

# 2017 MIAC Softball Preview and Preseason Coaches' Poll

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## 2017 MIAC Softball Conference Preview

BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – The Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) enjoyed an outstanding, competitive season of softball in 2016 and, with the 2017 set for its first pitch, hopes are high around the league for even more success across the diamonds of Minnesota.

It was yet another banner year for the University of St. Thomas, which won the MIAC regular-season and Playoff titles, and added NCAA Regional and Super Regional championships as it advance to the Division III World Series. Head Coach John Tschida's club finished 43-8 overall and 20-2 in conference play to claim MIAC title No. 21 overall, which was the programs sixth in the last seven seasons, and its 14th conference crown since 2000.

Gustavus, Hamline and St. Catherine also enjoyed outstanding seasons in 2016, as that trio joined the Tommies in the MIAC Playoffs. The Gusties went 26-12 overall and 17-5 in conference play to finish second and the Pipers (26-17) and Wildcats (34-11) each went 15-7 in the MIAC to share third place. St. Kate's added a magical postseason run to its breakout season as well, as the Wildcats met UST in the MIAC Playoff championship and forced a seventh and final game, and then received an NCAA at-large bid, where they continued their hot streak into the Regional Championship game as well, just missing putting a second MIAC team in the Super Regional.

Bethel and Saint Mary's also challenged for spots in the postseason, as each finished .500 or better in league play. The Royals were 18-20 overall but 12-10 in the MIAC to finish fifth, with Saint Mary's (22-16, 11-11 MIAC) in sixth place. Saint Benedict also had a solid season at 22-18 overall and 10-12 in the conference in 2016, and Augsburg went .500 overall (20-20) and 9-13 in MIAC play a year ago.

St. Olaf occupied ninth place in the MIAC standings with an 8-14 MIAC mark (14-19 overall). Macalester grabbed the final spot in the top 10 with a 13-27 overall record and 6-16 MIAC record. Concordia nearly had a .500 campaign with an 18-22 overall record (5-17 MIAC) and Carleton (10-28, 4-18 MIAC) rounded out the 2016 standings.

The 2017 isn't far off. First pitch for two of the MIAC's teams will happen Friday with four more starting Saturday in dome events in Rochester and Dundas, Minn. With plenty of talent back, several new coaches in the mix – four, to be exact – and high hopes swirling around the league, the season can't start fast enough.

## COACHES CAST THEIR VOTES

After last season's success, the MIAC coaches predict that St. Thomas is again the team to beat, as the Tommies received 10 first-place votes and 120 total points to lead the 2017 MIAC Softball Preseason Coaches' Poll. Though MIAC Rookie- and Pitcher-of-the-Year Kierstin Anderson-Glass will likely miss the season due to injury, St. Thomas is strong in the outfield with the return of Melissa Barry (.424) and Dana Connelly (.375) and Brenna Walek returns at 1B/DH to provide the power in the lineup.

St. Catherine and MIAC Coach-of-the-Year Colleen Powers were one of the league's brightest success stories a year ago, and the coaches picked them to be the Tommies' top challenger with two first-place votes and 109 points in the poll. MIAC Player-of-the-Year Robyn Rohr is no longer entrenched at shortstop for the Wildcats, but star pitcher Krista Flugstad returns, as do talented infielders Kylie Macziewski and Ashley Sis, to give St. Kate's a trio of juniors ready to lead the way in 2017.

The coaches again expect Gustavus (103 points) and Hamline (94 points) to be in the Playoff picture in third and fourth in the Coaches' Poll, respectively. New Gustie Head Coach Britt Stewart has three-time All-MIAC pitcher Hannah Heacox back to lead the way, along with versatile All-MIAC standout Jena Willis and infielder Emily Webb. Hamline also has a trio of senior stars back to complete their careers in two-time All-Region 2B Mary-Clare Couillard, All-MIAC pitcher Sarah DeMars, and P/OF Casey Anderson.

