

2016 MIAC Football Preview and Preseason Coaches' Poll

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2016 MIAC FOOTBALL CONFERENCE PREVIEW

BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – It's hard to imagine a more unforgettable season than the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference's (MIAC) 2015 football campaign.

ESPN paid the MIAC visit, with a "SportsCenter On The Road" broadcast from Collegeville, Minn., in advance of the St. Thomas at Saint John's showdown. The game that followed broke the NCAA Division III attendance record, as 17,327 fans crammed into Clemens Stadium.

The same two teams represented the MIAC in the NCAA Division III Playoffs, where they collided again in the second round in front of 8,025 fans on the Tommies home field. UST prevailed in both matchups, and in each of its first 14 games en route to a spot in the Stagg Bowl. There, Head Coach Glenn Caruso's squad built a 14-0 lead, but came up just short of a national championship in a 49-35 loss to Mount Union.

But the highlights didn't end with the league's two Playoff representatives. Yet again, the MIAC led all of Division III in [football attendance](#) both overall (167,582) and per-game (3,286). On a per-game basis, the MIAC would have ranked fifth in Division II, and even averaged more fans than on Division I FCS Conference. This marked the fifth-straight season – and 10th time in the last 11 – that the MIAC led D-III in football attendance.

In Division III, the next-best conferences trailed the MIAC by 35,000 total fans, and nearly 500 fans per game. The MIAC had three schools rank among the top 10 in attendance in the nation, led by first-place Saint John's (53,372 total, 7,625 per game), No. 6 Concordia (21,697 total, 4,339 per game) and No. 10 St. Thomas (35,376 total, 3,931 per game).

That nation-leading fan total witnessed an outstanding season throughout the entire conference. During conference play, there were 12 games decided by 10 points or less. After the MIAC-leading Tommies and Johnnies, things were exceptionally even, with a pair of 5-3 teams (Concordia and Gustavus) and two more at 4-4 (Augsburg and Bethel) making for a deep, evenly-matched, and entertaining season.

So after all that, what does the MIAC collectively do for an encore? Many of the league's teams – including those at the top – will be breaking in new quarterbacks and many of the conference's top wideouts also graduated. However, there's star power back in the backfield and up front, the defenses look loaded and each team is excited about an influx of new talent, as the league's collective success has made the MIAC a desirable destination for incoming recruits and transfers alike.

COACHES CAST THEIR VOTES

Each of the past three seasons has produced a different champion in the MIAC, with St. Thomas winning a year ago, Saint John's taking the title the year prior to that, and Bethel winning in 2013. However, the MIAC head football coaches expect that trend to end in 2016, as they picked UST to repeat as conference champs. Caruso's crew received 63 points and seven of the nine first-place votes to sit atop the poll. St. Thomas also opens the season ranked No. 4 nationally with one first-place vote and 536 points in the D3football.com Preseason Top 25.

It's hard to argue with that logic as the Tommies return all kinds of talent from 2015's 14-1 squad (8-0 MIAC) that was a few plays away from the Division III crown. National Offensive Player-of-the-Year Jordan Roberts returns after rushing for 2,092 yards and 34 touchdowns a year ago. One of his top blockers is back in All-American tackle Will Hilbert and another All-American, defensive tackle Ryan Winter, returns to anchor the always-tough Tommie defense after earning the Mike Stam Award as the conference's top interior lineman a year ago.

The coaches once again tabbed Saint John's (10-2, 7-1 MIAC) to be UST's top contender, as SJU received the other two first-place votes and 58 points in the poll to finish second. Saint John's - ranked ninth in the nation by D3football.com - loses one of the best running backs in school history, Sam Sura, along with quarterback Nick Martin and standout tight end Nick Simon, but the Johnnie defense will be stacked. Linebacker Carter Hanson and defensive lineman Peyton Thiry are both back after earning All-American accolades in 2015, and receiver Evan Clark returns from an injury to give the offense an experienced playmaker to build around as it finds its identity.

