

Northeast Conference

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For Immediate Release

March 1, 2007

Long Island Valerie Nainima Makes History, Voted NEC Women's Basketball Player and Rookie of the Year

***Mount's Tiffany Green Honored as Defensive Player of the Year
Stephanie Gaitley of Long Island Named Coach of the Year***

Somerset, NJ — Long Island freshman **Valerie Nainima (Suva, Fiji/St. Joseph's Secondary)** became the first freshman in conference history to be named both NEC Women's Basketball Player of the Year and Rookie of the Year in a vote conducted by league head coaches. Mount St. Mary's junior guard **Tiffany Green (Arlington, VA/Washington-Lee)** claimed NEC Defensive Player of the Year honors for the second consecutive year while the Brenda Reilly Coach of the Year award went to Long Island head coach **Stephanie Gaitley**. The honorees were announced previous to the 2007 NEC Basketball Tournament, which will begin on Saturday, March 1 with quarterfinals played at four campus sites.

With the play of a seasoned veteran, Nainima becomes the first player in Northeast Conference history to garner both player and rookie of the year honors. Among the conference best in three-point shooting and free throw percentage, the Fiji product showed exceptional control, especially from behind the arc, connecting on 60 treys. She also topped the league in free throw percentage, with a mark of .891. An all-around team leader, the 5-7 guard set the bar by claiming 10 *Choice Hotels* NEC Rookie of the Week honors, including a five-week stretch from mid-January to mid-February. Nainima, who is a member of the Fiji women's national team, has stepped into the spotlight to become one of the conference's top point producers, averaging 17.3 points per game.

For the second consecutive year, Green has been recognized as the top defender in the conference. The junior guard averages 2.14 steals per game, with 37 takeaways coming in conference play. The former 2004-05 Rookie of the Year has been a defensive prowess since her inception into the league. Green has earned one major award in each of her three years as a Mountaineer.

Gaitley has led the Blackbirds to the NEC Tournament in four of her five seasons at the helm. This season, under the guidance of Gaitley, Long Island enjoyed a program-best 22 overall wins including a 13-game mid-season win streak. A testament of hustle and discipline, the Blackbirds top the conference in scoring defense (55.1 ppg), rebounding defense (33.2 rpg) and control (.94 assist to turnover ratio). Quickly climbing up the ranks, Gaitley is now the 12th all-time winningest coach in the conference (58) and ranks fifth among active coaches.

The All-Northeast Conference first team sees only two veteran returnees. Sacred Heart senior **Amanda Pape (Stamford, CT/Trinity Catholic)** and Central Connecticut senior **Gabriella Guegbelet (Bangui, Central African Republic/Lauringburg Institute (NC))**, two of the conference's most decorated players, are joined by first-time honorees Robert Morris junior **Chinata Nesbit (Washington, DC/Chipola JC)**, Mount St. Mary's senior **Dita Krumberga (Riga, Latvia/Grammar School of Nordic Languages)** and Nainima.

(2006-07 NEC Women's Basketball All-Conference Release; 1-of-4)

Central Connecticut State University • Fairleigh Dickinson University • Long Island University
Monmouth University • Mount St. Mary's University • Quinnipiac University
Robert Morris University • Sacred Heart University • St. Francis (NY) College
Saint Francis (PA) University • Wagner College

Pape, the former 2005-06 NEC Player of the Year, notched 551 points to average 19.0 ppg this season. The local Connecticut product led the conference in scoring for the second consecutive year. The all-time leading scorer at Sacred Heart, the 5-8 guard has tallied 1,976 over her four-year career. This season, Pape was one of the conference's most tenacious defensive players, as the Stamford native recorded 95 takeaways. Her 3.28 steals per game average ranks her sixth in the nation. Pape also ranks in the NEC tops in rebounding (10th - 7.4rpg), assists (sixth - 3.59 apg) and in assist to turnover ratio (seventh - 1.12). No stranger to post-season accolades, as a freshman Pape was named the NEC Rookie of the Year and to the All-Conference second team. Her sophomore and junior campaigns saw first-team honors and also as a junior, the 2006 NEC Player of the Year was the tournament MVP as Sacred Heart went on to advance to the 2006 NCAA tournament.

