

2011 MIAC Baseball Season Preview and Coaches' Poll

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ST. PAUL, Minn. – Though winter's hold on Minnesota hasn't quite given way to baseball weather just yet and the roofless Metrodome made for an unusual early portion of the season, the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) is gearing up to open the conference portion of its schedule as the calendar flips to April. And once again, there appear to be some very familiar foes angling for the conference title and playoff positions.

The University of St. Thomas will open the 2011 MIAC season as the favorite once again, after claiming its unprecedented eighth-straight conference title last year and adding the playoff championship for good measure. The Tommies received six of the 12 first-place votes and sit atop the 2011 MIAC Baseball Preseason Coaches' Poll with 93 points. However, for UST's long-standing dominance, there figures to be some big hurdles between it and a ninth-straight trophy.

St. Olaf and Saint John's – the only two teams not named St. Thomas to earn a MIAC title in past 15 years – are again the top contenders to the Tommies' throne, and the gap appears to be extremely close in 2011. The Oles received three first place votes and snagged the second spot in the poll with 86 points, and the Johnnies are just one back at 85 points, with two first-place votes to their credit. Those three Saint schools certainly could engage in an intriguing three-horse race for the conference crown.

The fight for the playoffs could include many more teams, however, as nine of the 11 league teams earned at least 34 points in the poll. Concordia is the odds-on favorite to join the top three in the four-team postseason field with 77 points, but after that things could get very interesting as almost the entire rest of the field can legitimately lay claim to challenging for a playoff spot this season.

Hamline and Augsburg came in fifth and sixth in the poll with 59 and 56 points, respectively. Bethel slotted in seventh with a total of 40, and Macalester (35) and Gustavus (34) were right behind the Scots in eighth and ninth. Saint Mary's finished 10th in the poll with 21 points, and Carleton rounded things out with a total of 19.

It's no surprise the coaches' tabbed the Tommies as the favorite again after eight-straight titles. St. Thomas has also won 12 of the last 15 MIAC championships, and leads all schools with 30 total baseball titles. Last year's squad won the MIAC by a single game with a 15-5 record, and was 35-9 overall with seven losses coming by a single run. UST graduated several key players from last year's squad – and the 2009 national title team – but there is still a lot in the cupboard for second-year coach **Chris Olean**.

A trio of All-MIAC returnees will lead the Tommies in 2010, starting with pitcher **Kris Edwards**. UST led all NCAA teams (all levels) with a team ERA of 2.41, and Edwards was a big part of that, with a 1.87 ERA last season. **Taylor Rahm** is back to anchor an experienced outfield for St. Thomas, and 3B **Charles Bruchu** is another returning All-MIAC pick. Designated hitter **Drew Cremisin** has swung a big bat early this season, and was named the season's first MIAC Player-of-the-Week earlier this week.

St. Olaf has validated its first-place votes with a strong start to the 2011 season. **Matt McDonald's** club is 12-3 thus far, and ranked as high as No. 12 in Division III after playing some impressive early-season ball. The Oles said goodbye to MIAC Player-of-the-Year **Tyler Jones**, they're getting plenty of contributions from talented returners in 2011. **Sam Maus** is hitting .380 with 15 runs scored and **Sean Dube** and **Erik Nelson** are both hitting above .325, while the pitching staff is getting good outings from numerous individuals.

The Johnnies return one of the most imposing nucleuses in the league in 2011 with four All-MIAC Players back in red and white. Catcher **Brian Skluzacek**, DH **Bert Marsnik** and pitchers **Brett Kramer** and **Hayden Zimmerman** are all back after earning all-conference last year, and after finishing just a game behind UST in the standings, the experienced and talented team in Collegeville has its sights set on another playoff berth and dethroning the defending champs.

Concordia finished last season tied with Saint John's for second, and the Cobbers expect to figure in the title chase and the playoff field again this season. Concordia got a brand-new FieldTurf infield, so that should ensure Mother Nature doesn't disrupt as many games in Moorhead, but the Metrodome collapse hurt the Cobbers, as they were the only team without a warm-weather trip on the schedule. Junior **Dan Wackler** was an All-MIAC pick last year, and will team up with **Michael Carlson** to give Concordia one of the conference's top infields, and a veteran pitching staff returns for the Cobbers.

Hamline and Augsburg both hope to challenge for playoff spots – or more – in 2011 with lots of talent back at each city school. The Pipers will be stellar on defense with Gold Glove All-American **Tony Rogers** back in the outfield and MIAC All-Defensive team pick **Andy Powell** back at second base. Hamline also returns All-MIAC pick **Andy King**, and conference Rookie-of-the-Year **Matt Eickman**, a starting pitcher. The Auggies will be led by pitchers **Kriz Ozga** – an All-Conference pick last year – and **Mark Heise**, who earned All-Defensive honors.

Bethel, Macalester and Gustavus will all try to move up in the conference standings. The Royals return All-MIAC and All-Region catcher **Jay Slick** and this week pitcher **Matt Rowley** earned the MIAC's first Pitcher-of-the-Week honor in 2011. Macalester has shown a nice progression in recent years, and hope to continue that behind the leadership of All-MIAC 2B **Mitch Glasser**, leading hitter **Robert**



Williams and a pitching staff rich with veterans. Gustavus is replacing nine key players lost to graduation with an influx of talented youth, led by P/2B **Cody Sukalski** and 1B **Drew Block**.

Saint Mary's and Carleton also hope to continue their progress this season. The Cardinals lost eight seniors, but have lots of potential in players like **Curt Swanson** – the team's biggest returning bat - and **Gary Seifert**, who will lead a deep pitching rotation. Carleton brings back seven starters and will go as far as a young pitching staff can take it. The Knights are led by senior **Grant Bowen** at DH/1B and leading hitter **Alex Wirta**, who batted .395 a year ago.

