

2009 MIAC Baseball Season Preview

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St. Paul, Minn. -- St. Thomas enters the 2009 MIAC Baseball Season as the league favorite based on the Preseason Coaches' poll. The Tommies edged St. Olaf, Gustavus, and Hamline for the top spot. Each of those four teams played in last season's conference playoffs. The coaches picked Concordia, Saint John's, Augsburg, and Bethel to finish five through eight, followed by Macalester, Carleton, and Saint Mary's. The top four teams in the regular season standings will qualify for the 2009 MIAC Baseball Playoffs to be played May 8-10 in Dundas and Northfield, Minn.



St. Thomas has won or shared the last six MIAC regular season crowns. The Tommies have 15 returners led by junior pitcher Matt Schuld, and two returning All-Region honorees in pitcher/third baseman Dan Leslie and first baseman Tom Wippler. St. Olaf will ride the arms of an experienced pitching staff, solid returning bats in the lineup and a traditionally good-fielding defense. The Oles are led by two-time all-region and three-time All-MIAC pick Todd Mathison.

Gustavus will feature solid defense and pitching on a team with a deep roster. Veteran infielders Mike DesLauriers (shortstop) and Nate Ruff (second baseman) will anchor the Gustie lineup. Hamline enters 2009 with one of the most decorated players in school history, but a lack of experience on the mound. Piper senior shortstop Dan Kaczrowski was named the Division III Preseason Player of the Year by Baseball America.

Concordia has high hopes for the 2009 season as the Cobber's roster includes talented group of seniors and one of the deepest pitching staffs the team has had in several years. A young Saint John's team will have plenty of depth and new faces in the starting lineup as six key players graduated from last year's squad. Augsburg will look to crack the top four in the standings, led by two-time All-MIAC junior catcher Craig Henry. Bethel lost eight seniors from last season, but a veteran pitching staff should anchor the Royals in 2009.

All-Region third baseman Devin English and pitcher James Murrey will lead Macalester in 2009 on their brand new home field. Carleton will feature its most experienced and deepest team in recent history, led by All-MIAC senior Ethan Guevin and Jay Melson. First-year head coach Nick Winecke will lead a young Saint Mary's squad after replacing former coach Nick Whaley.

The MIAC Baseball Showcase will open the 2009 conference season with five MIAC doubleheaders over two days at the Metrodome. On Friday, March 27, Augsburg and Saint Mary's will open the showcase at 4 p.m. followed by Saint John's taking on Macalester at 9:30 p.m. Carleton and Hamline will start play on Saturday, March 28 with a doubleheader at 8 a.m., followed by Gustavus and Concordia at 1:30 p.m. and St. Thomas and Bethel at 7 p.m. Ticket prices are \$5 for adults and \$3 for students. Free parking is available at the Metrodome East Parking Lot.

The 2009 MIAC Baseball Playoffs will once again be played in Dundas and Northfield, hosted by Carleton and St. Olaf. The four-team double elimination tournament will begin with opening round games on the afternoon of Friday, May 8 and run until Sunday, May 10, if necessary.

2009 MIAC Preseason Coaches Poll

Coaches voted for every team in the conference except their own team. Points were assigned for each vote (1 for first, 2 for second, etc.) Teams are ranked in order of lowest point total to highest with first place votes shown in parentheses.

1. St. Thomas (8)
2. St. Olaf (3)
3. Gustavus
4. Hamline
5. Concordia
6. Saint John's
7. Augsburg
8. Bethel
9. Macalester
10. Carleton
11. Saint Mary's

2009 MIAC Playoffs: Top four teams (double elimination) - Friday - Sunday, May 8-10 at Dundas and Northfield Parks (Hosted by Carleton and St. Olaf)

Augsburg

Coach: Keith Bateman (6th season)

2008 Finish: 8th (8-12 MIAC, 16-20 overall)

Augsburg Season Preview

Depth may be the key for the Augsburg College baseball team in its quest to return to the four-team Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference playoffs and contend for the conference title this season.

The Auggies have significant depth at nearly every position on the field -- in particular, on the pitching mound, where seven pitchers who threw 13 or more innings last season return to the rotation. In the field, four key starters return for a squad that collectively hit .302 last year.

Combined with a strong recruiting and transfer class, there is confidence from the coaching staff that the Auggies will improve from last season's 16-20 overall and 8-12 MIAC records, and in turn, move up to the upper echelon of the league standings.

"We had a lot of interest, and what that's supplied us with is some legitimate depth," said head coach Keith Bateman, entering his sixth season as the Auggies' mentor. "We worked real hard on recruiting last year, and I'm real happy with the work the assistant coaches put in, and the quality of players we have. We have some good depth."

