

2011 MIAC Softball Season Preview & Coaches' Poll

Posted: Mar 29, 2011

ST. PAUL, Minn. – The 2011 Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) softball season will spend the early part of the schedule battling the lingering winter that has hampered field conditions throughout the league. However, once the action gets going the battle for the conference title and the league's four playoff spots more than make up for the season's weather-hampered start.

The MIAC softball coaches predict there will be some familiar faces at the top, although a new contender could emerge to challenge for conference supremacy, and the race for a spot in the postseason could be just as intriguing with numerous teams entering the season with playoff hopes.



The team atop the 2011 MIAC Softball Preseason Coaches' Poll should come as no surprise, as the University of St. Thomas was tabbed as the favorite to win its 17th conference title and its 10th in the last 12 years. The Tommies, who received nine first-place votes and 119 points, have won more conference title (16) than the rest of the league combined (15), and with a 13-4 nonconference record thus far in 2011, they've already shown why the coaches have pointed to them as the favorites to repeat.

However, St. Thomas will be challenged by a familiar foe and a rising upstart. Gustavus – which has won the two titles the Tommies didn't in the past 11 years (2003, 2009) – received a pair of first-place votes and are officially the No. 1 contender with 102 points. The final first place vote went to Saint Mary's, which finished tied for fifth a year ago, and could take another big step forward in 2011 with a lot of talent back in the lineup. The Cardinals finished third with 91 points.

However, the battle to make the top four and earn a spot in the playoffs could feature more than half the league. Bethel was picked fourth by the coaches, just a point behind Saint Mary's with 90. Hamline (79), Augsburg (77) and St. Olaf (70) finished fifth-through-seventh, respectively, and all have realistic postseason hopes this season. Saint Benedict (51) and St. Catherine (38) hope to get involved in the playoff race as well, while Macalester (28), Carleton (25) and Concordia (22) head into conference play with plenty to prove.

One could be quick to point out that another Tommies' title will have to come following the graduation of last season's MIAC Player (**Alison Wright**) and Pitcher (**Marta Radcliffe**) of the year – who were both All-Americans. But **John Tschida** has plenty of talent back in his 11th season, starting with senior All-American **Sydney Marquardt** (.440, 38 RBI, 32 runs) and All-Region pick **Erica Wilson** (.431, 41 runs, 19 steals). **Cristy Gries** will assume Radcliffe's role as the No. 1 starter after going 9-2 with a 1.43 ERA a year ago, and infielders **Kimmy Hassel** and **Kayla Boward** will also be expected to continue their development as the St. Thomas dynasty tries to add another MIAC trophy to its case.

Gustavus also has a few questions on the mound, but a lot to look forward to with what's coming back, including the league's most talented – and experienced – infield. **Kristen Prunty**, **Emily Wendorff** and **Lisa Klass** all hit above .340 last year and were all named to the MIAC's All-Conference team. Sophomore **Kate Rentschler** looks to be the team's top hurler after graduating a pair of veteran pitchers a year ago, and **Jenny Ewert** appears poised for a breakout season in the outfield.

Saint Mary's could be on the verge of permanently joining the MIAC's upper echelon with its returning nucleus of talent. The Cardinals return eight starters and their top six hitters from a year ago, and add an influx of talented players to that core in 2011. All-MIAC selections **Kellie Simons** (.353) and **Katy Gannon** (.338) and **Erin Stenseth** (.350) headline Saint Mary's returners, and if Saint Mary's can be more consistent this season, it could find itself in the conversation for a playoff spot – and the MIAC title.

Bethel tied its school record for overall (23) and MIAC (14) wins last season, and it hopes to set the bar even higher in 2011. The Royals have a pair of star seniors in position to lead a team that features good experience and some talented newcomers. Shortstop **Kelly Berg** – and All-MIAC selection last year – and pitcher **Rebecca Akerson** will both try to close their record-setting careers with outstanding senior seasons.

Hamline, Augsburg and St. Olaf were all in contention for the playoffs a year ago, with the Oles earning the fourth and final spot, and all three expect to be in the mix again in 2011. The Pipers will be led by All-MIAC and All-Region IF **Heidi Larsen** in her senior season, and talented sophomore OF **Bethany Hine**. Augsburg has a pair of All-Conference infielders back in its lineup this year in senior **Jessica Hinz** and sophomore **Bri Dorale**, and MIAC Rookie-of-the-Year **Jessica Wilson** and All-Conference Honorable Mention selections **Katie Truax** (P) and **Cara Lemmon** (OF) will be the main characters trying to take St. Olaf back to the postseason.