Guegbelet led the conference in double-doubles (15) en route to her second consecutive All-Northeast Conference first team nod. A model of excellence throughout her duration at Central Connecticut, the 6-0 forward has earned NEC all-rookie honors in her freshman campaign and all-conference second team as a sophomore. One of only three players to average a double-double, she posted the second-best scoring average (18.7 ppg) as well as the second best rebound average (10.1 rpg) in the league. Ranked nationally, Guegbelet cracks the top-30 in both categories (points per game - 28th; rebounds per game - 21st).

Krumberga saved playing her best ball for last, as the senior stepped into a prominent role during her final campaign at the Mount. Almost impossible to guard, she improved her stats immensely from a year ago in both points per game (9.7ppg to 17.9ppg) and rebounds (5.9 rpg to 9.7rpg). The 6-0 Latvia native was a model of consistency, notching 13 double-doubles, the second highest tally in the league. Shooting over .500 on the year, she hit 169 of 322 attempts for a league-fourth best 501 total points.

Making an immediate impact in her inaugural season in the conference, Nesbit paced the league in pull downs, averaging 10.5 caroms per game. She recorded 13 double doubles, as the junior college transfer ranked in the top three in points (18.5) and is one of three players to average a double-double on the year. Nominated twice for a WBCA Player of the Month accolade, the three time *Choice Hotels* Player of the Week has had 11 20+ point performances on the year.

The all-conference second team welcomes back three former award winners and recognizes two newcomers. Teammates **Erin Kerner (Erie, PA/Mercyhurst Prep)** and **Monique Lee (Lynn, MA/Lynn Classical)** of Quinnipiac both earned the distinction last year as Kerner was noted as the 2006 Rookie of the Year and named to the second team all-NEC, while Lee was a member of the all-NEC first team. Robert Morris senior **Sugeiry Monsac (Villa Maria, Dom. Rep./Arizona Western JC)** reemerges into the scene, as last season was plagued with injury. The second team welcomes **Jasmine Walker (Amityville, NY/Copiague)** of Sacred Heart and St. Francis (NY) **Katja Bavendam (Hamburg, Germany/Gymnasium Osterholtz-Scharmbeck)**.

Kerner was among the conference's top leading scorers, before ducking just below the 75% participation mark due to a knee injury. Up until early February, the Lynn, MA product averaged 17.7points per game and 3.5 helpers. The 2005-06 Rookie of the Year played in just 20 games.

Lee, who has earned post-season recognition in three consecutive years, notched a team-high seven double-doubles and averaged 14.5 points per game. An all-around threat, the 5-11 guard averaged just under five defensive rebounds per game and would pull down an average of three offensive boards. Previously, the Lynn, MA native was named to the all-rookie team in 2004-05 and as a sophomore, garnered first team accolades.

Monsac wraps up her career with a comeback performance worthy of an encore. After missing last year due to injury, Monsac quickly reestablished herself as a staple in the Colonial offense, averaging 15.8 ppg. Ranked second in the conference, the 6-1 senior is equally effective on the other side of the ball, averaging 2.64 steals. Monsac is among conference leaders in several categories: scoring (15.8ppg – sixth), rebounding (9.2rpg – fifth).

From last year's NCAA team, Walker has consistently been a key player instituted during Sacred Heart's recent success. Walker is a dominant force on the boards averaging 10.1 caroms as well as a consistent offensive threat with 12.0 ppg. Walker has posted 10 double-doubles, including eight in conference play. The 6-1 forward is part of a Sacred Heart team that has yet to miss qualifying for postseason play.

The lone Terrier to gain recognition, Bavendam immersed as a leader this year for St. Francis (NY). Sneaking into the eighth spot in the tournament, Bavendam led the squad with a 14.6 scoring average and recorded 13 double-doubles. As the tallest player in the conference, the agile junior center knocked away a league-best 97 shots good for a top-seven national ranking.