Four pitchers who combined to start 28 of Augsburg's 36 games last season return, along with four others who combined for 54 innings of relief work. *Sam Weber* (JR, Arden Hills, Minn./Mounds View HS) started nine games and pitched a team-high 47.2 innings last year with a 4-3 record, 3.97 earned-run average and a team-best 53 strikeouts. *Jon-Eric Urseth* (SR, Golden Valley, Minn./Robbinsdale Armstrong HS), in just his second season as a pitcher after starting his collegiate career as a catcher, started seven games and had a 4-2 record and 4.25 ERA, earning All-MIAC honorable-mention honors.

Alex Glasenapp (JR, Minneapolis, Minn./South HS) moved from a relief role to a starter last year and continued his strong development, while *Jason Kickhafer* (SR, Cottage Grove, Minn./Park HS), the team's top pitcher in 2007, will aim to return to his prominent role after dealing with injuries last season that limited his production.

Shawn Sanders (SR, St. Charles, Minn.) appeared in a team-high 12 games last season in relief, and looks to return to that role again, as will *Brian Olson* (SR, Cottage Grove, Minn./Park HS), a versatile multi-position player who pitched in 11 games last year with a team-best five saves. *Alex Gustafson* (SR, Anoka, Minn.) pitched in 11 games last season and earned two saves in relief, while *Brett Cloutier* (SO, Baxter, Minn./Brainerd HS) also returns to the mound.

Behind the plate, catcher *Craig Henry* (JR, Lino Lakes, Minn./Centennial HS) returns for his third season as the team's starter. One of only two MIAC juniors this season to have earned All-MIAC honors each of their first two years, Henry has developed a reputation as a solid player both offensively and defensively. He hit .327 last year with 12 RBI and nine extra-base hits, while defensively, he threw out 15 runners trying to steal, tops among conference catchers. Returner *Bryant Nordby* (SO, Brownton, Minn./McLeod West HS) is a key reserve, along with newcomer *Trent Anderson* (FY, Eagan, Minn.).

The rest of the Auggie infield is young, but shows plenty of promise. At first base, returners *Shea Sajevis* (JR, Hastings, Minn.) and *Joe Pierce* (JR, Eden Prairie, Minn.) will compete for the position along with newcomer *Tom Petersen* (FY, Hugo, Minn./White Bear Lake HS). At second base, *Eric Olson* (JR, New Prague, Minn.) returns with the most experience, having started 25 games with a .241 batting average and 12 RBI last season. *Nick Vavra* (SO, Minnetonka, Minn./Hopkins HS) saw action in 21 games last year, while newcomers *Matt Santiago* (FY, Bloomington, Minn./Kennedy HS) and *David Matyi* (FY, Edina, Minn.) could make a challenge for the position.

At shortstop, starter *Donald Blunt* (SO, Richfield, Minn.) returns after a solid debut season last year. Starting 27 games, he hit .230 with 12 RBI, and is coming off a strong summer where he continued to develop his game, Bateman noted. Santiago could also offer a challenge at shortstop.

At third base, Mason Holmquist (SO, Prior Lake, Minn.) looks to be the prime candidate to fill the position, and will have competition from newcomers Bobby Mousour (FY, Inver Grove Heights, Minn./Roseville HS), *Adam Langer* (FY, Kenyon, Minn./Kenyon-Wanamingo HS) and *Jacob Fannik* (FY, Max, N.D.).

The Auggies will need to fill two starting positions in the outfield, including one of the top defensive outfielders in school history in centerfielder Jeff Stomberg. Starting leftfielder *James Panning* (SR, Gibbon, Minn./Gibbon-Fairfax-Winthrop HS) returns, after hitting .273 last year.

In right, Brian Olson will fill the position when not pitching. He hit .390 last year, tops among Auggie returners. In center, there could be a battle to fill the position between newcomers *Brent Kolbow* (FY, Forest Lake, Minn.) and *Tim Gerding* (FY, Robbinsdale, Minn./Cooper HS).

Bethel

Coach: Greg Indlecoffer (7th season)

2008 Finish: 5th (11-9 MIAC, 21-18 overall)

Bethel Season Preview

The Bethel Royals are eager to return to the field in 2009 after finishing fifth in the MIAC standings last season with an 11-9 record, 21-18 overall. However, the Royals lost the services of eight seniors, many of whom were starters or significant contributors. While there are some big shoes to fill, last season's underclassmen are anxious to step up and become leaders this season.

Both Travis Adams (Sr., Chanhassen, Minn.) and Ben Turnwall (Sr., Burnsville, Minn.) return to lead the Royals on the mound as the two were named to Collegiate Baseball newspaper's list of Division III Players to Watch. Adams compiled a 4-3 record and had a 3.71 ERA last season. Turnwall established himself as the Royals' closer, converting on each of his nine save opportunities to set a new Bethel single season record. He led the MIAC in saves and had a 3.29 ERA, striking out 24 batters in just 13 2/3 innings pitched. Kyle McCracken (Jr., Johnston, Iowa) and John Slick (Jr., River Falls, Wis.) will also be players to watch. Erik Anderson (So., Arden Hills, Minn.) and Kirk Darling (So., Portage, Mich.) quickly developed into solid catchers and this season, Jay Slick (Fr., River Falls, Wis.) joins the mix, looking to make up the other half the battery.