The 20-game MIAC schedule is slated to open Saturday, but lingering snow and winter weather conditions are causing some changes to the schedule. At the end of the regular season, the top four teams in the standings will qualify for the 2011 MIAC Baseball Playoffs, which will have a new look this year. The tournament moves to Veteran's Field in Minnetonka, Minn., and the double-elimination tournament will be held May 13-15 with an automatic bid to the Division III Playoffs on the line.

The rest of the 2011 MIAC Baseball Preview contains complete results from the 2011 MIAC Baseball Preseason Coaches' Poll, information on the 2011 MIAC Playoffs, links to schedules, stats and more, and links to team-by-team previews for all 11 teams.

2011 MIAC Baseball Preseason Coaches' Poll

Coaches voted for every team in the conference except their own team. Points were assigned for each vote (10 for first, nine 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.

2011 MIAC Baseball Preseason Coaches' Poll		
Rank	Institution	Total
1	St. Thomas (6)	93
2	St. Olaf (3)	86
3	Saint John's (2)	85
4	Concordia	77
5	Hamline	59
6	Augsburg	56
7	Bethel	40
8	Macalester	35
9	Gustavus	34
10	Saint Mary's	21
11	Carleton	19

2011 MIAC Playoffs: Friday-Sunday, May 13-15 at Veteran's Field, Minnetonka, Minn. (Top four teams - double elimination)

| [2011 MIAC Schedule](#) | [2010 MIAC Statistics](#) | [MIAC Recordbook](#) | [MIAC Archives](#) |



Augsburg

Coach: Keith Bateman (8th season)

2010 Finish: Tied 4th (12-8 MIAC, 21-22 overall)

Augsburg Season Preview

The Augsburg College baseball team returns 28 players, including six starting position players, to a squad that reached the MIAC's playoff final round last season. Augsburg finished 21-22 overall, 12-8 in MIAC play in 2010.

Outfielders John Demgen (SR, Minneapolis, Minn./South HS), Jeff Butler (SO, Prior Lake, Minn.) and Tim Gerding (JR, Robbinsdale, Minn.) return. Demgen hit .333 with 25 RBI last year, while Butler hit .295 and Gerding hit .286 with 22 RBI.

In the infield, Donald Blunt (SR, Richfield, Minn.) is back, along with Mason Holmquist (SR, Prior Lake, Minn.). Also back in the starting lineup is designated hitter Adam Seaman (JR, Richfield, Minn.), who hit .304 with a team-high eight home runs last season, driving in 28 runs while connecting for a .618 slugging percentage.

On the mound, All-MIAC performer Kristofer Ozga (SR, Hawthorn Woods, Ill./Stevenson HS) is back. Last year, he was converted from a starter to a reliever late in the season, finishing with a 4-4 record with four saves and a 4.47 ERA.



Bethel

Coach: Greg Indlecoffer (9th season)

2010 Finish: Tied 6th (9-11 MIAC, 21-17 overall)

Bethel Season Preview

Head Coach Greg Indlecoffer leads the Bethel Royals into the 2011 season as he takes the helm for his 9th season. The Royals are returning a strong core of athletes despite losing several key athletes to graduation.

Coming off a 2009 season in which Bethel finished tied for 6th in the MIAC, going 21-17 overall and 9-11 in the conference, the Royals will look to build off their strengths and move up in the MIAC.

The Royals will look for key leadership both on the mound and with the bat from key returners such as:

Hitters:

Esteban Abbey (.308 BA, 12 BB)

Erik Anderson (.342 BA, 41 H, 4 HR, 34 RBI)

Mike Sedjo (.371 BA, .451 OBP)

Jay Slick (.430 BA, 52 H, 5 HR, 40 RBI, 13-15 SB)

Pitchers:

Chris Dent (30 IP, 3 SV)

David Freed (36 IP, 2-4 W-L)

Chris Harrell (44.2 IP, 4-3 W-L)

Behind the plate Jay Slick returns after a strong 2009 in which he was selected to his second All-Conference team, in addition to being selected as a Third Team All-Midwest Region selection.

The Royals graduated their top starter from last year's squad, but return several pitchers who have seen significant innings on the mound during their collegiate careers. Chris Harrell, who earned All-Conference Honorable Mention honors after his sophomore season and is a 2011 "Player to Watch" according to Collegiate Baseball Newspaper, returns in his senior year to lead the pitching staff. With a strong offense, and potential on the mound, the Royals have plenty of optimism heading into the 2011 season.

After losing the entire starting outfield from last year's roster, the Royals have some holes to fill. A combination of skilled young outfielders will be called upon to rove the grass for the Royals.

With some talented players returning and coming into the program, Bethel hopes to find themselves in the MIAC playoffs this season for the first time since 2000.



Carleton

Coach: Aaron Rushing (7th season)

2010 Finish: Tied 8th (8-12 MIAC, 14-25 overall)

Carleton Season Preview

With seven starters returning and six players on Collegiate Baseball's annual NCAA Division III National "Players to Watch" list, the Carleton College baseball team is poised to begin its pursuit of the 2011 MIAC title. The offensive unit looks solid with five of those returners hitting over .350 for the Knights last year, but much of the success in the upcoming season will rest on the arms of a young pitching staff.

Senior Grant Bowen (Duxbury, Mass.) provides the offensive power in the lineup after tying for the team lead in slugging and popping three homers in 2010. Bowen also posted a .400 batting average in 17 conference games and a .358 average overall. After catching for the Knights his first three years, he will move to first base and see the majority of his time in the lineup as the designated hitter.

