

2012 MIAC Baseball Season Preview and Preseason Coaches' Poll

3/27/2012

ST. PAUL, Minn. -- With league games about to start, the 2012 Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) baseball season already has a drastically different feel than a year ago. Between the return of the Metrodome for local early-season games and record-high temperatures seemingly every day, the positive vibes felt in the early part of the season have been felt throughout the league.

Last spring, the collapse of the Metrodome roof and a brutal spring filled with snow and rain caused scheduling headaches all the way through the final week of the regular season. However, the 2011 season was still an unforgettable one in the MIAC as St. Thomas and Macalester shared the regular season crown, and Hamline captured the Playoff title at a new site - Minnetonka's Veteran's Field. The Pipers and Tommies both represented the conference in the NCAA Division III Playoffs.

However, the 2012 season could shape up to be even better with several talented teams emerging as contenders for the conference championship and the four MIAC Playoff spots. Leading the charge is St. Thomas once again. The 2012 MIAC Baseball Coaches' Preseason Poll features the Tommies - who are looking for their 10-straight league title and 32nd overall - at the top with eight of the 11 first-place votes and 87 total points.

Another conference title won't be a slam-dunk for St. Thomas as Hamline, Saint John's and Bethel also received first-place votes and as many as nine teams could be in the hunt for a bid to the postseason. The Pipers finished second in the poll with 77 points and the Johnnies were a close third at 73. St. Olaf (55) edged Macalester (53) and Concordia (51) for the final playoff spot in the coaches' predictions, with Bethel (45), Augsburg (42) and Gustavus (37) also in contention. Carleton (18) and Saint Mary's (12) rounded out the poll.

Teams hoping to out-do their predicted place don't have to look further than last season for inspiration. Macalester was predicted to finish eighth in the 2011 Preseason Poll, but delivered one of the MIAC's most memorable performances, tying St. Thomas for the league title for their first baseball championship since 1950, ending a 61-year drought.

Thus far, it's hard to argue against the Tommies as the favorite. Coach Chris Olean lost MIAC MVP Tayler Rahm and All-Region pitcher Kris Edwards, but brings back MIAC Rookie-of-the-Year J.D. Dorgan at catcher along with fellow All-MIAC selections Charles Bruchu (3B) and Bryce Gapinski (P).

Also back is outfielder Tim Kuzniar, and Olean brought in a haul of talented transfers, such as Ben Podobinski (CF), Dylan Thomas (RHP/DH), Josh Kubitschek (RHP) and starter Steve Maher, who has already earned MIAC and Division III Pitcher-of-the-Week honors. So far, Olean's club has lived up to the hype, going 12-4 in nonconference play and ranked in the Top 20 in two different Division III national polls, including a top-10 nod in one of the rankings.

Heading the list of UST's top contenders is the Playoff champion-Pipers, hoping the momentum of their magical postseason run will carry over into 2012. Head coach Jason Verdugo brings back a pair of All-Conference players in Jordan Buck (DH) and Ben Richardson (C) and an All-Defensive Team selection in outfielder Cory Miller. Andy King is off to a great start for Hamline and recently earned Division III Player-of-the-Week honors, and a pair of Matts - Mullendore and Eickman - will lead Hamline's pitching staff.

Saint John's is also hoping for a return trip to the conference tournament, with its high hopes paced by a talented crop of pitchers. Hayden Zimmerman and Connor Cline will anchor SJU's rotation, and All-Conference outfielder Alex Powell also returns for Jerry Haugen's squad. All-MIAC infielder Luke Larson transferred from Saint Mary's to Saint John's this season to give the Johnnies one more reason for optimism in 2012.

St. Olaf started the 2011 red hot then tailed off, but the Oles hope that experience will help as they hunt for a postseason bid in 2012. Head coach Matt McDonald has to replace MIAC Pitcher-of-the-Year Ben Hughes, who was drafted by the Colorado Rockies, but Brady Sand and Alex Lampert will help St. Olaf stay strong on the mound. All-MIAC infielder Nick Kulla will again be a key to the Oles' success and Dan Lee and Jack Schechinger are off to tremendous starts thus far this season.