Saint Benedict will rely on an experienced team in 2011 with an eye towards playoff contention as well. Junior **Emma Alwin** (P) and seniors **Carissa Hancock** (C), **Devin Bowlin** (IF) and **Alyssa Kubesh** (OF) lead a veteran Blazers' team this year. Meanwhile, St. Catherine welcomes back 2009 All-MIAC and All-Region honoree **Jess Kneifel** after injuries shortened her 2010 season, and All-MIAC pick **Kelsey Luedtke** is also back to help lead the Wildcats into the playoff race in 2011.

Macalester hopes change is a good thing with 10 first-year players on the roster and only three experienced players back this year. One of those players, junior **Amanda Knopf**, pitched in 20 games a year ago and **Courtney Nussbaumer** also saw a lot of action in 2010. Carleton will again be led by **Kelsey Parsons**, who hit .412 and earned All-MIAC honors during her spectacular freshman campaign a year ago. Concordia will count on a pair of All-MIAC returnees, **Kesley Jones** and **Kaia Sele**, to get the Cobbers headed in the right direction in 2011.

The MIAC conference schedule was slated to begin on Wednesday, March 30, but weather conditions have postponed most of those games at least a few days. After completion of the 22-game MIAC schedule, the top four teams in the final conference standings will earn berths in the 2011 MIAC Softball Playoffs, where the conference's automatic bid to the 2011 NCAA Division III Playoffs will be on the line. The double-elimination MIAC Playoffs will take place May 6-7, and will be hosted by Bethel and St. Thomas.

The rest of the 2011 MIAC Softball Preview contains complete results from the 2011 MIAC Softball Preseason Coaches' Poll, information on the 2011 MIAC Playoffs, links to schedules, stats and more, and links to team-by-team previews for all 12 teams.

2011 MIAC Softball Preseason Coaches' Poll

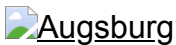
Coaches voted for every team in the conference except their own team. Points were assigned for each vote (11 for first, 10 for second, etc.) Teams are ranked in order of highest point total to lowest with vote totals listed and first-place votes shown in parentheses.

2011 MIAC Softball Preseason Coaches' Poll		
Rank	Institution	Total
1	St. Thomas (9)	119
2	Gustavus (2)	102
3	Saint Mary's (1)	91
4	Bethel	90
5	Hamline	79
6	Augsburg	77
7	St. Olaf	70
8	Saint Benedict	51
9	St. Catherine	38
10	Macalester	28
11	Carleton	25
12	Concordia	22

2011 MIAC Playoffs: Friday & Saturday, May 6-7 at Bethel and St. Thomas (Top four teams - double elimination)

| [2011 MIAC Schedule](#) | [2011 MIAC Statistics](#) | [2010 MIAC Statistics](#) | [MIAC Recordbook](#) | [MIAC Archives](#) |

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Coach: Tim Gormley (5th season)

2010 Finish: 7th (11-11 MIAC, 21-19 overall)

Augsburg Season Preview

With an experienced lineup, including four all-conference selections, returning this season, prospects are good for continued improvement for the Augsburg College softball team in 2011. Twelve letterwinners, including eight starters, are back for an Auggie squad that went 21-19 overall, 11-11 in MIAC play last season -- the second 20-plus-win season in head coach Tim Gormley's first four years with the Auggies.

Shortstop Jessa Hinz (SR, Richfield, Minn.) and outfielder Bri Dorale (SO, Ramsey, Minn./Anoka HS) return after earning All-MIAC honors last year. A three-year starter, Hinz had the best year of her career in 2010, hitting .338 with 15 extra base hits, 15 RBI, a .496 slugging percentage and a .385 on-base percentage. Hinz has a .291 career batting average. Dorale hit a team-best .367 last year with 44 hits, 37 runs scored, a .449 on-base percentage and a conference-leading 31 stolen bases in 35 attempts.

Jennifer Castillo (SR, Minneapolis, Minn./Washburn HS), a 2008 All-MIAC selection and 2010 All-MIAC honorable-mention selection, is back at third base for the Auggies. She hit .295 in 2010 and is a .351 career hitter.

