

2019 MIAC Softball Preview and Preseason Coaches' Poll

Posted: Feb 21, 2019

BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – Softball season is here again and teams from around the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) are ready to take the field for what figures to be another very competitive season in 2019.

A trio of MIAC squads got a headstart on the action, as Carleton, Macalester, and St. Olaf each competed in two-game series at the Dundas Dome last Saturday. The rest of the league will begin non-conference dome play locally in the coming days, before taking off for spring break games in Florida and Arizona. The 2019 conference schedule is set to begin on Saturday, March 30 with five MIAC doubleheaders.

Before the action gets underway, however, all 12 returning MIAC softball coaches took a moment to vote in the annual Preseason Coaches' Poll.

St. Thomas is picked to win a fourth-straight regular season MIAC championship after collecting 119 points with nine first-place votes in the balloting. The Tommies went 20-2 in conference play last season and 39-8 overall, wrapping up both the regular season and MIAC Playoff championships and earning the program's 15th consecutive trip to the NCAA Tournament. UST is poised to return 2019 FPN Preseason Honorable Mention All-America pitcher **Haley Dunning**, 2018 MIAC Player of the Year **Melissa Barry**, and 2016 MIAC Pitcher of the Year **Kierstin Anderson-Glass**, in addition to the debuting **Megan Banieceke**, a First Team All-State pitcher at Forest Lake last season. The Tommies are ranked No. 7 in the nation in the [NFCA Preseason Top 25](#).



Haley Dunning and the Tommies are picked to win a fourth straight MIAC title.

Saint Benedict earned three first-place votes and ranks just behind their rivals with 113 points in the balloting. Neither the Tommies nor Bennies placed lower than second on any ballot. CSB capped off a record-setting season last year with its first trip to the NCAA Tournament since 1994. The Bennies led the MIAC with a 2.08 earned run average last year and return several pieces of that staff in 2019, headlined by last year's Rookie and Pitcher of the Year, **Ally Hjort**. The Woodbury, Minn. native earned NFCA All-Midwest Region honors after finishing the year ranked 24th in Division III with a 1.33 ERA. The Bennies are ranked No. 17 in the nation in the first NFCA Top 25 Poll of 2019.

St. Catherine picked up 95 points in the balloting to settle in at No. 3 in the preseason poll. The Wildcats have become a mainstay near the top of the MIAC standings but will have the unenviable task this year of replacing the production and experience of the most successful senior class in program history. That blow will be softened, however, by the return of two-time All-Region infielder **Jenna George**, who led the team in slugging percentage, on-base percentage, doubles, and home runs for the second straight season as a junior last year.

St. Olaf is No. 4 in the preseason poll, collecting 91 points in the balloting. The Oles made their first trip to the MIAC Playoffs in five years last season and will look to make it two in a row with an experienced lineup in 2019. Preseason Honorable Mention All-America pitcher **Julie Graf** will be back for her third season in Northfield. The 2017 MIAC Pitcher of the Year won 15 games as a sophomore last season, recording a league-leading 261 strikeouts and has finished among the nation's top three in both of her seasons in a St. Olaf uniform. **Emily Carr** will also return for her senior season. The All-Midwest pick led St. Olaf in batting average, hits, doubles, total bases, slugging percentage, and on-base percentage (.470) a year ago.

Augsburg picked up 77 points in the balloting to come in No. 5 in the preseason poll. The Auggies earned a trip to the MIAC Playoffs for the third time in program history last year and figure to be a factor again this year with three-time All-MIAC pitcher **Samantha Anderson** back for her senior season. Anderson was a 15-game winner a year ago and has already claimed the school strikeouts record with 427 to her name. She has also gotten the job done at the plate, hitting .381 with a team-high 12 doubles last season.

Hamline logged 65 points to come in at No. 6 in the poll. The Pipers missed out on postseason play last year but ended the 2018 season on a high note by sweeping Bethel on the road in the regular season finale. Pitcher **Alex Molloy** appeared in 27 games in her first season at HU last year, starting 12 and completing 10, racking up a team-high six wins along the way.

Bethel finished just behind Hamline with 63 points in the balloting to claim seventh-place in the poll. Though the Royals did not finish the 2018 season with the record they had hoped for, there were bright spots along the way, including a signature victory over conference champion St. Thomas - one of just two MIAC games the Tommies lost last season. All-MIAC selection **Allie Fauth** was also a major positive for BU. Fauth ended her rookie season with a .432 batting average, along with a .480 on-base percentage and a .545 slugging percentage in 28 starts.