The only player to start all 39 games in 2010, Alex Wirta (Jr./Corte Madera, Calif./Redwood) looks to improve after two solid years at the plate. An All-MIAC selection his freshman year, Wirta improved in almost every offensive statistical while leading the Knights in batting average (.395) and doubles (11). He was also second on the team in runs scored, runs batted in, and home runs. After two years of conference play, the co-captain owns a .405 career batting average in MIAC action and has started in 66 consecutive games.

After joining the team last year, Patrick Philley (Jr./Gig Harbor, Wash./Charles Wright Academy) was a staple in the middle of the order during his first year, hitting .364 with a team-best 24 RBI. After spending the majority of the time in the lineup as the designated hitter in 2010, Philley will move to right field this spring.

Junior corner infielders Kiyo Gomi (Dobbs Ferry, N.Y./Ardsley) and Clay Parrish (Westport, Conn./Staples) both had breakout seasons in 2010 as they had batting averages of .356 and .354, respectively. Rounding out the infield is senior co-captain David Ames (Riverwoods, Ill./Deerfield) who returns to shortstop after spending the 2010 season at second base. Over the last two years, Ames holds a .339 batting average in conference play.

Erik Fabry (Jr./Apple Valley, Minn./Eastview) will patrol center field for the Knights for the third straight season. The Knights will look to utilize his speed and ability to reach base as Fabry will start in the leadoff position after spending his first two seasons in the middle of the order. Fabry has led the team in stolen bases his first two years and was not caught stealing in 2010.

Adam Zweber (Corvallis, Ore.) and Jeff Dsida (Winnetka, Ill./New Trier) will split time behind the plate to begin the 2011 campaign. Zweber started 15 games a year ago, and Dsida can swing the bat as he led his high school in RBI's while hitting .418 during his senior year.

Joining the veteran starting lineup will be first-year Ray Yong (Elmhurst, Ill./York) who has impressed the coaching staff in fall workouts and practices. Yong led his team to the regional championship as a senior, hitting at a .426 clip with six homers.

The depth in the infield may be the Knights' biggest luxury in 2011. Senior Jim Klein (Alameda, Calif./College Prep) is a defensive specialist who will slide into third base when Parrish is summoned to the mound. Jacob Rice (So./North Oaks, Minn./St. Paul Academy) has impressed with his improvement since his freshman year and can play all infield spots. Freshmen Kevin Johnson (St. Anthony, Minn./De La Salle) and David Stillerman (Evanston, Ill.) will backup Ames and Wirta at the middle infield spots and will push for playing time. At first base the Knights have an abundance of suitable backups to Gomi including Bowen, Ben Cushing (Oakland, Calif./Head Royce), Josh Zoellmer (Richfield, Minn.), and Cameron Webb (Portland, Ore./Lincoln).

The outfield positions do not have the depth like the Knights do at the infield spots, but they make up for it in their flexibility. Philley, Fabry, and Yong can play all three spots and will be backed up by Angus Vaughan (Jr./Minneapolis, Minn./Minneapolis Southwest) and freshman Mike Holter (Centennial, Colo./Valor Christian). Another option in the outfield could be versatile Ben Walsh (New Canaan, Conn./St. Paul School), who will also work in behind the plate as well.

All the big questions for the 2011 Knights squad come on the mound. The Knights lost a considerable portion of their staff from 2010 and will have to replace 138 innings. Jacob Anderson (Sr./Ramsey, Minn./Anoka) is slated to be the staff's ace after going 2-3 in 11 appearances last year. Joining him at the front end of the rotation is Paul Dimick (Jr./Northfield, Minn.) who also finished 2-3 in 15 appearances and was second on the team in innings pitched. First-year Anderson Cole (Aspen, Colo.) impressed in the fall season and has earned himself a spot in the starting rotation. Injured for most of his high school senior season, Cole finished the year 7-0 with a 0.33 ERA while striking out 65 batters in 45 innings. Gomi, Brendan Fowl (Fy./Kingsville, M.D./McDonogh) and Henry Rownd (So./Rochester, Minn./Rochester Lourdes) will compete for the final spots in the rotation.

The bullpen is also inexperienced as several newcomers will be called on to have an immediate impact for Carleton. Parrish, Holter, Ted Harmon (So./Edina, Minn.), Jackson Tears (Fy./Trabuco Canyon, Calif./JSerra), Jukie Tsai (Fy./New York, N.Y./Friends Seminary) and Danny Shields (Fy./Richfield, Minn./Holy Angels) will look to piece together the back end of the games for the Knights. Without a proven stopper on the mound, their roles will be further defined as the season progresses.



Coach: Bucky Burgau (33rd season)

2010 Finish: 2nd (14-6 MIAC, 24-17 overall)

Concordia Season Preview

The outlook for Cobber baseball is bright and optimistic. Concordia is coming off its best MIAC finish in six years and is about to step foot on a brand new FieldTurf infield. The Cobbers finished just one game back of the conference regular season championship last year and then watched as workers removed the old dirt infield and installed a brand new "state of the art" artificial surface that will guarantee the team a chance to get outside once the temperatures rise above freezing.

Head Coach Bucky Burgau begins his 33rd season at the helm of the Cobbers after earning MIAC Coach of the Year honors in 2010. He is hopeful this year's team will be able to carry over the momentum gained from last year's title chase and subsequent berth in the conference playoffs. His optimism is carried by a group of 14 seniors. Concordia also returns five regulars and four of their top 5 pitchers from a team that won 24 games.