Back behind the plate is Brittney Bruzek (SR, Alexandria, Minn./Jefferson HS), also a 2010 All-MIAC honorable-mention selection. Bruzek set a single-season school record with 40 RBI last year, en route to a .350 campaign. She had six home runs, a team-best .598 slugging percentage and a .421 on-base percentage.

Kylee Persing (JR, Mound, Minn./Mound-Westonka HS) will take over the primary pitching duties for the Auggies. Persing produced a 9-6 record with a 3.50 ERA and 65 strikeouts in 22 appearances last year.

Other returning starters for the Auggies include outfielder Laura Strandell (SR, Pine Island, Minn.), second baseman Stephanie Saxe (JR, Stacy, Minn./North Branch HS) and outfielder Allyson Ruedy (SO, Waseca, Minn.). Strandell hit .212 with four extra-base hits last year, Saxe hit .236 with six extra-base hits and Ruedy hit .275.



Bethel

Coach: Rod Radcliffe (7h season)

2010 finish: 3rd (14-8 MIAC, 23-20 overall)

Bethel Season Preview

After a 2010 season in which the Bethel softball program made another stride forward, the Royals look to yet again improve and take their performance up another notch in the MIAC. In 2010 the Royals tied school records for wins in a season (23) and conference wins (14), earning them a top-three finish in the MIAC standings. The Royals played in their second ever conference playoff tournament in which they played three games before their season came to an end. Kelly Berg (South Haven, Minn.), Lauren Habisch (Lakeville, Minn.), and Ashley Lindberg (Sartell, Minn.) earned spots on the All-Tournament Team for their outstanding play against very strong competition.

For their 2011 campaign Bethel returns just over a dozen experienced varsity athletes to lead a core of young new potential. Head Coach Rod Radcliffe will again take the helm for the Royals in what will be his 7th season. The Bethel program has continually taken steps to improve each year of Radcliffe's tenure.

Bethel will be looking for senior leadership from two players who have previously earned selections to the MIAC All-Conference team. Shortstop Kelly Berg (Sr., South Haven, Minn), set the school single season and career home record as a sophomore, and doubles record as junior; and Rebecca Akerson (Sr., Lakeville, Minn.), who set the single season record for low ERA in 2009. Berg also went on to be honored as 1st Team All-Region selection.

As in years past, there is plenty of excitement surrounding the 2011 softball team. But despite the recent success of the Royals, Head Coach Rod Radcliffe wants his team to stay firmly grounded and has a simple philosophy: "Our focus stays consistent each year - we want the athletes to have a great experience, be very competitive in the conference, and prepare their lives spiritually for when they leave Bethel," said Radcliffe.



Carleton

Coach: Amy Erickson (14th season)

2010 Finish: 12th (3-19 MIAC, 6-30 overall)

Carleton Season Preview

The Carleton softball team will once again be full of young faces, but with their top two returners just sophomores, the Knights hope to make strides forward in 2011 and improve on last year's finish.

Sparking the offense for the Knights will be sophomore infielder Kelsey Parsons (Golden Valley, Minn./Hopkins). One of just three rookies named to last year's All-MIAC first team, Parsons led all conference players with a .480 on-base percentage, while pacing the Knights in batting average, slugging percentage, total bases, RBIs, and walks. Parsons hit .412 during conference contests, ranking eighth among players with more than 75 MIAC plate appearances. A disciplined hitter, she will look to improve her power in 2011 while also adding greater range at one of the middle infield positions.

Classmate Chelsea Yost (Bemidji, Minn.) will help Parsons anchor the lineup while also leading Carleton's pitching staff. The Knights' only returning hurler, Yost posted a 3.44 ERA over 116 innings in 2010, while ranking third in the MIAC with 100 strikeouts. Playing first base when not on the mound, she was second on the team in batting average and will provide a steady bat in the middle of the lineup this year.

Another sophomore returning to head coach Amy Erickson's starting lineup is catcher Jocelyn Friedman (Mount Kisco, N.Y./Fox Lane), who led the squad in home runs a year ago and tied Parsons for the RBI lead. She will look to improve her offensive output in 2011 while helping the Knights' rookie pitchers adjust to the college game.

Joining Parsons on the infield will be promising first-year Jenny Ramey (Cottage Grove, Minn./New Life Academy). An all-state pick and two-time state champion for the Eagles, she can play any infield position and will compete to fill the third base spot vacated by graduated All-MIAC star Michael Johnson.