Carleton secured 59 points in the balloting for a spot in eighth-place in the poll. The Knights qualified for the MIAC Playoffs for the first time since 2013 last year and nearly pulled off an upset against 2018 preseason favorite St. Kate's, ultimately falling, 1-0, to the Wildcats. **Maris Daleo** was an immediate impact player at shortstop for Carleton last season and figures to be a key piece of the puzzle as a sophomore this year. Daleo batted .411 in league-play last year and paced the Knights with 12 stolen bases and a .475 on-base percentage.

Gustavus is No. 9 in the poll with 40 points. Only three programs in conference history can call themselves "MIAC Playoff Champions" and Gustavus is one of them, having won the postseason title in 2015. Only two seniors appear on the Gusties' 2019 roster, which means Gustavus will rely heavily on the continued development of honorable mention All-MIAC competitors **Aly Freeman** and **Ashley Neuenfeldt** this season. Freeman recorded four complete games as a pitcher last season, while Neuenfeldt paced Gustavus with 14 starts on the hill.

Macalester collected 34 points in the balloting to land at No. 10 in the poll. The Scots ended 2018 with a win and carried that momentum into 2019 by sweeping Mount Mary University in non-conference action over the weekend. Junior outfielder **Julia Carpenter** had six hits and six runs in seven at-bats against the Blue Angels, an unsurprising result for the Scots' batting average leader each of the last two seasons. Carpenter is a two-time All-MIAC and All-Region pick and set single-season program records with 63 hits and 43 runs scored in her debut season two years ago.

Saint Mary's is No. 11 in the poll with 24 points. The Cardinals strung together five straight victories with four runs scored in each game last April, including wins against a pair of playoff teams. **Paige Gunderson** started all 40 games in her first season at Saint Mary's last year - one of just four Cardinals to start every contest for the team a year ago. Gunderson registered a team-high 13 multi-hit games and ranked second on the team in runs, hits, and total bases last year.

Concordia picked up 12 points in the preseason balloting. The Cobbers will be young again in 2019 - after posting the largest recruiting class in program history ahead of last season, Concordia added 11 more commits this year. **Elizabeth Asp** is the lone junior on the roster. The Cobbers infielder started 31 games last season, batting .363 with an on-base percentage of .348 on the year.

Complete 2019 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.

2019 MIAC Softball Preseason Coaches' Poll

Rank	Institution (First-Place Votes)	Total
1.	St. Thomas (9)	119
2.	Saint Benedict (3)	113
3.	St. Catherine	95
4.	St. Olaf	91
5.	Augsburg	77
6.	Hamline	65
7.	Bethel	63
8.	Carleton	59
9.	Gustavus	40
10.	Macalester	34
11.	Saint Mary's	24
12.	Concordia	12

Around the MIAC

-Carleton's **Maris Daleo** scored the MIAC's first run of the 2019 season. Daleo was the first of three Knights to cross home plate in the first inning of the team's season-opening victory against Martin Luther last Saturday. **Tegan Carlson** belted a triple to left-center to score Daleo.

-St. Thomas senior infielder **Melissa Barry** was among 50 Division III softball players named to the National Player of the Year Watch List earlier this month. The only MIAC player named to the list, Barry is a career .398 hitter and has committed just six errors in 431 chances in the field.

-MIAC teams will host games at a few non-traditional sites this season. Saint Benedict will open its 2019 schedule in nearby Collegeville by hosting a doubleheader against the University of Northwestern at the Gagliardi Dome this Friday, while St. Kate's will host Wis.-La Crosse at the Packer Dome in Austin next month. Several contests will also be played at typical early-season sites, including dome games in Dundas, Rochester, and West St. Paul, as well as a handful of matchups at the hallowed "Auggie Dome" in Minneapolis.

2019 MIAC Softball Playoffs

The 2019 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 2019 tournament will be held Friday, May 3 – Sunday, May 5 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 2019 NCAA Division III Softball Tournament.

For the Record

The MIAC is in the process of overhauling 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 48-page MIAC Softball Record Book contains annual Conference championship information, year-by-year standings, all-time award winners, individual and team records, NCAA Tournament 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 Softball Record Book is now available for download [here](#).