Around the horn, Bob Tokar (Jr., Elk River, Minn.) emerged as Bethel's everyday first baseman last season, but the biggest hole Bethel will have to fill is the vacancy left by All-MIAC third baseman Brandon Carr. Several players will vie for the starting job at the hot corner, including Bjorn Anderson (Jr., Arden Hills, Minn.) and newcomer Pete Anderson (Sr., Bloomington, Minn.). Tim Churchill (Jr., Mt. Prospect, Ill.) returns as Bethel's starting shortstop, but second base has a trio of candidates competing to start. Dusty Littlefield (Sr., Rockford, Minn.) and Mark Therrien (Jr., Spring Lake Park, Minn.) are veterans who will be joined by newcomer Sean Bethke (Fr., Mahtomedi, Minn.). In the outfield, the Royals have good speed and athleticism led by Sean Flaherty (Jr., Shoreview, Minn.), a Rob Lang (Jr., Johnston, Iowa), and Tim Oesterlin (Jr., Rochester, Minn.), as well as John Slick.

Overall, there is a renewed spirit of determination among both the players and the staff to reach team and individual goals and set the bar higher for the program in order to be associated as a top team in a competitive conference.

Carleton

Coach: Aaron Rushing (5th season)

2008 Finish: 11th (2-18 MIAC, 10-27 overall)

Carleton Season Preview

For the first time since rejoining the MIAC in 1984, the Knights return a pair of All-MIAC players, seniors Ethan Guevin and Jay Melson, who lead the most experienced and deepest team Carleton has had in years.

Guevin posted a team-leading 3.21 ERA with 47 strikeouts in 47 2/3 innings last year. In fact, he paced Carleton in wins, strikeouts and ERA during each of his first three seasons.

Melson, an All-Region selection a year ago when he batted .389 overall with 7 homers and 32 RBI, while ranking among the MIAC's top ten in nearly every offensive category. His home run total ranked second in the conference and tied for the second-highest single-season amount in the Carleton record book. Melson hit .410 during conference action and batted a whopping .477 over the final month of the season.

Among the many returning position players to keep an eye on are Russ Fujisawa, Cameron McDonald-Hyman and Brad Eckelmann. Fujisawa finished second on the squad in home runs and RBI a year ago after transitioning from shortstop to left field. McDonald-Hyman has become a mainstay in right field after starting 48 games over the last two seasons. Eckelmann worked his way into the lineup at first base and designated hitter as a rookie, pacing the team in hitting at .429 with a .512 on-base percentage.

Carleton's pitching staff is deeper than it was a year ago. Southpaw Aaron Troyansky and right handers Shane Henfling, Michael Servis, Jacob Anderson, and Alex Wirta have a chance to join Guevin in the starting rotation. In the bullpen, the Knights return a quartet of players-Jake Riss, Sam Cross-Knorr, Geoff King, and Glenn Greenberg-who appeared in 10 or more games last season.

Concordia

Coach: Bucky Burgau (31st season)

2008 Finish: Tied 6th (10-10 MIAC, 18-14 overall)

Concordia Season Preview

Concordia head coach Bucky Burgau has been eagerly anticipating the 2009 season for the past 24 months. The reason for Burgau's optimism is a group of seniors led by an All-American candidate and a pitching staff that is the deepest it has been in several years. Burgau will be hoping that the experience, potentially explosive offense and the deep pitching will bring the Cobbers back to the MIAC playoffs for the first time since the 2005 season.

Concordia has a pair of returning All-Region players. Senior catcher Kyle Johnson (Cambridge, Minn./Cambridge-Isanti HS) and junior pitcher Adam Johnson (Pelican Rapids, Minn.) were named to the ABCA/Rawlings All-Midwest Region Team last season. Both players had tremendous seasons in 2008 and will need to duplicate their success in order for the Cobbers to reach their goals. Kyle Johnson led the team in hitting for the second straight season with a career-high .450 average. He also led the MIAC in hitting (.507), slugging percentage (.881), RBI's (24), home runs (5) and total bases (59).

Adam Johnson led the team in ERA (2.43) and was tied for the team lead in wins (5). He appeared in 10 games in 2008 and made a team-high seven starts on the year. He was credited with the win in the Cobbers' upset victory over NCAA Division I NDSU on Apr. 29. Johnson was 3-1 in MIAC play and gave up only five earned runs in 20.1 innings of work. He was second in the MIAC in ERA in conference games (2.21) and led the conference in opponent's batting average (.151).

