

2017 MIAC Men's Soccer Preview and Preseason Coaches' Poll

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BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – Fresh off the program's first outright Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) championship since 1993, the University of St. Thomas men's soccer team is projected to make it two in a row, as MIAC coaches ranked the Tommies No. 1 in the annual Preseason Men's Soccer Coaches' Poll.

St. Thomas became just the second program in MIAC history to reach the NCAA national semifinals last season. To reach that plateau again, the Tommies will need to find a way to replace 2016 MIAC Player of the Year Mark Heydt, but several key contributors will be back in the lineup to pick up the slack, including battle-tested seniors **Shae Bottum** and **Christian Elliehausen**, who both drilled three game-winning goals a season ago. Ranked third in the nation by the United Soccer Coaches earlier this month, expectations are as high as ever for the Tommies heading into 2017.

Last season's preseason favorite and runner-up in the MIAC Playoff Championship, Macalester College heads into 2017 ranked No. 2 in the Preseason Coaches' Poll.

The Scots outshot St. Thomas 13-6 in last year's title game, but could not sneak the ball past St. Thomas goalkeeper **Aiden Hogan**. The Scots will look to rising senior and 2016 All-MIAC midfielder **Jake Burke** for veteran leadership, while junior midfielder **Jamel**

Benhamida and sophomore defenseman **Max Kent** – both honorable mention All-Conference selections last year – will look to play an even more prominent role in 2017.

Augsburg University earned the nod at No. 3 in this year's Preseason Coaches' Poll. Despite finishing with a .500 record in Conference play last season (4-4-2), the Auggies enter 2017 with a talented and experienced lineup – one that pushed the top-ranked Tommies to the limit in overtime during last year's MIAC Playoffs. Midfielder **Ebesa Hamid** was also an All-MIAC selection as a sophomore a season ago and figures to play an even bigger role for this year's squad. Under the radar no longer, the Auggies are poised to be real contenders in 2017.

Coming in at No. 4 in this year's Preseason Men's Soccer Coaches' Poll is Gustavus Adolphus College. The Gusties will celebrate 50 seasons of men's soccer in 2017 and with a pair of All-Conference players back in the lineup, could be celebrating even more this year. The most decorated program in MIAC men's soccer history returns senior midfielder **Matt Murakami** and junior forward **Arthur Parens**, along with junior goalkeeper **Matt Bateman**, who finished second in the MIAC with four shutouts and a .906 save percentage in Conference play last year.

Saint John's enters the 2017 campaign ranked fifth in the Preseason Men's Soccer Coaches' Poll. A program with five consecutive trips to the MIAC playoff semifinals, the Johnnies always seem to be in the mix, and this season should be no different. Junior midfielder **Zack Boerjan** came on strong last season, earning a spot in the starting lineup eight games in and finishing with 13 points in Conference play, second only to MIAC Player of the Year, Mark Heydt. Goalkeeper **Nicholas French** was also a bright spot for Saint John's last season, earning credit for five wins as a freshman.

Complete 2017 Preseason Coaches' Poll

Coaches voted for every team in the conference except their own team. Points were assigned for each vote (10 for first, 9 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.



2017 MIAC Men's Soccer Preseason Coaches' Poll

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Institution</u>	<u>Total</u>
1.	St. Thomas (10)	100
2.	Macalester (1)	88
3.	Augsburg	73

4.	Gustavus	66
5.	Saint John's	65
6.	Carleton	62
7.	St. Olaf	56
8.	Hamline	38
9.	Bethel	27
10.	Concordia	16
11.	Saint Mary's	14

Around the MIAC

-Honorable mention All-MIAC selection **Austin Peterson** quickly made a name for himself in his first season at Concordia in 2016. A defender for the first two-thirds of the year, Peterson made the jump to the front line for the stretch run, totaling a team-high five points in Conference play last season.

-The Hamline Pipers enjoyed the program's first winning season in nine years with a final record of 9-6-2 in 2016. The Pipers are down just one senior from last year's roster and return All-MIAC defender **Oscar Campbell**, as well as honorable mention selections **James Reardon** and **Adam King**.

-Saint Mary's three honorable mention All-MIAC selections in 2016 – **Sean Butcher**, **Garrett Grunke** and **Jared Wolt** – combined to score as many goals in Conference play (6) as the entire Cardinal team had in each of the previous two seasons. All three return to the lineup as seniors this season to aid a Cardinals squad that compiled its highest win total (8) since 2002 last year.

Can't-Miss #MIACtion

-*Sept. 30, 2017: St. Thomas at Macalester.* The return match from last season's MIAC Playoff Championship figures to be another close call between the Conference's projected top teams. Both squads have significant holes to fill, but with the last two recipients of the MIAC Coach of the Year award – Gregg Olson and Jon Lowery – patrolling their respective sidelines, expect this one to come down to the wire once again.

-*Oct. 11, 2017: St. Olaf at Carleton.* A pair of teams separated by two miles and six Poll points clash in a matchup that will likely have repercussions well beyond Northfield, Minn. Two second-half goals propelled the Knights past the Oles in last season's meeting, while the squads battled to a thrilling 3-3 tie in 2015.

-*Oct. 14, 2017: Gustavus at Saint John's.* One point is all that separated the Gusties and Johnnies in the Preseason Coaches' Poll and one goal has been the difference in each of their last three regular season meetings. This matchup between perennial playoff contenders should be one to keep an eye on.

2017 MIAC Men's Soccer Playoffs

The 2017 MIAC Men's Soccer Playoffs will feature the Conference's top six teams from the regular season in a single-elimination, high-seed host tournament. The top two seeds receive byes to the semifinals, while teams seeded No. 3-6 will square off in the quarterfinals. The two quarterfinal games will take place Tuesday, Oct. 31, the two semifinal games will follow on Wednesday, Nov. 1, and the championship is set for Saturday, Nov. 4. The winner will receive the MIAC's automatic bid to the 2017 NCAA Division III Men's Soccer Tournament.

For the Record

-Two-time MIAC Coach of the Year Greg Holker has become the winningest men's soccer coach in Augsburg history with a career record of 122-95-28. His 122 wins are more than the combined wins for Augsburg in the 25 seasons prior to his arrival in 2004. The 2017 MIAC Men's Soccer Record Book is available for download [here](#).

Odds and Ends

-Bethel finished above .500 for the first time since 2011 and third time since 2004, boasting a 5-1 record in nonconference play last season.

-Carleton has reached the MIAC postseason each of the last 10 seasons, twice as long as the Conference's next-best streak in men's or women's soccer.

-St. Olaf plays four teams ranked in the United Soccer Coaches' Preseason Top 25, including St. Thomas (No. 3), Carthage College (No. 22), Luther College (No. 23) and Wisconsin-Whitewater (No. 25).