Saint Benedict (78 points), Saint Mary's (69 points) and Bethel (67 points) just missed the Playoffs a year ago, but the coaches expect that trio to be in contention in 2017 in fifth, sixth, and seventh, respectively. Saint Ben's has an All-MIAC trio of Megan Toninato (OF), Sara Wennerstrand (C/IF) and Kate Deming (OF) back to lead the Blazers. Saint Mary's brings back All-MIAC senior Ashley Betzold along with Brittney Birkhauser and Kathi Opsahl in 2017 to put plenty of pop back in its lineup, and the Royals return 3B Wendy Roberts, pitcher Anna



1. ST. THOMAS
2. ST. CATHERINE
3. GUSTAVUS
4. HAMLINE
5. SAINT BENEDICT
6. SAINT MARY'S
7. BETHEL
8. AUGSBURG
9. MACALESTER
10. ST. OLAF
11. CONCORDIA
12. CARLETON

Nichols and catcher Megan Bode as Bethel aims to return to contention just a year removed from its first MIAC title.

The coaches all expect Augsburg (44 points), Macalester (40 points) and St. Olaf (40 points) to be evenly matched in 2017, with Augsburg in eighth and Macalester and Olaf sharing ninth place in the poll. First-year Head Coach Melissa Lee has All-MIAC standout Brianna Cline and Carly Dropik back in her outfield, and star P/IF Samantha Anderson back as well to bolster the Auggie lineup during Lee's debut season on the bench. Macalester also has optimism thanks to the return of All-MIAC P/IF Morghan Bean, OF G.G. Gunther and P Sophie Migacz, and the Oles bring back two-time All-MIAC OF Jessica Bentley and talented IF/C Emily Carr for first-year Head Coach Kayla Hatting.

Concordia received 23 points and Carleton had 16 points as those two teams rounded out the coaches predictions for 2017. The Cobbers have a new head coach in Chad Slyter, and he welcomes back All-MIAC pitcher Abigail Haraldson, Honorable Mention OF Madison Little and infielder Sydney Roberts. The Knights also hope for bigger and better things in 2017 with the return of All-MIAC and All-Region outfielder Anna Lauko, All-MIAC C/IF Molly Stteinberg and versatile P/IF Sam Kile.

### A CLOSER LOOK

The rest of the 2017 MIAC Softball Preview contains complete results from the 2017 Preseason Coaches' Poll, MIAC Playoff details, helpful links and a preview for each team submitted by their sports information director. The MIAC web site - [www.miacathletics.com](http://www.miacathletics.com) - will be an outstanding source for MIAC softball news, schedules, scores, stats and more throughout the 2017 season.

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

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### 2017 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.

2017 MIAC Softball Preseason Coaches' Poll		
Rank	Institution	Total
1.	St. Thomas (10)	120
2.	St. Catherine (2)	109
3.	Gustavus	103
4.	Hamline	94
5.	Saint Benedict	78
6.	Saint Mary's	69
7.	Bethel	67
8.	Augsburg	44
T9.	Macalester	40
T9.	St. Olaf	40
11.	Concordia	23
12.	Carleton	16

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### 2017 MIAC Softball Playoffs

The 2017 MIAC Softball Playoffs will again have the No. 1 seed serving as host for the entire four-team, double-elimination tournament. If the No. 1 seed is unable to host, the right to host will be offered to No. 2, No. 3 and then No. 4. The 2017 edition will be held May 5-7. There will be two games on Friday, May 5, three on Saturday, May 6, and up to two title games on Sunday, May 9. The winner will receive the MIAC's automatic bid to the 2017 NCAA Division III Softball Tournament.

| [2017 MIAC Softball Playoffs Home Page](#) |

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### MIAC Softball Links

| [Website](#) | [Standings](#) | [Schedule](#) | [Statistics](#) | [News](#) | [Athletes-of-the-Week](#) | [Recordbook](#) | [Archives](#) |