Macalester's Matt Parrington received MIAC Coach-of-the-Year honors after his team's 2012 remarkable season, and the Scots hope to become perennial title contenders with a fabulous again in place. Infielder Mitch Glasser and the 1B/catcher platoon of Garrett Salzman and Robert Williams all received All-MIAC honors a year ago, and All-Defensive Team shortstop Jimmy Belfont is also back for Macalester. The Scots' big question mark is replacing some talented arms in the rotation with Nick Meerson and several other up-and-comers.

Perhaps Concordia's biggest offseason news was on Bucky Burgau's coaching staff. Chris Coste - a three-time MIAC MVP during his playing days with the Cobbers and a World Series champion with the Philadelphia Phillies - joined Burgau's staff this season. Brad Olson and Chris Gilson anchor the Concordia lineup, while pitchers Zach Frappier and Shawn Krueger has the pitching staff feeling optimistic in 2012.

Bethel also has a new face on the bench - head coach Brian Raabe - who takes over the Royals after building the Forest Lake High School program into a power. All-MIAC 3B Mike Sedjo is back to lead Raabe's squad this year, which also expects big things from a pair of versatile pitcher/outfielders: David Freed and Matt Rowley. Freed's hot start earned him the first MIAC Player-of-the-Week honor.

The Auggies also hope to climb the ladder and return to the postseason, and a pair of All-MIAC returners bolster the hopes of Keith Bateman's squad. Tom Petersen (1B) and Adam Seaman (DH) are both back to try and replicate their All-Conference seasons of a year ago.



Outfielder Brent Kolbow is another key component of the Augsburg lineup, and there's talent on the mound - freshman Tanner Oakes hurled a no-hitter in his first collegiate start earlier this spring.

Gustavus will be led by Taylor Fish (IF), Erik Sveen (OF) and pitcher Kellan Euerle in 2012, as Mike Carroll's team also has an eye on moving up in the standings and competing for a spot in the conference tournament. Carleton has talented hitters Ray Young and Alex Wirta back for head coach Aaron Rushing, along with pitcher Paul Dimick. Saint Mary's will look to Curt Swanson (catcher) and versatile Teddy VanRast (pitcher/hitter) to lead the way in 2012, as Nick Winecke's club strives for improvement this season.

The 20-game MIAC schedule is slated to open Saturday, and the warmer temperatures and already-green grass offer much more optimism for things to stay on-schedule compared to 2011. At the end of the regular season, the top four teams in the standings will qualify for the 2012 MIAC Baseball Playoffs, which will return to Veteran's Field in after a standout debut as the new location last season. The double-elimination tournament will be held May 13-15 with an automatic bid to the NCAA Division III Baseball Playoffs on the line. Bethel is the Playoffs' host school this season.

The rest of the 2012 MIAC Baseball Preview contains complete results from the 2012 MIAC Baseball Preseason Coaches' Poll, information on the 2012 MIAC Playoffs, links to schedules, stats and more, and links to team-by-team previews for all 11 teams.

2012 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.

2012 MIAC Baseball Preseason Coaches' Poll		
Rank	Institution	Total
1	St. Thomas (8)	87
2	Hamline (1)	77
3	Saint John's (1)	73
4	St. Olaf	55
5	Macalester	53
6	Concordia	51
7	Bethel (1)	45
8	Augsburg	42
9	Gustavus	37
10	Carleton	18
11	Saint Mary's	12

2012 MIAC Playoffs: Friday-Sunday, May 11-13 at Veteran's Field, Minnetonka, Minn. Host: Bethel Univeristy. Format: Top four teams, double elimination.

| [2012 MIAC Schedule](#) | [2012 MIAC Statistics](#) | [MIAC Recordbook](#) | [MIAC Archives](#) |



Augsburg

Coach: Keith Bateman (9th season)

2011 Finish: T-9th (6-14 MIAC, 11-22 overall)

Augsburg Season Preview

The Augsburg College baseball team enters Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference play following a very successful trip to Arizona for the Greater Phoenix Invitational during its spring break week, going 7-1 in its eight games. Under ninth-season head coach Keith Bateman, Augsburg enters this week's play with a 12-4 record, including nine wins in its last 10 games. The Auggies have already eclipsed last season's win total (11-22, 6-14 MIAC).