Meanwhile, Carleton's outfield will be a source of veteran experience, with senior Alex Schefter (Mt. Vernon, Iowa) and junior Dana Mackey (Hingham, Mass.) returning to starting spots in left and center field, respectively.

On the mound, first-years Kaitlin Bagley (Duluth, Minn./Denfeld), Jenny Forster (Ledyard, Conn.), and Katrina Harper (Columbia Heights, Minn.) will help Yost shoulder the pitching load.



Concordia

Coach: Megan Johnson (3rd season)

2010 Finish: 9th (8-14 MIAC, 11-28 overall)

Concordia Season Preview

Concordia is hoping a strong finish in 2010 will lead to success in 2011. The Cobbers won three of their last four games from a year ago and were victorious in four of their last seven games and will be looking to parlay that success at the start of the 2011 campaign.

The Cobbers' had several newcomers last year step up at the end of the season and help the team win their final two games. The biggest newcomer impact came from the bat of Kaia Sele (So., Bemidji, Minn.) who finished her freshman season with a .347 average and was named to the MIAC All-Conference Honorable Mention Team. She was third on the team in hitting and led the team in home runs and RBI. Sele hit safely in the final 10 games in 2010 and had at least one hit in 12 of the final 13 games. During that time she hit .430, had three home runs and a slugging percentage of .750.

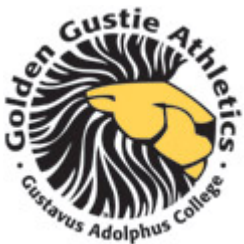
Sele is one of the two top returning hitters from 2010. Junior Kesley Jones (Billings, Mont./Billings West HS) was second on the team in hitting with a .376 average. She earned MIAC postseason honors for the second straight year as she was named to the MIAC All-Conference Team. Jones was tied for the team lead in hitting in conference play in 2010. She hit .419 in 22 league games and was tied for ninth in the conference in average. She led team in on-base percentage with a .471 mark and was second in home runs (3), RBI (13) and slugging percentage (.629). Jones hit safely in 16 of the 22 MIAC games. She also had at least one hit in eight of the last nine games of the year and also 10 of the final 12. During that stretch she had six multiple-hit games.

Jones will also anchor the Cobbers' pitching staff in 2011. She was the team's top pitcher for the second straight year last season. She won four games in the MIAC and threw 68.1 innings. Jones was fourth in the MIAC in appearances (17) and was tied for the league lead in games finished (7). She has 202 strikeouts in her first two seasons in the circle for the Cobbers.

A pair of sophomores, who came on at the end of their freshmen seasons, will be counted on to help the Cobbers in 2011. Joelle Link (Hardin, Mont.) and Kelly Tasky (Brooklyn Park, Minn./Champlin Park HS) both hit over .270 last year. Tasky, the team's starting center fielder, hit .302 in 2010 and finished the year by hitting .529 in her last seven games. Link hit safely in nine of the last 13 games and had a .325 average during that stretch. She finished the year second on the team in doubles and tied for third in stolen bases.

Link will also add depth to the Cobber pitching staff. She went 2-0 with a 3.68 ERA in her final six appearances in 2010.

The biggest challenge for Concordia will be the unpredictability of the weather and the ability to get outside after their annual Florida spring break trip. The Cobbers will play 14 games in Clermont, Fla. at the end of February before returning home for their northern opener on Mar. 26. Concordia might not get back outside until the end of March and will have to fit their entire MIAC season into three weeks of play. If CC can carry over the success they had at the end of 2010 and improve at the start of 2011, then they have a chance to improve on their ninth-place finish from 2010.



Gustavus

Coach: Jeff Annis (6th season)

2010 Finish: 2nd (18-4 MIAC, 30-13 overall)

Gustavus Season Preview

The Gustavus softball team begins its MIAC campaign on Wednesday, April 30th against Bethel with the hopes of returning to the top of the conference in 2011. The Gusties, who have finished in the top-two the last five seasons, will first need to develop a new identity on the mound after graduating veteran pitchers Betsie Collins and Callie Nelson. The Gusties have relied on sophomore Kate Rentschler (Lakefield, Minn.), senior Erin Truebenbach (Mapleton, Minn.), and first year Bethany Flohrs (Ornsby, Minn.) in the early going this season. Rentschler has seen the majority of innings thus far, starting 10 games and going 5-5 with an ERA of 4.36.