Bethel slipped to .500 (5-5 overall, 4-4 MIAC) but the MIAC coaches expect a resurgence in Arden Hills, Minn., as they tabbed the Royals to finish third with 49 points. All-MIAC tight end Drew Neuville and offensive lineman Kevin Olson give the team a strong foundation up front, and senior defensive end Steven Plocker leads the always-tough Bethel defense. Quarterbacks Trey Anderson and Andrew Dzurik both



battled injury issues last season, but both should have ample weapons and opportunity to challenge UST and SJU at the top in 2016.

Concordia was slotted fourth – just five points back of Bethel – in the coaches' poll with 44 points, as the Cobbers come off a 7-3 overall season (5-3 MIAC) and spent much of the year either ranked or receiving votes. The team will have to replace some playmakers on the outside and at linebacker, but two-time All-MIAC tackle Josh Berg anchors a strong offensive line for All-MIAC Second Team running back Chad Johnson and starting quarterback Michael Herzog. Meanwhile, defensive back Matt Ahrndt returns to lead the defense after leading the team in tackles and fumble recoveries. Both Concordia and the Royals appeared in the "Others receiving votes" section of D3football.com's preseason Top 25 poll.

Each of the next two teams in the poll – Gustavus was fifth with 34 points and Augsburg was close behind in sixth with 30 – have to replace some of the most decorated quarterbacks and receivers in school history. Augsburg (5-5, 4-4 MIAC) said goodbye to MIAC Most Valuable Player Ayrtton Scott and Gustavus (7-3, 5-3 MIAC) graduated Mitch Hendricks at quarterback, and each team also lost an All-American wideout – Matt Boyce for Gustavus and Joey Sonnenfeld for Augsburg.

However, both programs are hopeful they can keep piling up points and yards while tightening up on defense. Gustavus has a trio of Second Team All-MIAC players back to lead each of the three phases in defensive lineman Casey Decker, offensive lineman Joe Theiler and kicker Brendan Boche. Augsburg's defense will be anchored by defensive back Matt Bowlin, while the offense will build around offensive lineman Andrew Konieczny and running back Tiras Bolton.

Hamline was picked to finish seventh with 21 points in the coaches' poll. The Pipers (4-6, 2-6 MIAC) will look to continue their recent improvement under first-year Head Coach Chip Taylor, who was elevated from his defensive coordinator position when Chad Rogosheske left for Capital (Ohio) University. Taylor added former Minnesota Quarterbacks Coach Jim Zebrowski and former Defiance Head Coach Brian Sheehan to his staff, which will be especially stout in the defensive backfield behind returning stars Anthony Hill and Zach Schwalbach.

The two Northfield rivals rounded out the poll's final two spots, separated by a single point, as Carleton (13) edged St. Olaf (12) for eighth place. Carleton (1-9, 0-8 MIAC) returns an experienced quarterback in Zach Creighton and some talented leadership on defense in All-MIAC First Team defensive tackle Peter Boerma and senior defensive back Dylan Saline. St. Olaf (2-8, 1-7 MIAC) loses leading rusher J.J. Strnad, but installed brand-new field turf in the offseason, and has high hopes fueled by receiver/returner Troy Peterson and wideout Connor Yahn on offense, while linebacker Colten Yahn returns to lead the Ole defense.

The [2016 season officially kicks off](#) on Sat., Sept. 3, with all nine teams in action against nonconference opponents. Each team will play a second nonconference game on Sat., Sept. 10, to tune up for the start of conference play on Sat., Sept. 17. From that date through Nov. 12, the league's nine teams will battle for the MIAC title, NCAA Playoff positioning, bragging rights, and much more.

The greatness of the 2015 season and the anticipation for the 2016 campaign add up to one prevailing sentiment throughout Minnesota's Division III conference: kickoff can't come soon enough.

A CLOSER LOOK

The rest of the 2016 MIAC Football Preview contains complete results from the 2016 Preseason Coaches' Poll, information about the 2016 MIAC Football Camp Tour, helpful links and a preview for each team submitted by their sports information director. The MIAC web site - www.miacathletics.com - will be an outstanding source for MIAC football news, schedules, scores, stats and more throughout the 2016 season.