The Cobbers will be far from a two-man gang as they return seven starting players from last year's squad that finished the year by winning four straight games. Junior Jake Krause (Moorhead, Minn.) will be the team's leadoff hitter and starting shortstop. He hit .301 and led the team in steals. Joining Krause and Kyle Johnson at the top of the order should be Nick Lewis (Jr., Fergus Falls, Minn.), Dan Wackler (So., Buffalo, Minn.) and Scott Schumacher (Sr., Thompson, N.D.). Schumacher hit .402 last season while Lewis knocked out a .394 average.

On the mound Adam Johnson will have plenty of help. All five of the Cobber pitchers that started at least five games last season return for the 2009 campaign. Schumacher pulls double duty and was second on the team in ERA with a 2.88 mark. He was 5-1 last year and allowed only 11 walks in 34.1 innings pitched. Joining Johnson and Schumacher in the starting rotation will be Andrew Skow-Anderson (So., Pelican Rapids, Minn.), Eddie Massee (Jr., Appleton, Minn./Lac Qui Parle Valley HS) and Jake Torrison (Plymouth, Minn./Wayzata HS).

The bullpen will also have a wealth of returning players. All told, the Cobbers have 10 of the 11 pitchers that posted stats in 2008 back for 2009. The relief corps will feature hard-throwing senior Nick Petro (Alexandria, Minn.) who led the team in saves in 2008 and struck out 16 in 16.2 innings of work.

If all the pieces fall into place for the 2009 Cobber baseball team then a return to the playoffs and a shot at a top three league finish is well within their reach.

Gustavus

Coach: Mike Carroll (13th season)

2008 Finish: Tied 3rd (12-8 MIAC, 21-18 overall)

Gustavus Season Preview

The 2009 Gustavus Adolphus baseball team again looks to contend for the MIAC title with solid defense and pitching after tying for third in the league last season with a 12-8 record. Head Coach Mike Carroll will need to replace all-conference first baseman Pat Siering and veteran catcher Shea Roehrkaske, but feels the great clubhouse atmosphere and depth will help the Gusties make a run at the league championship.

The infield returns veteran shortstop Mike DesLauriers (Sr., Minnetonka, Minn.) and second baseman Nate Ruff (Sr., Bloomington, Minn.). DesLauriers moved into the leadoff spot midway through the season en route to finishing second on the team with a .358 batting average, while Ruff posted a .971 fielding percentage and hit .277. Junior Tory Herman (Shoreview, Minn.) stepped in at third base last year and posted a .262 batting average. The biggest question for Gustavus is who will replace first baseman Pat Siering and catcher Shea Roehrkaske. Top candidates for the opening at first base are juniors Eric Bigham (Robbinsdale, Minn.) and Alan Woitas (Sleepy Eye, Minn.), while sophomore transfer Matt Morgan (Minnetrista, Minn.) and Mitch Johnson (So., Hopkins, Minn.) are vying for the starting catcher job.

The outfield returns two starters including junior rightfielder Spencer Campion (Plymouth, Minn.) and junior centerfielder Andrew Woitas (Sleepy Eye, Minn.). Both players saw regular time last year as Woitas had a batting average of .232 and Campion hit .179. Sophomores Brandon Boyd (Hastings, Minn.), Greg Lane (Chaska, Minn.), and Cody Sukalski (Blue Earth, Minn.) will also compete for outfield spots, as the positions will go to the players who can perform in the field and at the dish.

Coach Carroll feels he has a strong five-man pitching rotation with right-hander Adam Bren (Jr., Chatfield, Minn.) leading the way. Bren was third among MIAC pitchers holding opposing league hitters to a .200 batting average, while recording a 2.95 ERA despite a 1-4 record. The probable starting rotation is rounded out by Brandon Knoll (Sr., Princeton, Minn.), who was 0-2 in five starts a year ago, Derek Eddie (Jr., Owatonna, Minn.), who posted a record of 2-1 in three starts, Sukalski, who posted a record of 3-3 in eight starts, and Herman, who saw limited pitching time. Ryan Michaelis (Jr., Big Lake, Minn.) returns to the bullpen for the Gusties after emerging as the top relief pitcher last season with a 3.10 ERA in 16 appearances.

Hamline

Coach: Jason Verdugo (8th season)

2008 Finish: Tied 3rd (12-8 MIAC, 23-18 overall)

Hamline Season Preview

Hamline University head coach Jason Verdugo returns a decorated senior shortstop to his line-up, but sees a question mark on the mound with just one returning starter, as the Pipers prepare for the 2009 season.