The biggest concern for Burgau and the Cobbers centers around the preseason schedule. Last year the team dropped its annual Florida spring break trip to play weekly games in the Metrodome. The tactic of not having a long layoff between the preseason and conference schedule paid off and the Cobbers earned a spot in the league playoffs for the first time in five years. CC was hoping to repeat that scenario in 2011. Unfortunately the Metrodome collapsed and left Concordia scrambling to fill out their non-league schedule. The only MIAC team not to travel on a warm-weather spring trip this year, the Cobbers will be hoping that they can gain experience in short order once the snow melts and the team starts play in Minnesota.

Leading the way for the Cobbers in 2011 will be the infield tandem of Dan Wackler (Sr., Buffalo, Minn.) and Michael Carlson (Sr., Sartell, Minn.). Wackler earned ABCA All-Region honors last year as he led the team in hitting. His 413 average was over 130 points higher than his previous career best of .279 last season. Wackler also led the team in doubles (14) and on-base-percentage (.482) and was second in slugging percentage (.562). Wackler also had the highest fielding percentage (.980) of any Cobber regular as he committed only three errors in 153 chances at second base.

Carlson was third on the team in hitting with a .357 average. He led the team in walks (26) and was third in total bases (64) and second in stolen bases (20). Carlson was the team's starting third baseman last season but will be moved to shortstop to give the Cobbers an excellent defensive combination in the middle of the infield.

One of the biggest holes to fill for the Cobber offense will be in the power department. While Concordia relied more on the running game last year, CC did have decent power numbers and tied for the league lead in home runs and was second in slugging percentage. This year's squad will have to find new long-ball threats as the Cobbers lost 79.1% of their home run output due to graduation. The only returning player that had more than one HR last year is Tony Emmerich (Sr., Moorhead, Minn.). Emmerich had two home runs last year and is scheduled to be one of the starting outfielder's this season.

Wackler, Carlson and Emmerich are the only returning regulars who saw extended time in the starting lineup last year. Several newcomers and underclassmen will give Concordia a youthful energy that will help during the uncertain start of the season.

The pitching staff will be highlighted by veteran returners Andrew Skow-Anderson (Sr., Pelican Rapids, Minn.), Zach Frappier (Jr., Fargo, N.D./Shanley HS), Ryan Johnson (Sr., Fargo, N.D./Shanley HS) and Jake Torrison (Sr., Plymouth, Minn./Wayzata HS). Skow-Anderson, Frappier and Torrison will make up $\frac{3}{4}$ of the starting rotation. Frappier led the team in ERA (2.98) last season as he went 2-1 in 12 appearances. He earned the victory in the team's playoff win over St. John's. Skow-Anderson was second on the team in ERA with a mark of 3.05 and was 2-0 in his five starts. He will be hoping to recapture his early-season magic from 2010 when he did not allow a single run in his first seven appearances. Torrison went 3-2 last season and did not allow an earned run in five of his nine appearances.

Johnson will return as the team's closer to start the season. Last year he had a team-leading six saves and led the team in appearances with 18. Johnson was fourth on the team in ERA (3.55) and did not allow an earned run in eight consecutive appearances.

Only time will tell if Concordia can overcome the lack of preseason games due to the collapse of the Metrodome. One thing is for certain, the Cobbers' veteran leadership and experience from last year's title chase will go a long way in helping christen a brand new infield that will hopefully produce another playoff caliber team.



Gustavus

Coach: Mike Carroll (15th season)

2010 Finish: 10th (5-15 MIAC, 15-23 overall)

Gustavus Season Preview

The 2011 Gustavus baseball team will have a lot of new faces battling for playing time due to five field starters and four starting pitchers lost to graduation, however Coach Mike Carroll thinks his young team has good potential and he has been pleased with the dedication and effort the team has put in during the pre-season.

"Even though we are very young, I think this group has the potential to grow into a very competitive squad," stated Carroll. "We are going to use our spring trip to get everyone's roles defined and get ready for the challenging conference schedule when we return."

Pitching is a question mark as senior Cody Sukalski (Blue Earth, Minn./Blue Earth Area) is the only returning starter. Sukalski compiled a record of 4-6 in 11 appearances last year with an ERA of 3.93 in 55 innings of work. Sophomore Tim Miller (Eden Prairie, Minn.) is also a key returner on the pitching staff, however Coach Carroll is not sure yet whether Miller will be a starter or serve as the closer in the bullpen (a decision that will likely be made on the Spring Trip in Arizona). Miller was 3-2 in nine appearances last season with an ERA of 6.11 in 28 innings of work. Sukalski will play second base and Miller will play centerfield when they are not pitching. Others expected to battle for a spot in the starting rotation include juniors Bryce Bintzler (Woodbury, Minn.) and Tom Jaede (Eagan, Minn./Holy Angels), sophomore Connor Norris (Omaha, Nebr./Creighton Prep) and freshman Kellan Euerle (St. Cloud, Minn./Tech).

The team has good depth in the infield giving Carroll lots of options. Sophomore Drew Block (Rochester, Minn./Mayo) returns as the starting first baseman where hit .337 and had a .986 fielding percentage in 33 games last season. At second base, Sukalski will be joined by a pair of freshman Scott Benjamin (Northfield, Minn.) and Mike Holbrook (St. Cloud, Minn./ROCORI). Freshman Derek Lieser (Cold Spring, Minn./ROCORI) and sophomore Max Laureano (Plymouth, Minn./Breck) will vie for the starting role at shortstop, while senior Kyle Rains (Farmington, Minn.), junior Taylor Fish (Brandon, S.D.), and freshman Matt Lilledahl (Apple Valley, Minn./Eastview) are battling for playing time at third base. Rains hit .452 last season with 33 hits in 73 at-bats and Fish hit .297 with 19 hits in 64 plate appearances. Behind the plate, junior Mitch Johnson (Hastings, Minn.) and freshman Dave Tranvik (Robbinsdale, Minn./Benilde-St. Margaret) will combine to handle the young pitching staff.