Behind the plate, the Gusties will feature the veteran combination of seniors Dani Cattrysse (Mankato, Minn.) and Kelly Myers (Lakeville, Minn.). The pair split catching responsibilities last season with Cattrysse hitting a team-high .400 in 65 at bats. Myers is currently hitting .364 and has thrown out 3-of-4 runners attempting to steal, while Cattrysse is hitting .235 and has gunned down 3-of-7 runners.

Seniors Kirsten Prunty (New Ulm, Minn.) and Emily Wendorff (Prior Lake, Minn.), and junior Lisa Klass (Richfield, Minn.) make up the core group of returning infielders. Wendorff (.382), Klass (.378), and Prunty (.347) finished the 2010 season ranked second, third, and fourth, respectively, on the team in hitting, while also earning a spot on the MIAC All-Conference Team. Wendorff will anchor the infield at first base, as she is currently hitting .343 with a team-high six RBI and just one error. Klass will be Gustavus' utility player in the middle-infield, and Prunty will make the transition from shortstop to third base. Klass is hitting .343 with a fielding percentage of .957, while Prunty is hitting .217 and has made just one error. Others expected to compete for the last spot in the infield include sophomores Amber Hohenstein (Garden City, Minn.) and MacKenzie Dalton (Edina, Minn.) and first-year Caitlin Whitney (Waseca, Minn.).

In the outfield, senior center fielder Jenny Ewert (St. James, Minn.) is the only lock. Ewert made just two errors in the outfield and hit .326 last season. She is currently batting .417 with a team-high 15 hits. Head Coach Jeff Annis expects senior Amy Lynch (Watertown, Minn.), sophomores Sam Breneman (Sherburn, Minn.) and Jen Ulmen (Hokah, Minn.), and rookies Jenny Doeden (New Hope, Minn.) and Emily Gruhlke (Zimmerman, Minn.) to battle for the remaining two outfield spots.

The main goal for Annis' squad is to get back into the top-four in the conference, win the MIAC Tournament, and get back to the NCAA Regionals. He feels that this year's group will be solid offensively with a lot of depth and versatility throughout the diamond.



Hamline

Coach: Jim Rubbelke (4th season)

2010 Finish: Tied 5th (13-9 MIAC, 19-19 overall)

Hamline Season Preview

The 2011 Hamline University softball team features a core group of five seniors who will look to make a strong impact on a line-up that is younger overall than last year's edition, and head coach Jim Rubbelke sees a great deal of competition for key positions as the MIAC season begins.

The Pipers took on their toughest spring break schedule in Rubbelke's tenure, and came out of the week with a 6-6 record, including winning their final four games in Florida. The team will be looking to carry that momentum into the MIAC season – whenever the fields are clear enough to play!

Rubbelke graduated his starting battery of pitcher Jessalyn Weaver and catcher Ashley Anderberg, as well as a strong infielder in Brenna Healy. However, the Pipers are not without talent in those positions this spring, with a strong returning pitcher and new faces battling for time behind the plate.

Kelsey Tacheny (Sr., Saint Paul, Minn.) returns to lead the Piper pitchers after posting an ERA of 3.65 in 66.2 innings pitched over 16 appearances last season. In addition to leading the pitching staff, Tacheny is the Pipers' lead-off hitter, and will be in the line-up for every game regardless of her role on the rubber.

A pair of first-years in Bianna Vela (Kenosha, Wis.) and Lauren Clouston will also look to take some innings for the Pipers.

Behind the plate, a sophomore, Jackie Brigl (Roseville, Minn.) and a first-year, Lauren Turitto (West St. Paul, Minn.) will compete for time. Both are athletic two-sport athletes (hockey and basketball, respectively), with Turitto bringing a great deal of power to the Pipers as a hitter.

Hamline's infield will be anchored by senior Heidi Larsen (Andover, Minn.), who was a 2010 NFCA Midwest Region third team honoree and an All-MIAC player last year. She hit .363 with 20 RBI, including a .412 batting average in MIAC play, last season. Larsen spent the first three years of her career at second base, but is transitioning over to shortstop as she closes out her career at Hamline.