Dan Kaczrowski (Sr., St. Anthony, Minn.) has collected enough awards in the last calendar year to fill a trophy case, culminating in Baseball American naming him the preseason player of the year in the 2009 Division III preview. The publication also listed him as the #2 prospect in Division III heading into the 2009 draft. Last spring, Kaczrowski was the 2008 MIAC Co-Player of the Year, hitting .500 against MIAC opponents with 18 RBI and 24 runs scored. He hit nine doubles, one triple and four homeruns in 2008. Overall in 2008, Kaczrowski hit .477 to lead the Pipers, with 40 RBI and 54 runs scored. Verdugo will look to Kaczrowski to continue with the strong leadership and consistency that he has contributed in the past two years for the Pipers.

Six additional starters return alongside Kaczrowski in the line-up, including three who hit better than .315 for the season in 2008. Left fielder Alex Buresh (Jr., Vadnais Heights, Minn.) hit .378 with 15 RBI, mostly at designated hitter, last season. Verdugo will look for him to continue with the strong play he exhibited during conference play last year and will find himself with a larger role on the team as he spends more time in the outfield.

Joining Buresh in the outfield will be sophomore Tony Rogers (St. Michael, Minn.), who hit .326 with 12 RBI and was 10-for-13 in stolen bases. Rogers adds power at the plate for the Pipers, and has worked hard in the weight room during the off-season.

Guiding a young pitching staff this year will be junior catcher Lincoln Hughes (Inver Grove Heights, Minn.). Hughes hit .316, had 24 RBI, and was solid defensively with 215 putouts last season. Another one of the most consistent leaders off the field and contributors between the lines, he will serve as a co-captain of the team with Kaczrowski.

Matt Mullendore (So., Amery, Wis.) is the long Piper starting pitcher returning to Verdugo's rotation. He posted a 3-1 record with a 5.48 ERA in 44.1 innings pitched last season. He finished strong in 2008 for the Pipers, including a strong six-inning performance in the team's playoff game against Gustavus.

Joining Mullendore in the starting rotation will be newcomer Mike Bland (Fy., Minnetonka, Minn.), a double threat who has the ability to play a role in the field when he's not starting.

Looking to help finish off games for Mullendore and collect a lot of outs will be Cass Kreitlow (So., Glenwood, Minn.). Kreitlow will step in as the Pipers' primary reliever, after making just five appearances for a total of 6.1 innings in his first-year campaign.

In filling in vacancies and rounding out his pitching staff, Verdugo is forced to rely on several young players with little collegiate experience. The team will look to stay competitive in the MIAC and go after a fourth playoff appearance in five years by relying on the proven consistency of their returning hitters, as well as look to have their new players jump over the learning curve to contribute immediately.

Macalester

Coach: Matt Parrington (10th season)

2008 Finish: 9th (7-13 MIAC, 14-23 overall)

Macalester Season Preview

The Scots are back on campus this season, practicing in the winter at the new Leonard Center and playing their home games this spring at their cozy new baseball field, and are eager to make a move up in the MIAC standings under 10th-year head coach Matt Parrington.

A couple big reasons for optimism is the return of a pair of ABCA / Rawlings All-Midwest region and All-MIAC standouts in third baseman Devin English (Jr., Annapolis, Md. / DeMatha) and ace pitcher James Murrey (Jr., Western Springs, Ill./ Lyons Township).

English, who was Macalester's Offensive and Defensive MVP, batted .354 from his leadoff spot in the order and led the team in runs (37), RBI (27), doubles (11) home runs (4) and slugging percentage (.531). Murrey, a two-time all-conference pitcher, posted a 7-2 record with a 2.29 ERA. He fanned 60 batters in 55 innings and ranked second in the conference in strikeouts for the second year in a row. Opponents batted just .216 against him and he has more strikeouts than innings pitched in his two-year Macalester career.

The strength of the team's lineup is the left side of the infield, where English and shortstop Nate Wilson-Traisman (Jr. Eugene, Ore. / South Eugene) are back for two more years. Wilson-Traisman was the team's leading batsman in '08 with a .364 average while driving 21 runs and scoring 22, and receiving honorable mention all-conference honors. Wilson-Traisman had a .505 slugging percentage and .474 on-base percentage, and his career batting average at Mac is .335.

Outfielder Michael Kennedy (Jr., Chicago, Ill. / Northside Prep) batted .333 with a .480 slugging percentage and .444 on-base mark, and infielder/outfielder Jason Friedman (Jr., New York, N.Y. / The Browning School) also returns to the lineup. Newcomer Mitch Glasser (Fy., Chicago, Ill. / Latin School) should have an immediate impact in the infield. Robert Engel (Jr., Sunnyvale, Calif. / St. Lawrence) pitched in seven games and in 63 at-bats, hit .286.

Outfielders Will Chen (So., Edina, Minn.) Bobby De Meulenaere (So., Elk Grove Village, Ill. / Elk Grove) batted .261 and .275, respectively, as rookies.