In the outfield, Carroll will look to Miller in centerfield where he started 36 games last season and hit .313 with five doubles, two triples, and three home runs, while driving in 28. Juniors Erik Sveen (Shorewood, Minn./Minnetonka) and Kevin Roth (Richfield, Minn.) will share time in left field with Roth also serving as the designated hitter and freshman Kellan Euerle and Matt Lilledahl will share duties in right field with Euerle also pitching and Lilledahl playing some third base.



Hamline

Coach: Jason Verdugo (10th season)

2010 Finish: Tied 6th (9-11 MIAC, 16-24 overall)

Hamline Season Preview

Hamline University head coach Jason Verdugo returns the 2010 MIAC rookie of the year and a 2010ABCA/Rawlings NCAA Division III Gold Glove All-American as the Pipers look to return to the MIAC playoffs this season.

Verdugo graduated just four seniors from the 2010 roster - starting catcher Lincoln Hughes, power hitter Alex Buresh, infielder Tres Humerickhouse, and relief pitcher Tyler Welch. However, the Pipers return their entire corps of 2010 All-MIAC honorees for this spring's campaign.

Senior outfielder Tony Rogers (St. Michael, Minn.) leads the returners after being named to the nine-player Division III Gold Glove All-American list last season. He was perfect in the outfield last season with 104 putouts and four assists. He also led the Pipers at the plate, hitting .356 with 26 RBI over the course of the season.

He is joined by fellow 2010 MIAC All-Defensive team honoree, and classmate, Andy Powell (Minneapolis, Minn.). Powell had just one error with 30 putouts and 37 assists at second base during MIAC play for a fielding percentage of .985 a year ago.

A third position player from the 2010 All-MIAC list is a junior this season, Andy King (Fort Myers, Fla.). He earned All-MIAC first team honors after hitting .346 overall and .426 in conference play. He had seven doubles, two triples, three home runs, and 16 RBI against MIAC pitching. King also earned an MIAC player of the week honor following a set of four conference games in which he hit .667 (against Macalester and Carleton).

Heading up Verdugo's pitching staff is a pair of decorated players from last year, led by Matt Eickman (So., Brooklyn Park, Minn.), last season's conference rookie of the year. He threw four complete games in his inaugural collegiate season, all in MIAC play, posting a conference ERA of 2.77.

Eickman made seven appearances on the mound against MIAC opponents, including six starts, leading the Pipers in innings pitched with 39.0. He struck out 21 batters, gave up just five extra-base hits, and walked just eight en route to a conference record of 3-3.

He is joined on the mound by senior Cass Kreitlow (Glenwood, Minn.), who earned a pair of MIAC pitcher of the week honors in the final three weeks of the season. Kreitlow posted a 3.58 ERA during conference play and earned MIAC pitcher of the week honors twice in the final three weeks of the regular season. He made seven appearances with three starts and two complete games in conference competition, striking out 24 batters in 32.2 innings pitched.

Verdugo's line-up also feature a pair of proven players with playoff experience from previous seasons in J.D. Modrynski (Sr., Lakeville, Minn. and Cory Miller (Jr., Coon Rapids, Minn.).

His pitching corps also features another pair returning players who have seen time in the post-season - Matt Mullendore (Jr., Amery, Wis.) and Brett Bugielski (Jr., River Falls, Wis.). Sophomores Dan Ellefson (Burnsville, Minn.), Evan Knutson (Faribault, Minn.), and Casey Benford (Mesa, Ariz.) will all be looking to make an impact on the mound, as well.

A trio of transfer players will look to make an immediate impact for Verdugo's squad - catcher Ben Richardson (Jr., Akeny, Iowa), designated hitter Jordan Buck (So., Apple Valley, Minn.), and pitcher Dylan Olson (Jr., Richfield, Minn.). They are joined by Tyler Johnson (Fy., New Hope, Minn.), a two-sport athlete at Hamline (hockey), who will battle with Richardson for time behind the plate in the absence of Hughes.

As the Pipers return an extremely decorated and veteran line-up to MIAC play this season, Hamline will look to move back into the top of the MIAC standings and find themselves in their third post-season tournament in four years.



Macalester

Coach: Matt Parrington (12th season)

2010 Finish: Tied 8th (8-12 MIAC, 22-17-1 overall)

Macalester Season Preview

After finishing at .500 two years ago, the Macalester Scots moved up to 22-17-1 last spring. This season, under 12th-year head coach Matt Parrington, the Scots are looking to take another step forward. Macalester graduated the left side of its infield and record-holding pitcher James Murrey, but several key veterans are back to lead the charge.

The Scots batted .319 a year ago and return leading hitter Robert Williams (Jr., West Covina, Calif. / Northview), who will share catching duties with Garrett Salzman (Jr., Glendale, Calif. / St. Francis). Williams was second in the MIAC in RBI with 22 in 20 games and on the season hit .389 with four homers, 42 RBI and a .557 slugging percentage. He hit .490 (25-for-51) with runners in scoring position. Salzman batted .323 with three home runs. Williams and Salzman will also play first base for the Scots, along with Ezra Wise (Jr., Bronxville, N.Y. / The Hackley School).

