

2020 MIAC Softball Preview

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BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – Softball season has arrived once 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 2020.

Before the action gets fully underway, however, all 12 returning MIAC softball coaches took a moment to vote in the annual Preseason Coaches' Poll. Defending MIAC champion St. Thomas received the maximum 11 first-place votes to enter the 2020 campaign as the favorite to win the conference title once again.

The Tommies will also open the season ranked No. 9 in the NFCA Division III Top 25 Poll after reaching the Division III World Series for the third time in six seasons last May. Six seniors and five juniors from that squad are set to return to the lineup in 2020, including reigning MIAC Player of the Year **Elise Barnes** and MIAC Pitcher of the Year **Kierstin Anderson-Glass**. Barnes has registered 164 hits and 145 runs in 143 career games, while Anderson-Glass boasts a career ERA of 0.93 and a 10-to-1 strikeout-to-walk ratio with 368 Ks in 415 innings of work. The Toms will be tested right off the bat this season, with March matchups scheduled against No. 2-ranked Emory and No. 5-ranked Williams.



*Elise Barnes and the Tommies will open the season ranked No. 9 in the nation.
(Photo: Millie York)*

Saint Benedict picked up one first-place vote and 106 points in the preseason balloting to land at No. 2 in the Coaches' Poll. The Bennies missed out on the MIAC Playoffs last season but found their way into the NCAA Tournament as an at-large selection for the second year in a row based on a strong regional resume. CSB will need to replace a great deal of experience and some offensive firepower - including the production of the program's all-time hits, runs, and games played leader, graduated senior Kate Deming - in order to return to "The Dance" for a third straight season. **Mo Burns** will likely assist in that area. The U.S. Army ROTC Cadet and 2019 All-MIAC pick debuted with authority last season, going 5-for-5 with seven runs batted in, including a three-run home run, against MIAC Playoff participant St. Catherine.

St. Catherine is No. 3 in the Poll with 94 points. The Wildcats tied for second in the regular-season conference standings last season and locked down the No. 2 seed in the MIAC Playoffs. St. Catherine has now gone to the conference tournament in four straight seasons - winning it all in 2017 - and figures to be back in the mix for a fifth consecutive year in 2020. Second-year shortstop **Alex Ehde** will be essential to punching a return ticket to the postseason, as the 2019 MIAC Rookie of the Year led all first-year players with 33 hits, 21 RBI, and a batting average of .423 in 78 conference at-bats last year.

Hamline received 92 points in the preseason balloting to come in at No. 4 in the Coaches' Poll. The Pipers finished last season as the MIAC Playoff runner-ups, falling to St. Thomas, 1-0, in 11 innings - the longest postseason game in the 16-year history of the MIAC Softball Playoffs. Hamline returns the core of that 2019 club this season, including All-Region pitcher **Alex Molloy**. The junior right-hander was particularly impressive during the Pipers' playoff run, allowing just two runs and an opponent batting average of .209 with two complete games in 23.1 innings of work.

St. Olaf picked up 88 points to land at No. 5 in the Preseason Coaches' Poll. The Oles returned to the MIAC Playoffs for the second consecutive season last May and with the NCAA Division III leader in strikeouts per seven innings, **Julie Graf**, back in the circle for her senior season, should be poised for another run in 2020. Graf has been nothing short of dominant through her first three years as an Ole, averaging 18 wins and nearly 300 strikeouts per season, not to mention breaking the MIAC's career strikeouts mark midway through her junior campaign. Graf struck out an unbelievable 326 batters last season, including 169 in MIAC play to set a new single-season conference record. Run support for Graf will be key, as St. Olaf graduated its all-time leader in hits, RBI, and batting average, Emily Carr, last spring. If the Oles can replace some of that offense, another trip to the postseason seems well within grasp.

Bethel is sixth in the Poll with 72 points. The Royals enjoyed a breakout season in 2019, going 25-13 for a program-record winning percentage of .658. Bethel jumped out to a 15-1 start to the season, including a program-best 12-game winning streak. With four All-Conference selections back in 2020, the Royals appear ready to shake up the top of the standings this season. Junior infielder **Allie Fauth** picked up All-Region honors for the second time in her career last season after hitting .438 in 38 starts. Fauth led all MIAC batters with an average of .415 in conference play last year.

Carleton picked up 59 points to come in at No. 7 in the Preseason Poll. The Knights turned heads last season with a 24-15 record, good for the most wins in program history. All-Region catcher **Natalie Maurice** was key to the team's success, throwing out six base-runners - second-best in MIAC play - last year. Her bat was potent as well, as she lifted five home runs and recorded 48 hits with an impressive .612 slugging percentage.

Gustavus received 48 points in the preseason balloting to come in at No. 8 in the Poll. The Gusties flirted with .500 last season, finishing the year at 17-19 after Mother Nature and her wintry mix of inclement weather canceled the team's scheduled season finale against St. Scholastica last April. All-Conference pitcher and infielder **Aly Freeman** was a highlight in more ways than one for Gustavus last season, tossing 101.2 innings with an ERA of 2.96 and hitting .349 with a team-best slugging percentage of .670. Freeman was also a standout academically, receiving CoSIDA Academic All-America honors thanks to her 4.00 GPA as a biology major at Gustavus.