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### MIAC Team-by-Team Previews

| [AUG](#) | [BU](#) | [CAR](#) | [CON](#) | [GAC](#) | [HU](#) | [MAC](#) | [CSB](#) | [SCU](#) | [SMU](#) | [STO](#) | [UST](#) |

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



### Head Coach

- Melissa Lee (1st season)

### A Year Ago

- 9-13 MIAC (8th place) | 20-20 Overall

### Players to Watch

- Brianna Cline (OF, JR | All-MIAC in 2016; Hit .415 with 29 runs, 16 2B, 4 3B, 30 RBI, 16 BB, 14-of-15 SB, .619 slugging pct. and .485 on-base pct.; Ranked 4th in MIAC in batting avg. and on-base pct., 2nd in 2B and 3B.)
- Samantha Anderson (P/INF, SO | Single-season school record 157 strikeouts while walking 42 in 125.2 IP in 2016, 13-5 record, 2.73 ERA, .236 opponent batting average; 8.57 strikeouts per-game led all MIAC pitchers.)
- Carly Dropik (OF, SO | Hit .315 with 30 runs, 6 2B, 2 3B, 9 RBI, .405 slugging pct., .420 on-base pct. and 24-of-29 SB in 2016; 24 stolen bases was tied for MIAC lead in 2016.)

### Did You Know?

- Melissa Lee, a 2004 Augsburg alumnae, was named the fourth head coach in Augsburg softball history in June. She has served as an assistant coach for the past 12 seasons for the Auggie softball program, in addition to serving as an assistant athletic director and as an instructor in Augsburg's Health and Physical Education department. Lee was considered one of the best defensive third basemen in Augsburg softball history during her career, starting every game and every inning of her collegiate career -- 141 games, 141 starts and 964 innings.



## BETHEL | [Royals' softball home page](#) |

### Head coach

- Penny Foore (3rd season)

### A Year Ago

- 12-10 MIAC (5th place) | 18-20 Overall

### Players to Watch

- Wendy Roberts (3B)
- Anna Nichols (P)
- Megan Bode (C)

### Did You Know?

- The Royals have averaged 3.0 MIAC All-Conference recipients since 2011 thanks to 14 honorees over the last four seasons. Caroline Kivisto's award in 2016 made her one of six Bethel players to receive the award at least three times.



## CARLETON | [Knights' softball home page](#) |

### Head coach

- Amy Erickson (20th season)

### A Year Ago

- 4-18 MIAC (12th place) | 10-28 Overall

### Players to Watch

- Anna Lauko (OF, So. | Selected to NFCA All-Midwest Region Team and voted to All-MIAC squad; as a rookie led MIAC players in stolen bases (24) and was second in batting average (.436) and on-base percentage (.496); started all 38 games last season, hitting safely in 31 of them including 16 multi-hit affairs.)
- Molly Steinberg (C/IF, Jr. | All-MIAC selection in 2016; . Finished third in the MIAC with .417 batting average during the regular season, sixth with a .462 on-base percentage, and 10th with her .571 slugging percentage; spent time in 2016 at catcher, first base, shortstop, and third base.)
- Sam Kile (P/IF, So. | Led the Knights with 2 home runs and 22 RBI; tied for second on the squad with 3 wins and ranked sixth among MIAC hurlers with 6.49 strikeouts/7 innings.)

### Did You Know?

- Anna Lauko's stellar rookie season led to her being the Knights' first All-Region selection since 2000.



## CONCORDIA | [Cobbers' softball home page](#) |

### Head coach

- Chad Slyter (1st season)

### A Year Ago

- 5-17 MIAC (11th place) | 18-22 Overall

### Players to Watch

- Abigail Haraldson (P, Sr. | 2016 MIAC All-Conference; led the MIAC in strikeouts in conference games; broke the school record for strikeouts in a single season )
- Madison Little (OF, Sr. | 2016 MIAC All-Conference Honorable Mention; led the team in batting average, hits and stolen bases in 2016)
- Sydney Roberts (IF, So. | Led the team in home runs, total bases and slugging pct. In 2016; broke the school record for home runs in a single season)

### Did You Know?

- Cobber senior pitcher Abigail Haraldson has an extra rib.
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## GUSTAVUS | [Gusties' softball home page](#) |

### Head coach

- Britt Stewart (1st season)

### A Year Ago

- 17-5 MIAC (2nd place) | 26-12 Overall

### In the 2016 Postseason

- Lost to Hamline in an elimination game as the No. 2 seed in the MIAC playoffs.