Williams and Salzman will work behind the plate for a veteran pitching staff led by Alex Ingram (Sr., Chicago, Ill. / Morgan Park Academy), Elliott Yodh (Sr., Merion, Pa. / Lower Merion), Eric Robinson (Sr., San Francisco, Calif. / The Urban School), Nick Meerson (Jr., Los Angeles, Calif. / Harvard-Westlake) and Louis Mondale (Jr., St. Louis Park, Minn. / Benilde-St. Margaret). Ingram was 4-2 with a 3.05 ERA in 2010 and Meerson had a 4.13 ERA.

All-MIAC second baseman Mitch Glasser (Jr., Chicago, Ill. / Latin School) anchors an inexperienced infield. Glasser was among the MIAC leaders last year in batting (.418) and runs (16) and in overall games, batted .348 with 33 runs, six triples and 24 RBI. His slugging percentage was .496 and he committed just six errors for a .966 fielding percentage. Looking to join Glaser in the infield are Jimmy Belfont (So., Olney, Md. / Our Lady of Good Counsel), David Melms (So., Wauwatosa, Wis. / Wisconsin Lutheran), Roberto Capriotti (So., Pittsburgh, Pa. / Upper St. Clair), Colin Carpenter (Fy., Harvard, Ill.) and Andrew Gardiner (Fy., Hanover, N.H.).

The Scots boast an outfield filled with experience and skill. Macalester will seek major contributions from veterans Bobby De Meulenaere (Sr., Elk Grove Village, Ill. / Elk Grove), Will Chen (Sr., Edina, Minn.), Graham Brown (Annandale, Minn.) and Nathan Rubin (Jr., Venice, Fla.). De Meulenaere hit .330 last season with 22 RBI and along with Williams, picked up honorable mention all-conference honors. Brown was 19-for-20 on stolen bases.



Saint John's

Coach: Jerry Haugen (34th season)

2010 Finish: 3rd (14-6 MIAC, 21-18 overall)

Saint John's Season Preview

Jerry Haugen has coached the Saint John's University baseball team for 33 seasons. In all those seasons, Haugen has never returned four All-Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference players from one spring to another.

Until now.

Senior catcher Brian Skluzacek (Cold Spring, Minn./Rocori), senior Brett Kramer (Baxter, Minn./Brainerd), junior designated hitter Bert Marsnik (Annandale, Minn.) and junior pitcher Hayden Zimmerman (New Richmond, Wis.) all return to the Johnnies in 2011 after earning all-league honors in 2010. Their goal? To help the Johnnies capture the MIAC title.

For the second time in the last four seasons, Saint John's – which finished the 2010 season with a 14-6 record in the MIAC and 21-18 mark overall - was a game away from the MIAC regular-season title. Their second-place conference finish earned them a trip to the MIAC Tournament.

Haugen, who begins his 34th season as the Johnnies' head coach with a 617-535-5 (.535) career record, saw his team finish second among MIAC schools with a .339 team batting average in conference play. The Johnnies also posted an 8-2 record at home.

Here's a pre-season look at the 2011 Johnnies, by position:

Pitchers

Kramer and Zimmerman return as one of the top pitching duos in the MIAC after combining for a 9-1 record and holding opponents to a .245 batting average in 74.1 MIAC innings last spring.

A 2010 American Baseball Coaches Association (ABCA) All-Midwest Region third-team selection, Zimmerman - who was used as both a starter and a reliever - set a school record with 75 innings pitched and five saves (which tied a school record) while posting an 8-3 record with a 4.56 ERA. He recorded 57 strikeouts and held opponents to a .247 batting average. In conference action, he tallied a 5-0 record with a 3.67 ERA, four saves and a .241 opponent batting average in 41.2 MIAC innings.

Kramer, meanwhile, posted a 6-4 record with a team-best 4.42 ERA among starters and held the opposition to a .250 batting average in 71.1 innings. He tallied a 4-1 record with a 3.31 ERA in seven MIAC appearances (five starts).

Sophomores Connor Cline (Bloomington, Minn./Jefferson), Ryan Spengler (St. Cloud, Minn./Tech) and Adam Wenker (Sartell, Minn./Sartell-St. Stephen) are expected to comprise the rest of the SJU rotation. Cline pitched the only other MIAC innings (6.1) among SJU's returning hurlers.

Junior Ben Moen (Rochester, Minn./John Marshall) returns after missing last season due to shoulder surgery, while fellow junior Nick Roeder (St. Cloud, Minn./Tech) returns to bolster the bullpen.

In addition to their positions on the field, sophomores Max Forster (Hopkins, Minn.) and Alex Powell (Hopkins, Minn.) are expected to see time on the mound this year. Freshmen Tim Baebenroth (Minneapolis, Minn./DeLaSalle), Tony Gazich (Arden Hills, Minn./Mounds View), Josh Groth (Fridley, Minn.) and Joey Long (Belvidere, Ill./Rockford Boylan) will likely supply innings of relief, especially during the annual spring trip, in which the Johnnies are scheduled to play one-third of their season in a span of seven days.

Infielders

The Johnnies return the left side of last year's infield, but need to replace a pair of fixtures on the right. Senior shortstop Matt Butorac (Maple Grove, Minn.), returns after finishing near the top of several batting categories for the Johnnies last spring. He led the team with 14 doubles and finished second with 25 RBI and third in runs scored (26), hits (50) and total bases (66). Fellow senior Andrew Hengel (Bemidji, Minn.), as well as Baebenroth and Graves, will supply depth at short.

Forster also returns to the infield this season. He started 26 games at third base and totaled eight doubles, two home runs, 15 RBI and a .467 slugging percentage last year as a freshman. Groth is penciled in as the backup at third and may also see time at shortstop.

