

2018 MIAC Softball Preview & Preseason Coaches' Poll

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BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – Softball season has officially arrived and teams from around the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) are ready to take the field for what promises to be an exceptionally competitive 2018 campaign.

Beginning on Friday, fans will be treated to 18 consecutive days of MIAC softball action, with dome games scheduled in Dundas, Rochester, Minneapolis and West St. Paul, in addition to several warmer climate contests as far away as Arizona and Florida.

Before the action gets underway, however, MIAC softball coaches took a moment to vote in the annual Preseason Coaches' Poll.

After setting a new school record with 38 wins and advancing to the NCAA Championships Series for the first time ever last season, St. Catherine University earned the MIAC coaches' votes as the team to beat in 2018. The Wildcats totaled 119 points in the balloting, including nine first-place votes. Led by a trio of seniors in **Krista Flugstad**, **Kylie Macziewski** and **Claire Woebke** – lifelong friends who have played together since the age of eight – and All-American junior **Jenna George**, St. Kate's has transformed from an 8-25 team four years ago into a national power, entering the 2018 season ranked No. 8 in the country by the National Fastpitch Coaches Association (NFCA).



The defending MIAC regular season champion St. Thomas Tommies were a close second to St. Kate's in the Preseason Poll, earning 113 points and the other three first-place votes. Coach John Tschida's team advanced to the NCAA Super Regional round and enters 2018 heavy on experience. Junior utility player **Melissa Barry** – an All-Conference honoree with a team-best 17 multi-hit games a season ago – was selected as one of 50 Division III softball players named to the [Schutt Sports/NFCA National Player of the Year Watch List](#) earlier this month, while the Tommies as a whole are one of nine program's receiving votes in the NFCA Preseason Top 25.

Saint Benedict is ranked third in the Preseason Coaches' Poll with 98 total points. The bats are already alive for Rachael Click's squad, which has won 20-plus games in all five of her seasons at the helm. CSB opened its non-conference slate last weekend by scoring 36 runs in a double-header rout of Crown College. Sophomore utility player **Olivia Olson** demonstrated how dangerous she can be at the plate, batting 1.000 with a triple and a three-run home run in her 2018 debut last Saturday, while junior outfielder **Kate Deming** is back in the lineup as well with her eyes on a few more program records. Deming set new CSB marks for runs (50) and stolen bases (29) in a single season during her sophomore campaign last year.

Seven points separated No. 3 Saint Benedict from No. 4 St. Olaf in the 2018 Preseason Coaches' Poll. The Oles return a trio of All-Conference players from a season ago, including 2017 Pitcher and Rookie of the Year **Julie Graf**, who also earned All-America status last season after setting school records with 272 strikeouts, 22 wins and 21 complete games. Graf and teammate **Emily Carr** both landed on the Schutt Sports/NFCA National Player of the Year Watch List earlier this month.

Hamline received 81 points in the Coaches' Poll to nab the No. 5 spot. All-Midwest Region selection and two-time All-MIAC catcher **Aubree Douglas** figures to move into a leadership role this spring as the Pipers have the unenviable task of replacing three All-Region seniors from last year's squad, which finished as the runner-up to St. Kate's in the 2017 MIAC Playoff Championship Game.

Complete 2018 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.

2018 MIAC Softball Preseason Coaches' Poll

Rank	Institution (First-Place Votes)	Total
1.	St. Catherine (9)	119
2.	St. Thomas (3)	113
3.	Saint Benedict	98
4.	St. Olaf	91

5.	Hamline	81
6.	Bethel	57
7.	Gustavus	55
8.	Augsburg	49
9.	Macalester	41
10.	Carleton	35
11.	Saint Mary's	31
12.	Concordia	22

Around the MIAC

-Augsburg cleanup hitter **Katie Parker** knocked in 32 runs in her first season at Augsburg in 2017, the third-most in a single season in school history.

-Bethel senior **Wendy Roberts** may have to wait a little while longer to get back on the diamond, as the two-time All-Conference infielder is currently scoring goals instead of runs as a member of the playoff-bound Royals women's hockey team.

-Sophomore outfielder **Anna Lauko** was voted to the All-MIAC team for the second consecutive year last season, becoming the seventh player in Carleton history to crack the All-Conference team in each of her first two collegiate campaigns.

-Macalester outfielder **Julia Carpenter** is one of just seven sophomores named to the Schutt Sports/NFCA National Player of the Year Watch List. Carpenter led the MIAC in stolen bases with a school-record 37 in her first year as a Scot last season.

2018 MIAC Softball Playoffs

The 2018 MIAC Softball Playoffs will once again feature the No. 1 seed serving as host for the entire four-team, double-elimination tournament in May. If the top seed is unable to host, that right will be offered to the subsequent seeds in rank order. The 2018 tournament will be held Friday, May 4 – Sunday, May 6 with two games on Friday, three games on Saturday and the potential for a pair of title games on Sunday. The winner of the tournament will receive the MIAC Playoff Championship plaque and the Conference's automatic qualifier to the 2018 NCAA Division III Softball Tournament.

Odds and Ends

-Chad Slyter had a busy first offseason as head coach at Concordia, announcing 18 incoming first-year players have committed to join the 2018 roster – the largest recruiting class in the 31-year history of Cobber softball.

-Gustavus will celebrate 50 seasons of softball in 2018. The Golden Gusties launched their softball program in 1969 and will celebrate the achievement on Sunday, April 15 prior to the 1:00 p.m. double-header against Macalester College.

-Saint Mary's has proven to be a dangerous team when striking early, closing out the 2017 campaign with a 9-1 record when leading after five innings.