Visit the [MIAC scoreboard](#) on game days to follow all the action, and download the [MIAC mobile app](#) to have all the information with you anywhere you travel. Also, connect to the conference on its [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#) pages for updates and interaction all season long.

2016 MIAC FOOTBALL CAMP TOUR

To help fans gear up for the 2016 season, MIAC Media embarked on a training camp tour to preview each of the conference's nine teams. Each stop on the tour includes action photos and a video featuring highlights from practice and interviews with head coaches and key players.

| [2016 MIAC Football Camp Tour](#) | [Photo Gallery](#) | [MIAC YouTube Channel](#) |

MIAC WEEKLY PODCAST PREVIEW

The MIAC Weekly podcast with Host Mike Gallagher is back with a new format, and an in-depth preview of the 2016 MIAC football season. Gallagher's two-part football preview began with the [Aug. 24, 2016, episode](#), and will conclude with the rest of the teams the following week, with new episodes posted on the [Podcast home page](#), and available as a free download on [iTunes](#).

2016 MIAC FOOTBALL PRESEASON COACHES' POLL

Coaches voted for every team in the conference except their own team. Points were assigned for each vote (eight for first, seven for second, etc.) Teams are ranked in order of highest point total to lowest with vote totals listed and first-place votes shown in parentheses.



2016 MIAC Football Preseason Coaches' Poll

Rank	Institution	Total
1	St. Thomas (7)	63
2	Saint John's (2)	58
3	Bethel	49
4	Concordia	44
5	Gustavus	34
6	Augsburg	30
7	Hamline	21
8	Carleton	13
9	St. Olaf	12

2016 MIAC FOOTBALL LINKS

| [2016 MIAC Schedule](#) | [2015 MIAC Statistics](#) | [MIAC Recordbook](#) | [MIAC Archives](#) |

TEAM-BY-TEAM PREVIEWS

Jump to: | [AUG](#) | [BU](#) | [CAR](#) | [CON](#) | [GAC](#) | [HU](#) | [SJU](#) | [STO](#) | [UST](#) |



AUGSBURG | [Auggies' football home page](#) |

Head Coach

- Frank Haege (12th season)

A Year Ago

- 4-4 MIAC (t-5th place) | 5-5 Overall

Players to Watch

- Matt Bowlin (DB, SR | 2nd on team in tackles in 2015 (63 total, 24 solo), also 2 TFL and 1 interception.)
- Tiras Bolton (RB, JR | Rushed 39 times for 304 yards and 3 TDs in 2015; 7.8 yards per-carry was tops on team.)
- Andrew Konieczny (OL, SR | All-MIAC Honorable Mention in 2015; 3-year starter on offensive line that helped Augsburg produce 503.8 yards of total offense per-game, while allowing just 10 sacks and 52 tackles for-loss.)

Did You Know?

- Quarterback Ayrton Scott, the 2015 MIAC Most Valuable Player, ended his career setting a new NCAA Division III record for rushing yardage by a quarterback (4,242 yards), while finishing second in Division III history in both total offense (14,523 yards) and total offense yardage per-game (363.1). He also set a new Division III record with 31 career games with 300-plus yards of total offense.
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BETHEL | [Royals' football home page](#) |

Head Coach

- Steve Johnson (28th season)

A Year Ago

- 4-4 MIAC (T-5th place) | 5-5 Overall

Players to Watch

- Drew Neuville (TE, Sr. | 2015 MIAC All-Conference, Two-time MIAC All-Conference Honorable Mention)
- Kevin Olson (OL, Sr. | 2015 MIAC All-Conference)
- Steven Plocker (DE, Sr. | 2015 MIAC All-Conference Honorable Mention)

Did You Know?