Long, a transfer from Division I Creighton (Neb.) and a sophomore academically, will battle with Hengel for time at second base. Both will attempt to replace graduated senior and two-year starter Joe Eiden, who hit .306 last season to go along with a .952 fielding percentage. Cline, Kramer and senior Jack Ries (Shoreview, Minn./Totino-Grace) will provide depth at second.

Senior Ben Kelsey (Savage, Minn./Holy Angels), junior Luke Sweeter (Sartell, Minn./Sartell-St. Stephen), and sophomores Matt Chuppe (Bismarck, N.D./St. Mary's Central) and Charlie Perrine (Edina, Minn./Benilde-St. Margaret's) will all attempt to replace a three-year starter and 2010 ABCA All-Midwest Region selection Kyle Henkemeyer at first base. Henkemeyer finished the 2010 season as the Johnnies' leader in batting (.386), runs (39), hits (56), RBI (27), total bases (79), slugging percentage (.545), and on-base percentage (.438).

Catchers

Skruzacek returns after starting all but three games behind the plate last season. He batted .309 with 16 RBI in conference play to earn All-MIAC honors, as well as a spot on the MIAC All-Defense team. Skruzacek threw out 12 potential base stealers overall (64.7 percent, 22-34).

Kelsey, sophomore Mitch Oakes (Minnetonka, Minn.) and freshman Chase Keimig (Madison, Minn./Lac qui Parle) will provide depth for the Johnnies at catcher.

Designated Hitter

Marsnik returns after posting a .438 batting average and a .625 slugging percentage in conference play, as well as 17 RBI, 40 total bases and two home runs to earn All-MIAC honors last spring. Overall, he finished second on the team in runs scored (29), hits (52), doubles (11), RBI (26), batting average (.380) and total bases (71). Marsnik reached base safely in 36 of the season's 39 games, tallied 16 multiple-hit games and tied for a team-best 13-game hitting streak.

Outfielders

Haugen hopes that his fast and athletic outfield will serve to spark the Johnnies, both offensively and defensively, this spring. SJU returns senior Matt Boys (Eden Prairie, Minn./Minnetonka) to the outfield this season. He started all 39 games for SJU and finished the season with a team-high five triples and nine stolen bases, as well as 23 RBI.

Senior Eric Smith (Rogers, Minn.) and Powell are likely the other two suitors to start and cover the gaps this spring. As a junior, Smith started 14 games and hit .390 with seven RBI. Powell played in 24 games, many as a defensive substitute during the late-innings, as a freshman last year.

Sophomore Ian Goldsmith (Shoreview, Minn./Mounds View) turned in his All-MIAC football pads for a bat and glove this spring. Last season, Goldsmith only appeared in one game for the Johnnies, but look for the sophomore to provide depth this season.

SJU needs to replace Andrew Gurbada and junior Jimmy Loonan, the Johnnies' right-fielder for most of the 2010 season. Gurbada started all 39 games in left field and batted .355, including a .379 average in conference play. He tied Marsnik for the team-lead with a 13-game hitting streak last spring and finished second on the squad with a .552 slugging percentage in MIAC play. Loonan, meanwhile, underwent shoulder surgery over the winter and will miss the 2011 campaign. He batted .293 in 28 games last season for the Johnnies.

Coach: Nick Winecke (3rd season)

2010 Finish: 11th (4-16 MIAC, 12-28 overall)

Saint Mary's Season Preview

The Saint Mary's University baseball team has made steady progress in Nick Winecke's first two years as the Cardinals' head coach.

In his inaugural season, Winecke's squad won eight games, equaling the win total of the year before.

In season No. 2 a year ago, Winecke guided SMU to 12 victories — their highest win total since the 2005 season.

And after two years of getting their feet wet with Winecke at the helm, the Cardinals are ready to make a big splash in 2011.

"This is probably the deepest team we've had in a long time," said Winecke. "We've got a lot of talented returners and some freshmen who are going to be banging on the door to get into the lineup."

The biggest roadblock for Winecke heading will be replacing the eight graduated seniors from last year's 12-28 team — including Brett Ferschweiler, the ace of last year's pitching staff, and Kyle Ryan, the team's everyday starter for the past four seasons in the middle infield.

"Anytime you lose eight players who have put a lot of work into your program, it's tough to replace," said Winecke. "But as a coach, you have to deal with the loss of graduated seniors every year," Winecke added. "Every year, the loss of a senior class also opens the door for someone else to step up and fill those shoes, and this year is no different."

Among those Winecke is looking to to step into the leadership role are this year's seniors — Andrew Warren (Stillwater, Minn.), Jake Lechner (Shoreview, Minn.), Joe O'Neill (St. Paul, Minn.), Chris Bogie (St. Paul, Minn.), David Timmons (Rochester, Minn.), Sam Levisen (Rochester, Minn.), Andrew Ruf (Chippewa Falls, Wis.) and Gary Seifert (Prescott, Wis.).

Offensively, Winecke has a fully loaded arsenal — led by junior Curt Swanson (Woodbury, Minn.), who hit .302 with team-highs in home runs (3), RBIs (31), total bases (55), and slugging percentage (.437) — while on the mound, the Cardinal head coach has a stable filled with a nice mix of veterans — like Seifert, Levisen, Ruff (Chippewa Falls, Wis.), and Teddy VanRanst (St. Paul, Minn.) — and newcomers.

In other words, the pieces all seem to be in place, which leaves Winecke to answer one question — just how far can this team go?

"There's a ton of potential, no question about that," Winecke said. "But to me, it's not about wins and losses — it's about that inner drive to compete and do things the right way. Our goal is to go out and compete to get better every day," added Winecke. "If we do that, the wins will take care of themselves."

