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WOMEN'S SOCCER Championship Preview - Nov. 2, 2010

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WOMEN'S SOCCER TITLE UP FOR GRABS THIS WEEKEND ***Amherst Hosts Final Rounds After Bates Knocks Out Top-Seeded Tufts***

HADLEY, Mass. – Four former conference champions will descend on Amherst, Mass. this weekend for the remaining rounds of the 2010 NESAC Women's Soccer Championship. Second-seeded Amherst College earned the right to host the semifinals and final after eighth-seeded Bates knocked top-seeded Tufts out of the tournament in penalty kicks this past Sunday. The Jeffs will have the opportunity to thank the Bobcats in person, as the two teams will meet in the first semifinal on Saturday, Nov. 6 at 11:00 a.m. The second semifinal features fifth-seed Middlebury against third-seed and three-time defending NESAC champion Williams at 1:30 p.m. The 2010 NESAC Women's Soccer Championship concludes on Sunday, Nov. 7, at 12:00 p.m.

Amherst (7-6-2, 5-2-2 NESAC) came within striking distance of finishing atop the NESAC standings for the first time since 2006, however a loss to Trinity on the final day of the regular season combined with a Tufts win put the top seed in this year's championship just out of reach. The Jeffs battled to get past Bowdoin in the quarterfinals on Sunday, recovering from an early 1-0 hole for a 3-2 victory. Following the win, Amherst received the news that it would host the semifinals and final for only the second time in tournament history after Bates upset Tufts. The Jeffs have two NESAC titles to their credit, their most recent coming in 2003 over the Bobcats by a 6-0 score. Since its last championship, Amherst has managed to advance to Sunday's final only twice, falling in overtime to Middlebury (1-0) in 2006 and again in extra time to Williams (3-2) in 2008. The Jeffs started off the 2010 campaign on the right foot, going 3-0-1 over the first two weeks of the season, yet struggled to find consistency throughout the remainder with a 3-6-1 showing before Sunday's first round victory. On offense, first year forward Amanda Brisco (Houston, Texas) has come on strong as of late for the Jeffs, scoring four of her team-best six goals over the last four games. Brisco was responsible for the decisive goal in the 64th minute of Sunday's win over Bowdoin, her third game-winner of the season. Senior forward Jackie Hirsch (Wilmette, Ill.) is one goal shy of her rookie teammate's totals, as the two are responsible for almost half of Amherst's scoring this fall.

Hoping to produce a few more monumental upsets will be eighth-seeded Bates (6-7-2, 2-6-1 NESAC). After squandering a 3-0 halftime lead at Colby in the season finale on Friday and falling 4-3 in overtime, Bates appeared destined for an early exit from this year's tournament with top-seeded Tufts on the docket. Instead, the Bobcats rose to the occasion and held their opponent scoreless through regulation and two overtimes. Junior goalkeeper Annie Burns (Topsfield, Mass.) made eight saves in the game, then came up big during the penalty kick session with two saves as Bates moved on with a 3-2 advantage. The Bobcats are making their fourth appearance in the semifinals this weekend, their most recent showing a 3-0 setback to Amherst in 2006. Bates' lone title came the year prior to that, as the fifth-seeded Bobcats posted back-to-back shutouts before upsetting top-seeded Tufts 2-1 in double-overtime. This season, Burns has seen the bulk of the minutes in net for the Bobcats, making 14 starts (4-7-2) with a 1.32 goals against average, a .806 save percentage, and three shutouts. Up front, junior forward Tina Tobin (Lowell, Mass.) paces a group of eight goal-scorers with four tallies and four assists. If Tobin and company can score against the Jeffs, it will be the first time for the Bobcats since 2006, as Amherst ran its shutout streak over Bates to 485 minutes in a scoreless draw on Sept. 12.

The team which everyone will be gunning for this weekend will be third-seeded Williams (10-3-2, 5-2-2 NESAC). The Ephs, who have more NESAC titles than any other team, are back looking for their fourth consecutive conference crown and fifth championship overall after downing Wesleyan in the quarterfinals on Sunday, 4-1. Williams has been dominant over the past few years, going unbeaten in league play over a stretch of 30 games before finally succumbing to a NESAC foe this fall in a 1-0 loss to rival Amherst on Oct. 2. A week later, the Ephs fell at Bates 2-1 before regrouping and finishing the final four matches on the conference slate unbeaten, including a 3-0 win over their semifinal opponent, Middlebury, on the final day of the regular season. For the fourth year in a row, Williams enters the semifinals with the top offense in the league, averaging 2.00 goals per game. That figure, however, is significantly lower than the 3.40 average the Ephs carried into the final rounds of the NESAC championship last November. Back for another tour of duty is junior forward Brett Eisenhart (Seattle, Wash.). Eisenhart added three more goals to her team-leading totals during the quarterfinals, becoming only the third player in tournament history to record a hat trick. Her 11 tallies rank second among all conference players and she needs only four more goals this season to tie the career-best 15 she scored a year ago. Not far behind Eisenhart on the Eph stat sheet is senior midfielder Sara Wild (Portland, Ore.). Wild's 19 points on five goals and a league-leading nine assists match what she produced last season but have come in five fewer games.

Saturday's second semifinal will be a rematch of the 2009 title game when the Ephs face fifth-seeded Middlebury (8-4-3, 4-3-2 NESAC). The two-time NESAC champs (2000, 2006) came close to winning a third crown last fall but fell short in a 3-2 Williams win. The Panthers' loss to the Ephs in the season finale sent them on the road in the quarterfinals, yet they bounced back with a 2-0 victory at Trinity, their fifth shutout over the last seven games. The win also extended Middlebury's streak of semifinal appearances to five, the longest active streak. Although the Panthers suffered their sixth consecutive loss to Williams in the lone meeting of the regular season, they did pick up wins over the other two semifinal teams. Down three to Amherst with under 10 minutes to play on Oct. 9, Middlebury staged a remarkable comeback to force overtime and then won the game in the extra session, 4-3. Two weeks later, the Panthers handed Bates a 2-0 loss. Assisting the Panthers in both of those victories was first year phenom Scarlett Kirk (San Francisco, Calif.). Kirk, who is first among conference rookies in scoring with a team-high seven goals, tallied her first three career goals in the victory over the Jeffs as she completed the hat trick with the overtime game-winner. She also chipped in a goal against the Bobcats and added to her late-season push for Rookie of the Year consideration with a goal in Sunday's first round win over the Bantams. Behind Kirk, senior goalkeeper Lauryn Torch (Bronxville, N.Y.) heads up a defensive unit that is tops among this weekend's field with an overall goals against average of 0.89. Torch owns a 6-3-3 record with five shutouts, a 0.98 goals against average, and an .829 save percentage. The two are part of a Panther squad in search of only their second tournament victory over the Ephs, who have won three previous playoff meetings and knocked Middlebury out via penalty kicks twice.

2010 NESAC WOMEN'S SOCCER CHAMPIONSHIP
Semifinals - Saturday, November 6 at Amherst
No. 8 Bates at No. 2 Amherst - 11:00 a.m.
No. 5 Middlebury vs. No. 3 Williams - 1:30 p.m.
Championship - Sunday, November 8 at Amherst
Semifinal winners - 12:00 p.m.