After an injury-plagued freshman campaign, pitcher Eric Robinson (Jr., San Francisco, Calif. / The Urban School) gave the Scots solid support behind Murrey in the rotation, going 2-4 in nine starts in 43 innings of mound duty. Reliever Brad Johnson (Sr., Mt. Laurel, N.J. / Lenape) had a solid season last year.

Saint John's

Coach: Jerry Haugen (32nd season)

2008 Finish: Tied 6th (10-10 MIAC, 16-17 overall)

Saint John's Season Preview

The Saint John's University baseball team will fashion a new look in both appearance and composition in 2009.

The Johnnies' new uniforms and retro logo are appropriate this spring, considering head coach Jerry Haugen's versatile squad needs to replace 12 graduated seniors from a year ago. The youth movement will supply plenty of depth and new faces in the starting lineup as six of the graduated regulars will likely be replaced by underclassmen in '09.

The Johnnies missed the MIAC tournament by two games to finish tied for sixth in the MIAC with a 10-10 record and a 16-17 overall record in 2008. The top four squads in the 11-team MIAC make the annual postseason tournament.

A key returnee in the outfield for the Johnnies will be junior Joe Eiden (Maple Grove, Minn./Totino-Grace). Eiden had a .333 batting average and a slugging percentage of .435 last season. He was tied for the team lead in doubles with seven in 25 games played. Eiden also received Academic All-MIAC honors.

The Johnnies also return juniors Andrew Gurbada (Royalton, Minn.) and Matt Magnan (Prescott, Wis.), and sophomore Aaron Traut (St. Cloud, Minn./Rocori). Gurbada started in 15 games for the Johnnies and ended the season with a .293 batting average, while Magnan and Traut combined for a .538 batting average and seven RBI in 12 games last spring.

Freshman outfielders Matt Boys (Eden Prairie, Minn./Minnetonka), Jimmy Loonan (Waseca, Minn.), Andrew Rotschafer (Eden Prairie, Minn.), Luke Sweeter (Sartell, Minn./Sartell-St. Stephen) and Hayden Zimmerman (New Richmond, Wis.) will all see time in the outfield for the Johnnies.

The Johnnies need to replace two graduated seniors, Chace Pollock and Brandon Wolf. Last season, Pollock started all 33 games in center field and finished the season with a .295 batting average. Pollock tied for the team lead with three triples and finished second on the team in hits (33), RBI (20) and stolen bases (five). Wolf tied for third on the team in RBI (19) and contributed 23 hits with a .434 slugging percentage for SJU.

SJU has three holes to fill in its infield with the graduation of shortstop John Heinbigner, second baseman Ryan Sufka and third baseman Matt Meyer. Heinbigner was named to the ESPN the Magazine Academic All-District Five third team, NCAA Division III All-Midwest Region third team and received All-MIAC first-team honors. Heinbigner ended the 2008 season with a seven-game hitting streak, in addition to reaching safely in each of his final 16 games and led the Johnnies in batting average (.358) and hits (38). Sufka finished with a .294 batting average and led the MIAC in walks with 23. Meyer tied for third on the team in with 19 RBI and batted .301 in 2008.

Senior first baseman Mike Krempa (Burnsville, Minn. /Holy Angels) will look to bring experience and leadership to the 2009 team. Krempa started 23 games for the Johnnies last season and finished with a .290 batting average and a .507 slugging percentage. He recorded five doubles, two triples and a home run on the season. Krempa will likely see time as the designated hitter when sophomore Kyle Henkemeyer (Sauk Rapids, Minn./Sauk Rapids-Rice) is playing first. Henkemeyer batted .288 with a team-leading 21 RBI as a freshman last season.

Junior Mitch Faust (Plymouth, Minn./Wayzata) is penciled in as the starter at second base after batting .364 in 13 games for the Johnnies. When not in the outfield, Eiden could see time at second. Sophomores Brett Kramer (Baxter, Minn./Brainerd), Jack Ries (Shoreview, Minn./Totino-Grace) and Eric Smith (Rogers, Minn.) will also be in the mix at second.

Senior Case Paxton (Brooklyn Park, Minn./Osseo) is the probable starter at third base for the Johnnies in 2009. When Paxton takes the mound, expect either sophomore Matt Butorac (Maple Grove, Minn.), junior Michael Carr (St. Cloud, Minn./Apollo) or freshman Bert Marsnik (Annandale, Minn.) to take over at the hot corner. A trio of sophomores in Butorac, Andrew Hengel (Bemidji, Minn.) and Jordan Warren (Goodhue, Minn.) will battle for time at shortstop this spring. Butorac batted .375 in five games last spring.

Sophomore Brian Skluzacek (Cold Spring, Minn./Rocori) returns behind the plate after batting .288 with five doubles, two triples and a home run in 25 games last spring. Krempa, junior Aaron Hellem (Lincoln, Neb./Pius X) and freshmen Ben Kelsey (Savage, Minn./Holy Angels), Boys or Sweeter could also see time at catcher this season.