A trio of players – Laura Randall (So., Fridley, Minn.), Clouston, and Tacheny - will rotate at third base while sophomore Kara Poirier (Eau Claire, Wis.) and senior Lori Moldan (Sleepy Eye, Minn.) will share the duties at second base. Erin Farley (Sr., Saint Paul, Minn.) will round out the Piper infield with her steady presence at first base.

In the outfield, two things seem certain – 2010 All-MIAC honorable mention player and Hamline female rookie of the year Bethany Hine (Carver, Minn.) will be a fixture in center field and senior Kristi Gravem (Maplewood, Minn.) will lock down the left field position. In right field, Rubbelke sees a rotation of strong players, and he makes use of a deep roster with several players who could fit into his starting line-up.

The key to the Pipers' success this year will come from the strong senior leadership Rubbelke has in Tacheny, Larsen, Farley, Moldan, and Gravem, all of whom will be familiar faces in the Piper line-up each day. Hamline just missed the playoffs at the end of the 2010 season after posting a record of 19-19, 13-9 MIAC, and this senior corps looks to finish their career with extra games in May.



Macalester

Coach: Tom Cross (8th season)

2010 Finish: Tied 10th (4-18 MIAC, 8-32 overall)

Macalester Season Preview

This year's Macalester softball team will have a new look as the roster features 10 first-year players. Only three players have college playing experience. The campaign got underway with 14 games over Spring Break March 12-20 in Clermont, Florida, and the Scots returned with a 7-7 slate.

Amanda Knopf (Jr., Boulder, Colo.) returns after having 20 pitching appearances last season and is Mac's most experience player. She'll also play first base. Courtney Nussbaumer (So., Brookfield, Wis. / East) appeared in 35 games last year and will play in the outfield and at third base. Hayley Reeves (Sr., Oberlin, Ohio) returns after two years off and will play shortstop.

The Scots welcome a strong first-year class to the roster. Cleo Nagy (Fy., Eugene, Ore. / Henry D. Sheldon) and Allie Dautrich (Fy., Mansfield Center, Conn. / E.O. Smith) should play key roles in the outfield.

The infield will have a different look, depending on who is pitching. Pitching candidates, in addition to Knopf, include Alisha Barritt (Fy., Oklahoma City, Okla. / Bethany) and Meghan Merriman (Fy., Warroad, Minn.). Macalester infielders, in addition to the pitchers, include Lily Alexander (Fy., Takoma Park, Md. / Montgomery Blair) and Sarah Blau (Fy., Encino, Calif. / Oakwood).

The catching duties will be held by strong prospect Katie Fuller (Fy., Boulder, Colo.), while other top newcomers include utility player Amelia Franklin (Fy., Hyattsville, Md. / Eleanor Roosevelt), outfielder Rebecca McCrory (Fy., Seattle, Wash. / Univeristy Prep) and outfielder Lia Morone (Fy., Morris, Pa. / Liberty). Also looking to contribute will be Haley Yerxa (So., St. Paul, Minn. / Geneva) and Raynise Cange (Fy., Brick, N.J. / Marine Academy).

"The theme for this team is improving every day," says head coach Tom Cross. "We want to play solid defense and get timely hitting.



Saint Benedict

Coach: Denny Johnson (25th season)

2010 Finish: 8th (9-13 MIAC, 14-22 overall)

Saint Benedict Season Preview

The 2011 College of Saint Benedict softball team will rely on a number of upperclassmen as they look to improve on their eighth place finish in the MIAC last season. CSB finished the 2010 season with a 9-13 record in the MIAC and a 14-22 record overall. The Blazers return five senior and two junior starters from last year's team and also welcome a large first-year class of 12 players.

Junior pitcher Emma Alwin returns to lead the Blazers on the mound. As a sophomore, Alwin recorded nine wins and a 4.22 ERA while striking out 42 batters in 103.1 innings. Senior catcher Carissa Hancock returns after starting all 36 games last year. The Blazers will rely on first-year pitchers, Rachel Nelson, Trisha Johnson, and Amanda Eaton, to provide depth on the mound.

In the field, the blazers also return plenty of experience. Seniors Kristen Herges and Devin Bowlin return to anchor the CSB infield. Herges recorded a .283 batting average last season, while Bowlin received All-MIAC honorable mention in 2009. Also returning is junior Sierra Dooley, who batted .324 last season. Junior Lis Wieneke is also back after starting 21 games last year. First-year Stacy Svihel will be counted on to provide depth at multiple infield positions.

