

2019 MIAC Football Preview and Preseason Coaches' Poll

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BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – For the first time in four seasons, the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) football coaches have tabbed Saint John's University as the preseason favorite to claim the conference championship. The Johnnies received seven first-place votes and 63 points to land the top spot in the MIAC football coaches' annual preseason poll, released on Thursday.

Saint John's won its MIAC-record 33rd conference title and advanced to the NCAA national quarterfinals in 2018. Fourteen starters from last year's 12-1 squad are back this fall, including All-America guard **Dan Greenheck** and quarterback **Jackson Erdmann**. As a junior last season, Erdmann was named the Gagliardi Trophy winner as Division III's most outstanding player after leading Division III in passing efficiency (189.8), passing touchdowns (47), and points responsible for (290), while setting single-game program records for passing yards (470 on Oct. 13 vs. St. Thomas) and passing touchdowns (7 on Nov. 10 vs. Thomas More). Saint John's will open the year ranked No. 3 in the nation in [D3football.com's Preseason Top 25 Poll](#). SJU's non-conference schedule includes a road matchup at Wis.-Stout on opening weekend and a home game against Rose-Hulman to close out the regular season.



St. Thomas is second in the MIAC Preseason Coaches' Poll with 56 points and a pair of first-place votes. The Tommies - ranked No. 7 in [D3football.com's Preseason Top 25](#) - went 8-2 in 2018, missing the NCAA Playoffs for just the second time in the last decade, with the team's only losses coming against national quarterfinalists and conference rivals Saint John's and Bethel. St. Thomas is set to return an experienced lineup in 2019, however, with 16 starters back, along with a 31-man senior class. Among those returners is running back **Josh Parks**, who enters his final season as a Tommie with 39 touchdowns in 32 career games. The preseason All-American has posted 15 career 100-yard rushing performances and 11 breakaways of 45 yards or more during his time at St. Thomas. The Toms are set to host NAIA's Trinity International on opening weekend and will close out the month of September and their non-conference schedule at Wis.-Eau Claire on September 28.

Bethel picked up 52 points in the preseason balloting for a third-place finish in the MIAC Coaches' Poll. The Royals will open the year ranked No. 10 in the nation after enjoying a deep run in the 2018 NCAA Playoffs. Despite the losses of key graduating defensive standouts Kyle Kilgore and Dawson Brown - both of whom found their ways into [NFL mini-camps this past spring](#) - the Royals figure to be contenders again in 2019 and beyond with rising sophomore quarterback **Jaran Roste** behind center. Roste cracked the starting lineup midway through September last season and never looked back, crossing the 1,000-yard mark as both a passer and runner while reaching paydirt 20 times on the ground in 2018, tying for the fifth-most rushing touchdowns in all of Division III last year. Roste and the Royals will host Simpson on opening weekend before crossing the border for matchup with Wis.-River Falls to close out Bethel's non-conference schedule.

Concordia collected 43 points to lock down the No. 4 spot in the Preseason Coaches' Poll. The Cobbers went 5-5 overall with a 4-4 mark in conference play, making it 12 consecutive seasons of finishing .500 or better in both overall and league contests. Two-time [D3football.com](#) Preseason All-America linebacker **Alex Berg** is back in the lineup for one final go-round as a Cobber after an injury put a premature end to his 2018 campaign. Berg led Concordia in solo tackles, tackles for loss, and quarterback hurries, in addition to tying for the team lead in total tackles, during his last full season in 2017. The Cobbers are set for perhaps the toughest non-conference schedule of any MIAC team to start the year, with games scheduled against No. 4-ranked Wis.-Whitewater, as well as Wis.-La Crosse, which received 71 votes in [D3football.com's](#) preseason poll.

Gustavus is No. 5 in the Preseason Coaches' Poll with 36 points. The Gusties - who went 6-4 overall and 5-3 in conference play in 2018 - return three of their four First Team All-MIAC honorees from a season ago, including All-Region tight end **Brayton Finch**. The rising senior captain proved to be among the more versatile players in the league last season, accumulating 533 all-purpose yards as both a runner and receiver in 2018. Finch carried the ball 47 times for 171 yards and three scores in addition to 362 yards and five touchdowns on 39 receptions. Finch also served as the team's punter and handled kickoffs. Gustavus will host Martin Luther and head to Wis.-Stout for its non-conference contests in 2019.

St. Olaf got off to a hot start last season, going 5-0 for the first time since 2007. The Oles will face those same five opponents to begin the 2019 campaign before getting a bye week to prepare for three consecutive contests against preseason national top-10 opponents (No. 3 Saint John's, No. 10 Bethel, and No. 7 St. Thomas). Running back **Khayleb Willis** was a key part of the team's early success last season, eclipsing the 100-yard mark on the ground three times against conference foes, including a pair of 150-plus-yard games. St. Olaf will battle Crown and Luther in non-conference action to start the year.