### Players to Watch

- Hannah Heacox (P, Sr. | Three-time All-Conference)
- Jena Willis (UT, Sr. | 2016 All-Conference)
- Emily Webb (IF, So. | 2016 All-Conference Honorable Mention, returning hits leader)

### Did You Know?

- Britt Stewart, a former assistant at Southwest Minnesota State University, enters her first season as the Gustavus softball head coach, becoming the seventh all-time head coach in the program's 48-year history.
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## HAMLIN | [Pipers' softball home page](#) |

### Head coach

- Jim Rubbelke (10th season)

### A Year Ago

- 15-7 MIAC (T-3rd place) | 26-17 Overall

### Players to Watch

- Mary-Clare Couillard (IF, Sr., Hit .407 last year, All-MIAC, All-Region, CoSIDA Academic AA for second year in a row)
- Casey Anderson (Sr., P-OF, Went 13-7 last year with just 19 walks in 128.2 IP, Batted .333 with 4 HR)
- Sarah DeMars (Sr., P, 13-10 last year, Named to All-MIAC and All-Tournament team)

### Did You Know?

- The Pipers had four players -- Couillard, Anderson, Abbie Annen and Jamie Rubbelke (who graduated) -- on the MIAC All-Academic Team last year.
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## MACALESTER | [Scots' softball home page](#) |

### Head coach

- Jody Gabriel (6th season)

### A Year Ago

- 6-16 MIAC (10th place) | 13-27 Overall

### Players to Watch

- Morghan Bean (INF/P, JR | All-MIAC in 2016; .333 BA, 42 H, 7 HR, 35 RBI)
- G.G. Gunther (OF, JR | .362 BA, 29 R, 46 H, 20 RBI, 18 SB)
- Sophie Migacz (P, SO | 10-12, 135.0 IP, 89 K, MIAC Pitcher of the Week 4/25)

### Did You Know?

- Last season the Scots out-homered MIAC opponents, 10-8, with returnees Morghan Bean (5), G.G. Gunther (2) and Nikki Caicedo (2) accounting for nine of those home runs.
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## SAINT BENEDICT | [Blazers' softball home page](#) |

**Head coach**

- Rachael Click (5th season)

**A Year Ago**

- 10-12 MIAC (7th place) | 22-18 Overall

**Players to Watch**

- Megan Toninato (OF, Jr | All-MIAC, All-Region Third Team, 2nd in MIAC w/52 hits in 2016)
- Sara Wennerstrand (C/IF, Jr | All-MIAC, All-Region Third Team, 2nd in MIAC w/45 RBIs, 4th in MIAC w/15 doubles in 2016)
- Kate Deming (OF, So. | All-MIAC, 3rd in MIAC w/55 hits)

**Did You Know?**

- CSB has won at least 20 games in each of head coach Rachael Click's first four seasons.

**ST. CATHERINE** | [Wildcats' softball home page](#) |**Head coach**

- Colleen Powers (4th season)

**A Year Ago**

- 15-7 MIAC (T-3 place) | 31-10 Overall

**In the 2016 Postseason**

- MIAC Postseason Results (2<sup>nd</sup> place, def. Gustavus 4-2, lost to St. Thomas 3-0, def. Hamline 3-0, def. St. Thomas 5-4, lost to St. Thomas 6-0)
- NCAA Regional Results (def. Simpson 1-0, lost to Luther 6-4, def. Simpson 8-3, def. Luther 3-0, lost to Luther 3-1)