Seniors Abby Richardson and Alyssa Kubesh will lead the Blazer outfield after starting every game last season. Richardson recorded 28 hits including eight extra base hits in 2010, and Kubesh hit .280 with a team-high 20 RBIs. Junior Kristi Schammel and first-year Nicole Kirkvold will compete for the third outfield spot.

The Blazers finished their spring trip to Florida with a 4-8 record. Four of those losses came were one-run games. CSB will open up the MIAC schedule with a doubleheader at St. Olaf on March 30th.



St. Catherine

Coach: Madge Makowske (16th season)

2010 Finish: Tied 10th (4-18 MIAC, 9-28 overall)

St. Catherine Season Preview

The Wildcats will head into the 2011 season with a renewed effort to make a run for the play-offs. The MIAC conference provided a tough run in the 2010 softball season.

After struggling with injuries and bat production in 2010, the upside for 2011 will be the return of a healthy roster, led by NFCA Third Team All-Region and MIAC All-Conference player Jess Kniefel. Kniefel led the team in both stolen bases and batting average in 2009 and into 2010 before injury forced her to miss part of the season. Other key returners will be MIAC All-Conference honoree Kelsey Luedtke and starting pitchers Kayla Bergerson and Morgan Bohmbach.

The Wildcats welcome a strong incoming first-year nucleus made up of pitcher Courtney Stender, infielder Alyssa McKee, and outfielders Emilie Burton and Alyssa Luedtke, all of whom received All-Conference accolades in high school. Coach Makowske hopes the Wildcats will build on the solid foundation of veteran players and be electrified by the new young talent. Depth will be an asset for the Wildcats in 2011, as they take to the field with the largest roster in school history. The combination of returning veterans, talented newcomers, and added roster depth should translate into play-off opportunities.

The team will play one game at the Star Dome prior to spring break and then open up a ten game Arizona stint where they will face a number of regionally ranked opponents. The Wildcats will host their first 2011 home double header on Wednesday March 30 at 4pm against Carleton, pending cooperation from Minnesota weather.



Saint Mary's

Coach: Jen Miller (5th season)

2010 Finish: Tied 5th (13-9 MIAC, 16-24 overall)

Saint Mary's Season Preview

The Saint Mary's University fastpitch softball team has plenty of reasons to be excited about the 2011 season — the biggest of which is the amount of experience the SMU squad will be returning from last year.

Eight players started in at least half of SMU's 40 games last season, when the Cardinals finished 16-24 overall.

"We return starters at virtually every position," said coach Jen Miller, in her fifth season at the helm. "When we consider the experience we are returning — plus the talented newcomers — we are very excited about the season."

The Cardinals return their top six performers at the plate from last season — all of which hit over .300. Those players include senior Joanna Mangan (Chicago, Ill. / .375), senior Kellie Simons (Richfield, Minn. / .353), sophomore Erin Stenseth (Eau Claire, Wis. / .350), senior Katy Gannon (Roselle, Ill. / .338), senior Mallory Betzold (Farmington, Minn. / .303) and sophomore Paige Carter (Rosemount, Minn. / .302).

Simons and Gannon both earned All-MIAC honors last season, while Betzold and Mangan were All-MIAC honorable mention. Simons and Stenseth were both named to the NFCA/Louisville Slugger Third-Team All-Midwest Region.

"We should be pretty comfortable and confident at the plate this season," Miller said. "And defensively, we think we will be solid — the trick will be playing consistently and performing up to our ability."

"We struggled with consistency last year," added Miller. "One day we shut out the top team in the conference and then the next day we turned around and lost a doubleheader to a team in the middle of the pack."

Gone from last season are Hanna Schmitt, who played in 39 of SMU's 40 games in either the DP role or at second base, and Angie Diercks, who played in 33 games mostly at first base.

Anchoring the infield this season will most likely be Simons at third base, Gannon at shortstop, junior Nicole Olson (New Brighton, Minn.) at second base and Betzold at first base — when she's not pitching. Mangan and sophomore Julie Bartosz (Mokena, Ill.) will be counted on to handle the majority of the catching duties, while Betzold should lead the squad from the mound. Returning outfielders include Carter in centerfield, Stenseth in left field and Bartosz in right field.