The Johnnies' pitching staff will face the challenge of replacing graduated seniors Adam Johnson, T.J. Nelson and Dusty Wilfahrt. The trio combined for a 9-9 record in 123.2 innings and over half of the team's strikeouts.

Returning to the starting rotation for the Johnnies will be juniors Andrew Aebly (Madison, Wis./Edgewood) and Matt Johnson (Eagan, Minn.). In 19.2 innings, Aebly went 2-2 with a 5.49 ERA. Johnson pitched 29.1 innings for the Johnnies and finished with a 3.68 ERA and 19 strikeouts. Junior Cody Fruin (Cottonwood, Minn./Lakeview), who recorded one win in two starts, should also see time on the mound for SJU.

Sophomore Brett Kramer (Baxter, Minn./Brainerd) posted a 3.18 ERA in 5.2 innings of relief as a freshman last season, but may make the jump to the starting rotation this spring. Sophomore Dan Beste (Freeport, Minn./Melrose Area) and freshman Ben Englund (Shorewood, Minn./Minnetonka), both lefties, will also see time on the mound this spring. Ries and Zimmerman will also contend for innings this season.

The Johnnies return a pair of senior relief pitchers in Paxton and Alex Wahl (Plymouth, Minn./Benilde-St. Margaret's). Paxton made 10 appearances for the Johnnies in 2008 and boasts a 5-2 career record with five saves and a 3.46 ERA. Wahl enters this season with a 3-1 career record in 19 appearances with a 4.70 ERA.

Head coach Jerry Haugen, SJU class of 1976, begins his 32nd season as the Johnnies head coach. Haugen currently holds an overall record of 584-499-5 (.539), which places him in the top 25 on the NCAA Division III winningest active coaches list. Under Haugen, the Johnnies have had 15 winning seasons in the last 19 years.

Saint Mary's

Coach: Nick Winecke (1st season)

2008 Finish: 10th (4-16 MIAC, 8-23 overall)

Saint Mary's Season Preview

The head coach’s first name is the same. In fact, their last name starts with the same letter, too.

But that’s about where the similarities end.

This year’s Saint Mary’s University baseball team, under the direction of first-year head coach Nick Winecke will have a much different feel than last year’s Cardinal squad under Nick Whaley.

“I learned a ton under Coach Whaley and he gave me a lot of responsibilities last year that have really helped prepare me for the move from an assistant coach to a head coach,” said Winecke, who was named the Cardinals’ head coach after Whaley stepped down after 12 years as the Cardinals’ head coach to become the head baseball and volleyball coach, as well as a physical education and health instructor at Winona Cotter High School. “There’s no question Coach Whaley was instrumental in helping prepare me for this position.”

And while Winecke played for, and coached with, Whaley, this year’s 2009 Cardinal baseball team will definitely have Winecke’s stamp on it.

“We’re trying to do things totally different than they have been done in the past — and there’s been a bit of an adjustment period,” explained Winecke, who inherited a team that went 8-23 a year ago. “But their willingness to listen and work has helped the adjustment move along pretty smoothly.”

“Our focus right now is to get the guys to understand that everything they do has a positive or negative effect on their teammates.”

Winecke’s biggest task will be replacing the offensive punch lost with the graduation of Brady Knudsen (.406 BA, 23 runs, 43 hits, 28 RBIs); David Krieger (.338 BA, 13 runs, 26 hits, 10 RBIs) and Kevin Black (.302 BA, 26 runs, 32 hits, 16 RBIs).

“We lost a lot of offensive firepower, but we also return some guys who can swing the bat,” said Winecke, referring to players like Kyle Ryan (.308 BA, 22 runs, 32 hits, 17 RBIs), Brandon Haugh (.278 BA, 12 runs, 28 hits, 9 doubles) and Alex Schmidt (.250 BA). “Every year you’ve got to replace players, and this year is no different — we are just going to need people to step up and get the job done.”

St. Olaf
Coach: Matt McDonald (15th season)
2008 Finish: 2nd (16-4 MIAC, 28-12 overall)

St. Olaf Season Preview

The 2009 St. Olaf College baseball team will ride the arms of an experienced pitching staff, solid returning bats in the lineup and a traditionally good-fielding defense in its quest to win an MIAC Championship.

St. Olaf won the 2007 title before finishing second in 2008. In the 14 seasons under head coach Matt McDonald the Oles have won four league championships, finished third or better every season since 1996, have won 30 or more games three times and at least 20 games each season.

The Oles, who finished two games behind St. Thomas for the 2008 league crown, have key pitchers back in the rotation this spring led by two-time all-region and three-time All-MIAC pick Todd Mathison.