St. Olaf

Coach: Matt McDonald (17th season)

2010 Finish: Tied 4th (12-8 MIAC, 22-18 overall)

St. Olaf Season Preview

The St. Olaf baseball team, ranked 18th in the latest D3Baseball.com Top 25 poll, will look to a veteran pitching staff and a young group of position players in its quest for a MIAC title.

The pitching staff will be paced by juniors Ben Hughes and Erik Olson and a core of sophomores. Hughes has started the season 2-0 with a

4.74 ERA with 24 strikeouts against only three walks. Olson has been used mostly as a closer, picking up five saves in seven appearances.

Three sophomores -- Jake Schmiesing, Anders Dzurak and Brady Sand -- should round out the rotation. Dzurak had the most successful first year campaign, going 8-0 in 2010. Each have started well this spring, combining for a 6-1 record in over 45 innings of work thus far.

The team will also use senior Brandon Agneberg, first year Joey Voss (2-0, 1.26 ERA in 14 innings thus far) and others out of the bullpen.

The Oles will likely have just one senior -- Sean Dube -- in the lineup and as many as four first years when the conference season begins this week. Dube is off to a good start, hitting .350. First year Sam Maus who has a team-best 19 hits, has hit safely in each of the team's last six games and 12 of the 15 this spring. Maus will hold down the spot at short stop, while Sand will play third when he's not pitching and first year Nick Kulla will be at second. Sophomore Adam Johnson, a transfer from St. Cloud State, will likely have the job at first.

The outfield will be patrolled by committee, at least to start. Junior Andy Bartz and Erik Nelson have played the corner spots the most to start the season. First years Dylan Porter and Chris Paradise have played in center and either could earn the spot. Jim Blissenbach is off to a 9-for-19 start at the plate as he and Dan Lee (10-for-26, HR) could also find their way into the lineup.

The catching spot may be shared by Nelson and first year Jack Schechinger. Schehinger is hitting .300 (9-for-30) in the early going.



St. Thomas

Coach: Chris Olean (2nd season)

2010 Finish: 1st (15-5 MIAC, 35-9 overall)

St. Thomas Season Preview

Chris Olean was named St. Thomas' full-time head coach in January. He guided the 2010 Tommies to a 35-9 record, highlighted by a sweep of the MIAC regular-season and playoff championships. Seven one-run losses - including a 12-inning loss to Big Ten champion Minnesota and two close defeats in the NCAA regional playoffs -- kept the Toms from having even better results.

The 2011 squad has many new faces and a tough act to follow. UST won the 2009 national championship and has won an unprecedented eight consecutive conference titles. Last year's Toms led all NCAA teams at all levels in ERA at 2.41, and also ranked third in the nation in fielding percentage after finishing first in 2008 and 2009.

But the Tommies graduated eight seniors, including All-American and current Minnesota Twins farmhand Matt Schuld (RHP, Career: 30-5 record, 239 strikeouts in 264 innings, 2.93 ERA); All-American lefthander Matt Nelson (7-0, 2.00 ERA); All-Region selectees Tom Wippler (1B, four-year starter, 196 hits) and Roy Larson (SS, 157 hits in 157 career games, Minnesota Twins free agent); 2009 College World Series MVP Matt Olson (OF); and closer Brandon Stone (RHP, eight saves in 2010).

St. Thomas returned senior RHP Kris Edwards, junior LHP Bryce Gapinski and junior RHP John Licht, but no other Tommie hurler worked more than 15 innings in 2010. Edwards, who ranked fourth in Division III ERA at 1.87 for pitchers with 60-plus innings, is 9-4 over the last two seasons with a 1.81 ERA, 62 strikeouts and 24 walks. Gapinski has 20 career starts and is 12-3, with a 3.15 ERA, 62 strikeouts and 32 walks in 123 innings.

Returning player in the field include senior CF Matt McQuillan (three-year starter, .349 BA, 127 runs, 162 hits, 48 SB, 39 walks, 27 doubles, .988 field% in 250 chances); senior OF Tayler Rahm, SR (three-year starter, 107 games, 118 hits, 21 doubles, six triples, 7 HR, 26 walks, 94 RBI in three seasons); senior DH Drew Cremisino, (three-year career, .307 BA, 87 games, 57 hits, 44 RBI); junior 1B John Means, JR (.295 BA, 36 hits, 10 doubles, 17 walks, 23 RBI last two seasons); senior 2B Tim Kahle, SR (48 hits in 68 games last three seasons); junior 3B Charles Bruchu, (45 hits, 23 RBI, 3 triples, 3 HRs, 16 walks last season in 40 games); and senior catcher Brady Field (two seasons, 72 games, 55 hits, 41 RBI, 10 doubles, 17 walks, nine HBP, .311 BA) . As many as eight freshmen are expected to push veterans for starting spots.

The 2011 Tommies played another tough March schedule, challenged further with the loss of six Metrodome games to the roof collapse. There have been growing pains in the team's 4-8 start, notably with spotty infield defense and in getting some young pitchers game experience. The start has included three one-run defeats and a 1-4 record against top-15 rated teams. Cremisino is batting .500 on the season with 21 hits and 12 RBI and has hit safely in 11 of 12 games. Bruchu had 16 hits, 14 runs, 11 RBI and batted .390 in Florida. Freshman catcher J.D. Dorgan had a homer, three doubles and batted .360 in eight games on the trip. Licht was 1-0 with a save and a 3.00 ERA in four appearances on the trip.

The Toms are scheduled to open MIAC play Saturday April 2 at Carleton.