- Steve Johnson, the most tenured coach across the MIAC, enters his 28th season as Bethel's head football coach. Johnson, who is 197-88-1 (.693) coming into 2016, is ranked No. 3 among active NCAA Division III coaches in all-time wins. Prior to his arrival in 1989, Bethel had gone 116-227-6 (.338) since the program started in 1947.
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CARLETON | [Knights' football home page](#) |

**Head Coach**

- Bob Pagel (5th season)

A Year Ago

- 0-8 MIAC (9th place) | 1-9 Overall

Players to Watch

- Peter Boerma (DT, Sr. | All-MIAC First Team Defense; paced Knights' defense with 4.5 sacks, 6.5 tackles-for-loss, and 3 quarterback hurries; tied for fourth in the MIAC in sacks and was 12th in TFL)
- Dylan Saline (DB, Sr. | led the MIAC last season in solo tackles [5.4] and ranked third in total tackles [8.7]; also ranked among the conference's top five with 2 interceptions and 2 blocked kicks.)
- Zach Creighton (QB, Sr. | ranked second among MIAC quarterbacks in rushing [66.0 yards/gm] last season and fourth with a 59.6 completion percentage)

Did You Know?

- Carleton led the MIAC in fewest penalties (5 per game) last season.

**CONCORDIA** | [Cobbers' football home page](#) |**Head coach**

- Terry Horan (16th season)

A Year Ago

- 5-3 MIAC (T3rd place) | 7-3 Overall

Players to Watch

- Matt Ahrndt (DB, Sr. | 2016 All-MIAC 2nd Team; led the team in solo tackles & fumble recoveries)
- Chad Johnson (RB, Jr. | 2016 All-MIAC 2nd Team; led the team in rushing & scoring)
- Josh Berg (OT, Sr. | 2-time MIAC All-Conference; 3-year starter)

Did You Know?

- Concordia has been in the Top 10 in Division III in attendance in 10 of the past 11 seasons.

**GUSTAVUS** | [Gusties' football home page](#) |**Head Coach**

- Peter Haugen (8th season)

A Year Ago

- 5-3 MIAC (T3rd place) | 7-3 Overall

Players to Watch

- Casey Decker (Defensive line, Jr. | 2015 Second Team All-Conference ... 29 total tackles in 2015 ... 7 tackles for loss ... 3.5 sacks ... 24 punts with an average of 34.6 yards)
- Joe Theiler (Offensive line, Sr. | 2015 Second Team All-Conference ... blocked for a 2015 MIAC-leading 319.2 passing yards per game and a 58% third down conversion rate)
- Brendan Boche (Kicker, Jr. | 2015 Second Team All-Conference ... made a school record 55-of-58 extra points (95%) ... set a school record with 49 consecutive extra points made)

Did You Know?

- The 2016 campaign marks the 100th season of Gustavus football. Gustavus's official seasons are 1902-03, 1917-1942, and 1945-present. The Gusties have compiled an all-time record of 486-346-21 and a mark of 383-251-13 in the MIAC with 22 conference championships.

**HAMLIN** | [Pipers' football home page](#) |**Head Coach**

- Chip Taylor (1st season)

A Year Ago

- 2-6 MIAC (7th place) | 4-6 Overall

Top Returners

- Anthony Hill (Sr., DB) First team All-MIAC in 2014; Second team All-MIAC last year; 251 tackles, 5 INT in three year career
- Zach Schwalbach (Sr., DB) Second on team last year with 59 tackles; Also had an INT and a fumble recovery; 83 solo tackles last two seasons.
- Kyle Johnson (Jr., P-QB) Second team All-MIAC Special teams last year; 65-98-5 with 7 TDs as QB.

Did You Know?

- The Pipers have two former head coaches – Jim Zebrowski (Lakeland, also assistant at Wis-Whitewater and U-Minnesota) and Brian Sheehan (Defiance) on their staff as assistants.