Led by NEC Player and Rookie of the Year Nainima, the all-rookie accolades include four players who helped their respective teams enter the postseason. Fairleigh Dickinson places two freshmen on the team with forward **Christy Altimirano (Bayonne, NJ/Bayonne)** and guard **Jordan Sykes (Avalon, NJ/Holy Spirit)**. Sykes and Altimirano proved to be a one-two punch for the Knights, as the two averaged over 20 ppg combined. Altimirano, a four-time *Choice Hotels* Rookie of the Week honoree, averaged 9.3 ppg and 5.9 rpg. Sykes, a natural aggressor who notched 60 steals, averaged 11.2 ppg. Quinnipiac guard **Courtney Kaminski (Dudley, MA/Shepherd Hill)** also earns a spot on the team. Kaminski broke out for the Bobcats as of late, twice pacing the team with career highs against league-best competition. In a week that saw both Robert Morris and Long Island, Kaminski averaged 19.5 points including a 21-point, 10-rebound performance in Quinnipiac's upset win over the Blackbirds. En route to the 5-7 guard's first career double-double, she earned the Choice Hotels NEC Rookie of the Week honor. On the season, the Dudley, MA product averaged just under 10 ppg with 9.7. Central Connecticut's **PJ Wade (Hardy, VA/Franklin County)** rounds out the all-newcomer team. Wade, a 5-10 guard, jumped right in for the Blue Devils, showing face in every contest, averaging 19 minutes. The Virginia product averaged 6.3 ppg. Overall, the all-rookie team has no problem handling the ball in clutch situations, as four of the top ten most accurate free-throw shooters are in their inaugural season (Nainima: 1st - .891; Sykes: 2nd - .887; Kaminski: 4th - .865; Wade: 10th - .784).

2006-07 NEC Women's Basketball Award Winners

Player of the Year

Valerie Nainima	Long Island	G	5-7	Fr	Suva, Fiji/St. Joseph's Secondary
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Rookie of the Year

Valerie Nainima	Long Island	G	5-7	Fr	Suva, Fiji/St. Joseph's Secondary
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Defensive Player of the Year

Tiffany Green	Mount St. Mary's	G	5-4	Jr	Arlington, VA/Washington-Lee
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Brenda Reilly Coach of the Year

Stephanie Gaitley	Long Island
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2006-07 NEC Women's Basketball First Team All-Conference

Name	School	Pos.	Ht.	Yr.	Hometown/High School
Gabriella Guegbelet	Central Connecticut State	F	6-0	Sr	Bangui, Central African Republic/Lauringburg Institute (NC)
Dita Krumberga	Mount St. Mary's	G	6-0	Sr	Riga, Latvia/Grammar School of Nordic Languages
Valerie Nainima	Long Island	G	5-7	Fr	Suva, Fiji/St. Joseph's Secondary
Chinata Nesbit	Robert Morris	F	6-2	Jr	Washington, DC/Chipola JC
Amanda Pape	Sacred Heart	G	5-8	Sr	Stamford, CT/Trinity Catholic

2006-07 NEC Women's Basketball Second Team All-Conference

Name	School	Pos.	Ht.	Yr.	Hometown/High School
Katja Bavendam	St. Francis (NY)	C	6-8	Jr	Hamburg, Germany/Gymnasium Osterholz-Scharmbeck
Erin Kerner	Quinnipiac	G	5-8	So	Erie, PA/Mercyhurst Prep
Monique Lee	Quinnipiac	F	5-11	Jr	Lynn, MA/Lynn Classical
Sugeiry Monsac	Robert Morris	F/C	6-1	Sr	Villa Maria, Dom. Rep./Arizona Western JC
Jasmine Walker	Sacred Heart	F	6-1	Sr	Amityville, NY/Copiague

2006-07 NEC Women's Basketball All-Rookie Team

Name	School	Pos.	Ht.	Yr.	Hometown/High School
Christy Altimirano	Fairleigh Dickinson	F	5-11	Fr	Bayonne, NJ/Bayonne
Courtney Kaminski	Quinnipiac	G	5-7	Fr	Dudley, MA/Shepherd Hill
Valerie Nainima	Long Island	G	5-7	Fr	Suva, Fiji/St. Joseph's Secondary
Jordan Sykes	Fairleigh Dickinson	G	5-9	Fr	Avalon, NJ/Holy Spirit
PJ Wade	Central Connecticut State	G	5-10	Fr	Hardy, VA/Franklin County