Augsburg is No. 9 in the Poll with 36 points. The Auggies are coming off a 16-24 season and will be tasked with replacing four-time All-MIAC pitcher and the program's career strikeouts leader, Sam Anderson. On offense, however, two-time All-MIAC infielder **Anesia King** is back for her senior year after hitting a career-best .407 and leading the team with 32 runs and 16 extra-base hits last season. The team's leadoff hitter had a base knock in 28 of her 36 games in 2019, with 12 multiple-hit games and nine multiple-run games.

Macalester finished just behind Augsburg with 35 points in the balloting. The Scots won eight conference games last season - their most since the 2014 campaign - including victories over MIAC Playoff runner-up Hamline, NCAA Tournament selection Saint Benedict, and MIAC champion and College World Series participant St. Thomas. Outfielder **Julia Carpenter** was paramount to Macalester's success, recording two or more hits in seven straight games en route to 19 multi-hit contests as a junior last year. The three-time All-Region selection batted .450 with 59 hits, 38 runs, and 24 stolen bases in 2019.

Saint Mary's garnered 24 points in the preseason balloting. The Cardinals finished out the 2019 season with splits in their final three conference series and will enter 2020 with a good deal of experience in the lineup. Catcher **Justine Schultz** started 21 of the team's 22 conference games as a rookie last season, hitting a team-best .328 while also leading or sharing the team lead in hits (19), doubles (4), total bases (23), and on-base percentage (.423). Defensively, Schultz owned a .982 fielding percentage, recording 49 putouts and seven assists, while committing just one error.

Concordia received 17 points in the Preseason Poll. The Cobbers jumped out to a 5-2 record last March but were unable to keep the momentum going through the conference schedule. There were several bright spots, however, including All-MIAC pitcher **Megan Gavin**, who became the fifth player in program history to reach 200 career strikeouts. Gavin pitched in 14 of the 22 MIAC games and was the victor in both of the team's league wins. She tossed 85.1 innings in conference play and had 62 strikeouts - both figures nearly doubling her production from her debut season in 2018.

Complete 2020 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.

2020 MIAC Softball Preseason Coaches' Poll

Rank	Institution (First-Place Votes)	Total
1.	St. Thomas (11)	121
2.	Saint Benedict (1)	106
3.	St. Catherine	94
4.	Hamline	92
5.	St. Olaf	88
6.	Bethel	72
7.	Carleton	59
8.	Gustavus	48
9.	Augsburg	36
10.	Macalester	35
11.	Saint Mary's	24
12.	Concordia	17

2020 MIAC Softball Playoffs

The 2020 MIAC Softball Playoffs will transition to a six-team, single-elimination tournament this spring. The No. 3 and No. 4 seeds will host the No. 6 and No. 5 seeds, respectively, in quarterfinal games on Thursday, April 30, 2020. The semifinal and championship rounds of the tournament will then be played Saturday, May 2, 2020, on the campus of the No. 1 seed in the field. The No. 1 seed will face the winner of the No. 4/5 quarterfinal and the No. 2 seed will take on the winner of the No. 3/6 quarterfinal. The two semifinal victors will square off in the Playoff Championship, with the winner of that contest receiving the conference's automatic berth to the 2020 NCAA Division III Softball Tournament.

Odds and Ends

-The 2016 MIAC Player of the Year, former St. Catherine standout Robyn Rohr was named head softball coach at Brevard College in December. Rohr set Wildcat records for career batting average, on-base percentage, and runs scored during her time at SCU. She also achieved a 41-game hit streak, the third-longest streak in NCAA history.

-Saint Mary's unveiled its new softball locker room facility in January. The 1,200 square-foot space includes 29 lockers, a separate study and lounge space, and private showers and bathroom facilities. The addition comes on the 20-year anniversary of the Cardinals' first-ever national championship in 2000.

-St. Thomas head coach **John Tschida** - who happened to coach his alma mater, Saint Mary's, to that national title - is now entering his 20th season at St. Thomas with the best winning percentage in NCAA softball history at .842 (974-183). He needs 26 wins to become just the second active Division III coach to reach 1,000 victories.

-Three-time All-Region honoree and St. Olaf's career leader in batting average (.376), slugging percentage (.630), hits (176), doubles (59), total bases (295), and RBI (105), **Emily Carr joined the MIAC office in August as its Assistant Director**, a two-year position made possible through the NCAA Division III Ethnic Minority & Women's Internship Grant. The program is intended to provide opportunities for women and ethnic minorities to gain experience in college athletics.

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 2020 Record Book is based on available data and research for additional historical documents is ongoing. The 2020 MIAC Softball Record Book is now available for download [here](#).

Celebrating a Century

The MIAC is celebrating its 100-year anniversary throughout the 2019-20 season. The conference's Centennial celebration will highlight the many outstanding moments, memories, and individuals who helped build the MIAC over the last century. Initiatives will include student-athlete, coach, and administrator spotlights, historical photos showcasing the evolution of MIAC sports and teams through the years, recognition of former MIAC student-athletes who continued their time in the conference as coaches and administrators, and more. The official #MIAC100 webpage is housed at <https://www.miacathletics.com/miac100>.