Carleton got things moving in the right direction during Tom Journell's first season at the helm last fall. After ranking last in the conference with a red zone touchdown conversion rate of 63 percent in 2017, the Knights made a massive jump all the way up to second in the MIAC, scoring touchdowns on 74 percent of its trips to the red zone last season. The Knights also took care of business on the defensive side of the ball, thanks in part to the play of rising junior defensive back **Travis Brown**. Brown ranked second among all MIAC defenders with 12 pass breakups on the year and was the only player in the conference to score touchdowns on both an interception and punt return last season. Carleton will challenge Macalester and Lawrence in non-conference contests next month.

Augsburg went undefeated in non-conference play for the second consecutive season last year but suffered a devastating blow early on when quarterback **Quinn Frisell** went down with a season-ending injury in just the second game of the year. Frisell - who led all MIAC passers with 26 scoring strikes in 2017 - is poised to return in 2019 and figures to play a key role in helping the Auggies get back to the quick-strike form that translated into plenty of big plays during his last season behind center. Augsburg is set to take on Ripon and Concordia-Wis. in its non-conference games to open the year.

Hamline will need to fill its most glaring hole on offense following the end of Justice Spriggs' record-breaking four-year run at quarterback. However, three of the team's top four leading rushers from a season ago are back to help ease the transition to a new QB, including rising sophomore **Triston Thomas**, who tied for the longest rush from scrimmage by any conference back last season at 93 yards and led all MIAC return men with 620 kickoff return yards in his debut season. The Pipers will kick off the 2019 season under the Thursday night lights at home against Buena Vista on September 5 before taking on crosstown rival Macalester the following weekend to close out Hamline's non-conference schedule.

Complete 2019 Preseason Coaches' Poll

Coaches voted for every team in the conference except their own team. Points were assigned for each vote (8 for first, 7 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.

2019 MIAC Football Preseason Coaches' Poll

Rank	Institution (First-Place Votes)	Total
1.	Saint John's (7)	63
2.	St. Thomas (2)	56
3.	Bethel	52
4.	Concordia	43
5.	Gustavus	36
6.	St. Olaf	29
7.	Carleton	19
8.	Augsburg	17
9.	Hamline	9

Around the MIAC

-The MIAC continues to lead the nation in NCAA Division III football attendance. A total of 146,077 fans attended the 50 football games hosted by the MIAC's nine football teams in 2018, an average of nearly 3,000 fans per game. Saint John's, Bethel, and Concordia all ranked among the top 10 attendance leaders in Division III last season.

-All nine head coaches from the 2018 season are back on the sidelines in 2019, marking the first time in four seasons that the MIAC did not see any head football coach turnover. Bethel's **Steve Johnson** is the conference's longest-tenured head coach, with the 2019 season being his 31st on the Royals' sideline. Only four other active MIAC head football coaches - Concordia's **Terry Horan** (16th season), Augsburg's **Frank Haeger** (15th season), St. Thomas' **Glenn Caruso** (12th season), and Gustavus' **Peter Haugen** (11th season) - have been at their current programs for more than a decade.

-Former Saint John's wide receiver **Blake Elliott** is back on the College Football Hall of Fame ballot for the seventh year in a row. Elliott was a member of the MIAC's last national championship football team in 2003 and finished his career with a trio of NCAA Playoff records and 29 SJU highs. At one point, Elliott had more consecutive games with a reception (47) than any player in college football history. Elliott also holds MIAC records for receiving touchdowns in a season (15) and a career (45) and hauled in more balls (369) in overall games played than any MIAC receiver ever.

For the Record

The MIAC continues to overhaul its sport record books to provide a better historical perspective of the Conference and the accomplishments of its student-athletes over the last century. The 90-page MIAC Football Record Book contains annual Conference championship information, year-by-year standings, all-time award winners, individual and team records, NCAA Playoff history, and more. The information included in the 2019 Record Book is based on available data and research for additional historical documents is ongoing. The 2019 MIAC Football Record Book is now available for download [here](#).

Celebrating a Century

The MIAC will celebrate its 100-year anniversary throughout the 2019-20 season. The conference's Centennial celebration will highlight the many outstanding moments, memories, and individuals who helped build the MIAC over the last century. Initiatives will include student-athlete, coach, and administrator spotlights, historical photos showcasing the evolution of MIAC sports and teams through the years, recognition of former MIAC student-athletes who continued their time in the conference as coaches and administrators, and more. The official #MIAC100 webpage will be housed at <https://www.miacathletics.com/miac100>.