**Players to Watch**

- Krista Flugstad (P, Jr. | 2016 All-MIAC, Second-Team All-Region, MIAC All-Tournament Team, NCAA Regional-Team; second in MIAC in ERA (1.69), threw 14 complete games, posted 18-5 record; 2015 All-MIAC, Rookie-of-the-Year)
- Kylie Macziewski (IF, Jr. | 2016 All-MIAC, MIAC Elite 22 Recipient, second on team in batting average (.343), ranked top-five in slugging percentage (.481) and on base percentage (.372))
- Ashley Sis (IF, Jr. | 2016 All-MIAC, .321 BA, ranked top-five in slugging (.486), RBI (23) and total bases (68))

**Did You Know?**

- St. Kate's had a historic season in 2016, qualifying for the MIAC and NCAA Tournament for the first time in program history.

**SAINT MARY'S** | [Cardinals' softball home page](#) |**Head coach**

- Jen Miller (11th season)

**A Year Ago**

- 11-11 MIAC (6th place) | 22-16 Overall

**Players to Watch**

- Ashley Betzold (Senior, P/1B, Farmington, Minn. | 38 GP, .328 BA, 119 AB, 19 R, 39 H, 7 2B, 1 HR, 21 RBIs, 49 TB, .412 SLG %; 2.61 ERA, 18-12, 22 CG, 182.1 IP, 113 SO, 6 Shutouts. ... First-Team All-MIAC in 2015 & 2016, 2014 honorable-mention All-MIAC)
- Brittney Birkhauser (Junior., SS, Wisconsin Rapids, Wis. | 38 GP, .310 BA, 116 AB, 27 R, 36 H, 8 2B, 6 HR, 28 RBIs, 62 TB, .534 SLG %)
- Kathi Opsahl (Senior, OF, Elk River, Minn. | 37 GP, .288 BA, 111 AB, 10 R, 32 H, 7 2B, 1 HR, 15 RBIs, 42 TB, .378 SLG %)

**Did You Know?**

- Ashley Betzold (Farmington, Minn.) became the program's all-time single-season and career leader in complete games last season. The junior right-hander broke Megan Wallisch's single-season record by tossing 22 complete games in 2016, while also eclipsing Jenny Schipp's career mark, closing out her third season as a Cardinal with 56 complete games.

**ST. OLAF** | [Oles' softball home page](#) |**Head coach**

- Kayla Hatting (1st season)

**A Year Ago**

- 8-14 MIAC (9th place) 14-19 Overall

**Players to Watch**

- Jessica Bentley (OF, Jr. | Two-time All-MIAC... Seven 2Bs, two homers and 24 RBIs in 2016... Had 10 HRs in 2015.)
- Emily Carr (IF/C, So. | Hit .321 in 2015... Had only five K's in 112 Abs.)



**Head coach**

- John Tschida (17th season)

**A Year Ago**

- 20-2 MIAC (1st place) | 43-8 Overall

**In the 2016 Postseason**

- Went 3-1, won MIAC Playoffs; went 5-2 in NCAA Playoffs, tied for seventh in nation

**Players to Watch**

- Melissa Barry (OF, So., ; 2016: 39 Gm., .424 BA, 42 hits, 26 runs, 10 RBI; in 11 postseason games had 15 hits, eight runs)
- Dana Connelly (OF, So.; 2016: 36 Gm, .375 BA, 36 hits, 16 RBI, 11 doubles, 1 HR; in 11 postseason games had 12 hits, 11 RBI, four doubles)
- Brenna Walek (DH-1B, Sr., Career: 127 Gm., .330 BA, 33 HRs, 98 RBI, 96 hits, 62 runs, 25 doubles, 48 walks)

**Did You Know?**

- Pitcher Kierstin Anderson-Glass, All-Region as a freshman in 2016, likely will seek a medical redshirt for 2017. Senior Jessica Eppenberger starts as the staff ace, with soph Isabelle Marketon and three newcomers looking to provide depth.