Mathison was the conference's co-player of the year last spring after going 6-2 on the mound and hitting a career-best .393 in 124 plate appearances. Mathison has astonishing numbers on the mound in his tenure – 21-2 with a 1.84 ERA and six saves – in three seasons.

Also back in the rotation is Alex Sommer, who was third on the team in appearances and innings in 2008. His 5-4 record in seven starts was complimented by a pair of saves in 43 1/3 innings.

As a first year last spring, Brandon Agneberg became one of the team's go-to guys on the mound. He worked 35 innings, going 3-2 with a 2.83 ERA. He collected 28 strikeouts while limiting opponents to ten walks and three extra base hits – all doubles.

Alex Beckman was the Oles' most reliable and used man in the bullpen in 2008. He led the team in appearances (15) and had decent numbers –

3.98 ERA in 20 1/3 innings with only six walks.

Four other returners – senior first baseman Tyler Johnson, Wes Olson, Matt Neuger and Erik Olson – also saw innings and could see the more this spring.

The St. Olaf outfield will be paced by junior brothers Carson and Tyler Jones. Carson has started and played in all but two games in his first two seasons, hitting .369 as a first year and .361 last year with 11 doubles, four triples and 31 RBI. Tyler emerged as one of the team's best offensive threats in his first season of extended action, last year, hitting .396 and matching Carson's 31 RBI. The duo has alternated on the All-Midwest region teams as Carson was a third team pick in 2007 before Tyler earned the same honor last spring.

Junior Sam Baltes returns to the outfield as well after a standout first season of playing time. He hit .379 with ten doubles and three homers last season.

Nick Fuerst returns to third base after a remarkable junior season. Fuerst won the third base job early in the season and went on to hit .449 in 26 games. His 13 doubles and .652 slugging percentage led the squad.

Johnson, who hit .305 with a team-high four homers in 2008, will be the first option at first base.

The middle infield, at least in the early stages of the season, will be up in the air. Mathison, who has played short and third base, could also play some at second to make room for someone else to play short.

Senior Justin Tobias, sophomore Sean Dube, the versatile Tyler Jones or a first year could find their way into the lineup as a middle infielder.

Catcher Pat Wadzinski, who is expected to return behind the dish, had his best offensive season in 2008. The senior backstop was a tough out, hitting .352 with 21 walks against only six strikeouts in over 130 plate appearances.

Tyler Jones could spell Wadzinski in an effort to get another outfielder into the lineup as well.

St. Thomas**Coach:** Dennis Denning (15th season)**2008 Finish:** 1st (18-2 MIAC, 34-9 overall)**St. Thomas Season Preview**

St. Thomas came into the 2009 season with a No. 22 national ranking. The Tommies split two early March doubleheaders with ranked teams with No. 14-rated St. Scholastica and No. 3-rated UW-Whitewater. They will play 11 games in Florida, March 21-26.

Coach Dennis Denning starts his 15th season needing 19 wins to reach 500 on his college career. Denning saw his 2008 team finish 34-9, win the program's sixth consecutive MIAC title, and reach the NCAA playoffs for the 13th time in 14 seasons. St. Thomas is a combined 216-19 vs. conference foes in baseball and softball over the last five seasons -- 123-2 in softball, 93-17 in baseball. That includes an impressive 28-2 MIAC postseason record. St. Thomas was the lone Division III institution to be ranked all season in the top 20 in both baseball and softball.

But Denning graduated three All-Americans -- pitcher Lonnie Robinson (21-3, 119 Ks on career), catcher Matt Pexa (.406, 167 hits on career), and OF Chris Bullis (.434, 177 hits on career).

The Tommies have 15 returners in their chase for a seventh consecutive MIAC championship, led by junior RHP Matt Schuld, and two returning All-Region honorees in Dan Leslie, a senior RHP-3B, and Tom Wippler, a junior 1B.

More than 10 others who have played extensively return, including seniors Erik Olson (RHP), Louie Salmen (2B) and Brian Schmitz (OF-DH); juniors Matt Olson (OF), Roy Larson (SS), Jake Kraemer (LHP); and sophomores Matt McQuillan (OF), Taylor Rahm (OF), Ryan Fahey (RHP), Drew Cremisino (OF) and Tim Kahle (SS). Another sophomore, Charles Bruchu, is out for the season with an arm injury. The Tommies have five players up from their junior-varsity program.

The five newcomers on the current varsity roster include sophomore catcher Ben Wartman, who had 13 touchdowns and 1,311 rushing yards as an All-West region running back in football; freshmen pitchers Bryce Gapinski of Foley, John Licht of Minneapolis Southwest and Brad Weiers of New Prague; and freshman 1B-DH John Means of Burnsville.

The Tommies led Division III defensively with a .975 fielding clip, and their infield should again be a strength. UST appears to have good depth on offense and will look for some young pitchers to mature quickly. UST batted .357 and had a .540 slugging percentage to rank in the top 10 nationally in each category.