"While we do have a lot of returners coming back, probably the most exciting part is the fact that we also have a lot of younger players that we are counting on to step in and play some key roles this year," Miller said. "If we can find the right mix of players and stay healthy — we feel we have a ton of potential."

The Cardinals will be looking to return to the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference Tournament after missing it by one spot the last three years.

"Getting into the conference tournament is definitely our main goal," Miller said. "We think this team is capable of making a strong run in the playoffs."



St. Olaf

Coach: Ruthie Neuger (7th season)

2010 Finish: 4th (14-8 MIAC, 19-21 overall)

St. Olaf Season Preview

The St. Olaf softball team hopes to ride momentum it built over the final half of 2010 in its quest for a second straight MIAC playoff berth.

The Oles reached the MIAC playoffs last season as the fourth seed, finishing 14-8 in league play. The team rallied around a youthful group of position players, including MIAC rookie of the year Jess Wilson. Wilson hit .385 in MIAC play with a league-high 11 doubles, three homers and 23 RBIs.

The Oles lost four-time All-MIAC infielder Ali Berens to graduation but have Wilson and six other starters poised to get the team back to the postseason. Cara Lemmon, who hit .425 in league play as a first year in 2010 returns after earning All-MIAC honorable mention honors.

In the outfield, the Oles will have plenty of experience. Senior Kjirsten Speer returns as a four-year starter. Speer was All-MIAC honorable mention as a first year and hit .277 last season. Wilson will likely play left field with Julie Fergus opposite her in right.

The infield will be anchored by senior first baseman Melanie Brooks.

Brooks hit .303 last season and made only three errors in over 250 chances. Three sophomores will likely play the other three spots - Lemmon and Kirstee Rotty at second or third and Mackenzie Wolter at short. Esti Zimmerman could also see some at bats and play second or third base.

The catching duties will be held mostly by sophomore Maggie Scholer, who hit .337 in 30 games last season. Kari Zimmermann could also see some time behind the dish.

St. Olaf will look to a pair of seniors, Katie Truax and Natalee McNeff, for the majority of the pitching responsibilities. Each posted the best seasons of their career last year. Truax was 9-8 (3.86 ERA) and McNeff 7-9 (3.47 ERA).



St. Thomas

Coach: John Tschida (11th season)

2010 Finish: 1st (21-1 MIAC, 40-8 overall)

St. Thomas Season Preview

St. Thomas softball continued three long streaks in 2010. UST finished 40-8, including wins in 20 of its last 22 games, and posted its seventh consecutive 40-win season (and 11th consecutive 30-win season).

The Tommies also won the MIAC playoffs for the seventh year in a row, and made the NCAA playoffs for the seventh consecutive season and 14th time in 15 seasons.

The Tommies graduated a deep senior class, led by two All-Americans -- OF Alison Wright (266 hits, 155 RBI on career) and RHP Marta Radcliffe (68-14 career W-L, 533 Ks.).

The 2011 roster has seven seniors among 18 returners, plus 11 freshmen.

Leading returners include:

- Senior All-American Sydney Marquardt (.440 BA, 56 hits, 38 RBI and 32 runs in 44 games in 2010).
- Senior All-Region OF Erica Wilson (.431 BA, 66 hits, 41 runs, 20 RBI, 14 extra-base hits, 19 steals in 2010).
- Junior OF Becky Eischens (.319 BA, 44 games, 25 steals, 37 hits, 30 runs, no errors in 34 chances in 2010).
- Junior 3B Kayla Boward (.347 BA, 35 hits in 41 games in 2010).
- Sophomore 2B Kimmy Hassel (.287 BA, 35 hits, 21 runs, 14 RBI in 48 games in 2010).
- Junior RHP Cristy Gries (9-2 with a 1.43 ERA in 2010).
- Senior RHP-utility Cassie Smith (.319 BA, 15 hits, 15 RBI, no errors in 44 chances in 2010).

Tschida has 613 career wins in 10 seasons with the Toms and six with St.

Mary's. He's won 85% of his games (613-106) to rank first nationally among all NCAA softball or baseball coaches -- active or retired. He's the only NCAA softball coach to win national titles at two different schools.

The Tommies come into the March 30 conference opener at St. Mary's with a

13-4 overall record. The Toms appear to have several offensive weapons and have the potential to have another strong defensive team. The key will be the development of the pitchers and their ability to avoid walks. As many as five pitching prospects could be a factor led by junior Christy Gries.