SAINT JOHN'S | [Johnnies' football home page](#) |



Head Coach

- Gary Fasching (4th season)

A Year Ago

- 7-1 MIAC (2nd place) | 10-2 Overall

In the 2015 Postseason

- W, 51-7 vs. Dubuque (Iowa) in NCAA Division III first round; L, 19-38 at St. Thomas in second round

Players to Watch

- Carter Hanson (LB, Sr. | 2016 preseason All-American...2016 AFCA Good Works Team nominee...2015 D3football.com All-America honorable mention...2015 CoSIDA Academic All-American...two-time D3football.com All-West Region second-team honoree...two-time All-MIAC first-team selection...started all 12 games and finished second on the team, by one tackle, with 97 stops (35 solo) in 2015...collected six tackles for a loss, 1.5 sack, an interception, two forced fumbles and a fumble recovery for a touchdown...begins his senior season this fall seventh in school history with 119 career solo tackles)
- Peyton Thiry (DL, Sr. | 2016 preseason All-American...2015 D3football.com All-America honorable mention...2015 D3football.com All-West Region and All-MIAC first-team selection...started all 12 games for the Johnnies at defensive tackle and led the team in tackles for a loss (10.5), quarterback sacks (7) and quarterback hurries (9)...led the MIAC with 5.5 sacks in conference play and finished third with 7.5 tackles for a loss)
- Evan Clark (WR, Sr. | 2014 D3football.com All-West Region as a returner...had six catches for 84 yards and three touchdowns in eight quarters of play before suffering a season-ending arm injury in 2015...ran a laser-timed, 40-yard dash in 4.44 seconds Aug. 14)

Did You Know?

- SJU's Gary Fasching is off to the best start, in regard to wins, by any head coach in the program's history. His 27 wins (27-7 record, .794) are the most by any SJU football coach over either three seasons or 34 games, topping college football's all-time wins leader, John Gagliardi (19-6 in first three seasons and 23-10-1 in first 34 games at SJU).



ST. OLAF | [Oles' football home page](#) |

Head Coach

- Craig Stern (4th season)

A Year Ago

- 1-7 MIAC (8th place) | 2-8 Overall

Players to Watch

- Troy Peterson (WR, Jr. | Had team-best 59 receptions for 565 yards and three TDs in 2015... Was top return man, with 15 kick returns and 11 punt returns... Averaged 10.2 yards/return on punts.)
- Colten Yahn (LB, Sr. | Led linebackers with 40.5 tackles, including 3.0 for a loss... Had a pair of pass break ups.)
- Connor Yahn (WR, Sr. | was second on team with 28 receptions... Let team in yards per catch, 17.9... Had two TDs.)

Did You Know?

- St. Olaf installed turf at Manitou Field this summer... The Mondo system integrates grass-like blades, elastic underlayment, and infill materials that absorb 30 percent less heat than black rubber infill systems to improve hot playing conditions... The system also employs post-consumer non-toxic recyclable materials.



ST. THOMAS | [Tommies' football home page](#) |

Head Coach

- Glenn Caruso (9th season)

A Year Ago

- 8-0 MIAC (MIAC Champs) | 14-1 Overall, NCAA runner-up

In the 2015 Postseason

- NCAA postseason results (4-1: beat La Verne, 57-14; beat St. John's, 38-19; beat Wabash, 38-7; beat Linfield, 38-17; lost to Mount Union, 49-35)

Players to Watch

- Jordan Roberts (RB, Sr. | 2015: All-America, D-III Offensive Player of Year, 34 rushing TDs led all players among 660 NCAA teams; 2,092 rushing yards and 355 carries broke 25-year-old school records.)

- Will Hilbert (OT, Sr. | 2015: All-America, will start for fourth year; blocked for 100-yard rushing performances 13 times and nine QB 250-plus yard passing days; helped UST's active streak of 19 games scoring 30 or more points)
- Ryan Winter (DL, Sr. | 2015: All-America, MIAC Stam Award recipient, 28 solo, 18 assisted tackles, 12 TFL (seven sacks); one interception, returned for TD; one forced fumble, one recovered fumble)

Did You Know?

- Currently at 593 all-time victories, St. Thomas is looking to become the first Division III institution to reach or surpass 600 football wins, 1,600 men's basketball wins, and 1,100 men's hockey wins.

[MIAC Football Home Page](#)