

# WBOA Preseason Coaches Poll 2026

## Division 1

1



The defending state champs may look even more imposing in 2026 than the squad that won 23 games and hoisted the gold ball. Tyler Grulkowski leads a group that includes four of the top 25 seniors in the state according to Prep Baseball Report. That group and a host of sophomores and juniors in expanded roles promise to make it an exciting spring for the Warriors.

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2



The depth of the Classic 8 is on full display as the Warhawks would likely be in the top spot in most other seasons, but may find it tough to win their conference. This despite over half of their innings and at-bats returning led by D-1 recruits Cam Carter and Tanner Buhlmann from a team that saw its season end in sectionals in 2025. The Classic 8 looks to be a true heavyweight battle this season.

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3



The Big Eight preseason champ as picked by the coaches will be looking to return to Appleton for the eighth time in the past 11 years. Coach Marchese welcomes back Manny Abreu, Cam Glusick, Van Vogler and Joey Tamboli as they look to stay ahead of the likes of Madison Memorial and Middleton in pursuit of a conference title.

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4



Last year's top seed in Appleton bowed out without a win, but have the returning horses and are set on writing a new narrative in 2026. The Big Rivers co-champs return half of their innings and at bats led by Auburn recruit Jace Mataczynski. The Warriors are hoping what would be their third straight trip to state this spring ends with some combination of wins and hardware.

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5



The Spartans may have finished third in the Big Eight in 2025, but none of their conference foes will sleep on them this spring. Led by a quartet of D-1 recruits (Ezra & Caleb Ligon, Brayden Banyai and Myles Hosking), Vel Phillips is picked second in conference after finishing one win short of Appleton last spring. If they take one more step in 2026, it will be well-earned.

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6



The favorites to win the North Shore, the Blue Dukes return over half of their innings on the mound and at bats. A deep senior class headlined by Charlie McIntyre and Matthew Schoenfeldt who have a deep winning history with Coach Hayes from their Little League days have their sights on Appleton to cap their standout careers.

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A slight favorite to win the Greater Metro, the Phoenix look well equipped to manage the challenges conference coaches expect them to see from Germantown and Brookfield East in particular. Valparaiso recruit Cail Geiger headlines about 70 percent of the team's innings pitched and at bats who return.

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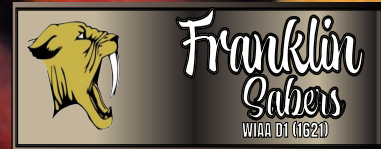
The Fox Valley Association favorite Papermakers are still viewed by conference coaches as the team to beat. This despite the loss of over 60 percent of their innings pitched and at

bats. One thing is for certain, you can expect Hall-of-Fame coach Ryan McGinnis to have the team ready to compete. Ryan Halfmann and Shaefer Peterson will lead the charge.



The Badgers emerged from a tough Southern Lakes conference race to end their season with a silver ball as the eight-seed in Appleton. They return three-quarters of their

at-bats headlined by Ryan Albanese and Brendan Kellar. Badger will be well-tested come playoff time again this spring, which keeps them in the conversation among the best teams in the state.



The Southeast runners-up won't have to look up at Oak Creek this spring and are the favorites to win the conference in 2026. They bring back over half of their innings and at-bats from a team that will be looking to

avenge an early playoff exit last spring. A host of All-Conference talent returns, including Nicholas Firl, Bennett Schueller and Samuel Ortiz.



The Red Hawks are one of the favorites in the Badger Large, and they will be hungry to get back to Appleton for the first time since winning it all in 2022. All of their at bats re-

turn led by UW-Milwaukee recruit Jake Cummins - they will have to first navigate the gauntlet of their conference schedule, which will no doubt prepare them for post-season success.



The Red Raiders are part of a trio of almost evenly-picked candidates to win the Wisconsin Valley this year. Rapids gets a boost from 80 percent of their pitching and

nearly the same percent of their at bats returning despite not winning a post season game in 2025. Gage Honeyager and Silas Cronkrite aim to lead the team to the top of the conference.



North Shore coaches suspect the Orioles will be one of the teams nipping at Whitefish Bay's heels all spring. Coach Steve Qleshko's squad was tri-champ of the conference in 2025 and had their sea-

son stopped by the team at the top of this poll in the state semifinal. Kaiden Romens, Aidan Kolb and Brady Helms have their sights set high again as they battle to defend their North Shore title.



The Lightning figure to be in the mix for the Fox Valley Association title with Kimberly and Hortonville as conference coaches see it this spring. They added a Regional Title to the wall last spring and

bring back nearly three-quarters of their pitching and all their at bats, headlined by Matthew Hietpas and Colin Reddy. Figure on the Lightning playing a big role in whoever finishes atop the FVA in 2026.



The Silver Eagles are one of the favorites in the Badger Large, and they will likely have a chip on their shoulder after falling one win short of Appleton in 2025. Cal Moreau (Central Florida) is back with a few other key contributors, including junior

Eli Bauler to keep Monona in the hunt for a conference title and a trip to the state tournament, which would be a first for the program since 1991.



A third team from the Classic 8 shows the depth of what is arguably the best conference in the state as the Indians, who won 21 games, a share of a conference title and

a regional title, are picked to finish around third place. They bring back Ben Jones, Isaac Teisl and Carson Grueel to make another run at both a conference title and playoff run.



The rich got richer when the Knights joined the Classic 8. Don't let the fact they are also picked to finish around third in the conference fool you - they are also a threat to run it back to Appleton,

where they were dispatched in the quarterfinals. Jackson Villarreal and Jayden Pryor are part of nearly 90 percent of the team's at bats who return to give the Knights another shot at hardware this spring.



The Pirates are a slight favorite to win the Fox River Classic, and they may have additional incentive after having their season end in the Regional Final in 2025. Carson Hawley and

Parker Lawson return to lead the Pirates to what they hope will be another conference title and one more shot for their senior classmates in Appleton, which would be their first since the team won back-to-back silver balls in 2021 and 2022.



The Polar Bears got their revenge on Kimberly in the post season and look to be a threat to reach Appleton for what would be the third time in four years. They finished

second in the FVA but knock off the Papermakers in the sectionals to reach state. Coach Greg Yeager's squad brings back Braylon Brantner and Elijah Yeager to chase the prize.



The Cardinals plan to be right on Hudson's tail for the top spot in the Big Rivers. Falls put a Regional Title plaque on the wall despite a .500 conference

finish and bring back nearly all of their innings on the mound and over 60 percent of their at bats. Gavin Thompson and Brady Smith expect to lead the pursuit of Hudson in preparation for another long post season run.



The Owls bagged a share of the North Shore title and a Regional Title plaque in 2025 and are seeking more this season. Confidence remains

high for another big season despite losing two-thirds of their pitching and half of their innings. Grady Chvosta and Nathan Miller are two big reasons for that optimism as the pair will lead the Owls in 2026.

**HONORABLE MENTION:**

