 15, and McNeese State on September 22.

After the McNeese game, the Thunderbirds enjoy a bye week before playing back-to-back road games at Montana State on October 6 and at Youngstown State on October 13.

SUU opens Great West Football Conference play at home on October 20 against UC Davis. The 'Birds go back on the road to play at North Dakota State on October 27.

The Thunderbirds' final home game will be Nov. 3, when they host Cal Poly. Then they close out the GWFC schedule with a game at South Dakota State on November 10, before wrapping up the regular season at Northern Iowa on November 17.



**WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL,
COMING FALL**

2009