As a team, Augsburg enters league play with a .326 team batting average. The Auggies hit .356 as a team in its eight games in Arizona, outscoring their opponents by a 54-24 margin. So far this season, Augsburg has outscored its opponents by a 97-57 margin, scoring five or more runs in 10 of its 14 games.

Six starters return from last year's ballclub, including 2011 All-MIAC selections Tom Petersen (SR, Hugo, Minn./White Bear Lake HS) and Adam Seaman (SR, Richfield, Minn.). Petersen, a first baseman, hit .317 last season with 15 RBI and is currently leading the Auggies with a .426 average and 10 RBI. Seaman, a designated hitter last season, has added third-base duties to his resume this season. A .370 hitter last year, Seaman is hitting .391 this season with 11 RBI and six doubles.

Leadoff hitter Brent Kolbow (JR, Forest Lake, Minn.) has had a strong start to this season, with a .404 batting average, a team-best 16 RBI and a .453 on-base percentage, to go along with six stolen bases. He is joined in the outfield by returning starter Tim Gerding (SR, Robbinsdale, Minn./Cooper HS), returner Alec Johnson (SR, Marine on St. Croix, Minn./Forest Lake HS) and newcomer Taylor McMurray (FY, Vadnais Heights, Minn./Totino-Grace HS).

Joining Petersen and Seaman in the infield is a trio of starters from Eagan, Minn. -- shortstop Adam Carl (SO, Eagan, Minn.), who is hitting .333 this year with 11 RBI and 14 runs scored, second-baseman Lou LaChapelle (JR, Eagan, Minn.) and catcher Trent Anderson (SR, Eagan, Minn.). Bobby Monsour (SR, Inver Grove Heights, Minn.) is splitting time with Seaman at third base.

One of the pleasant surprises this season for the Auggies is the solid performance of a relatively young pitching staff, with a 3.63 earned-run average and .247 opponent batting average entering this week's action. Of the 11 pitchers who have seen varsity playing time this year, five are first-year performers, with three among the top five Auggie pitchers in ERA.

Ryan Mestnik (FY, Prior Lake, Minn.) has a 4-0 record with a 1.00 ERA in his five starts, including two complete games and two shutouts. He has 12 strikeouts against just five walks and a .163 opponent batting average. Tanner Oakes (FY, Jordan, Minn.) threw a seven-inning no-hitter in his first collegiate start – a 2-0 win over Mayville State (N.D.) on March 8 – and has a 2-0 record with a 2.84 ERA, 13 strikeouts against just one walk and a .179 opponent batting average.

Junior Eren Cur (JR, Plymouth, Minn./Wayzata HS) has had a strong start to his season, with a 3-0 record and 3.22 ERA in five starts, with seven strikeouts against two walks and a .293 opponent batting average. Jeff Boresz (SR, Chardon, Ohio/Mentor HS) has emerged as Augsburg's relief specialist, with two saves in his seven pitching appearances so far this season.



Bethel

Coach: Brian Raabe (1st season)

2011 Finish: T-7th (8-12 MIAC, 20-19 overall)

Bethel Season Preview

The Royals welcome first year head coach Brian Raabe who comes to BU after serving as the head baseball coach at Forest Lake High School for the past 11 years. Raabe compiled a 164-99 record during his time as the skipper for one of perennial powerhouses in Class AAA. He will now be at the reins of the BU baseball squad, a team that finished one game above five hundred after the 2011 season. This spring BU returns several key players to the diamond as they look to capture their first MIAC crown.

The team will rely on a solid core of seven seniors to lead the charge for the 2012 campaign. The Royals should have a strong rotation imbedded within their pitching staff. Senior David Anderson (Willmar, Minn.) along with juniors David Freed (North Oaks, Minn.) and Matt Rowley (Minnetonka, Minn.) will throw a bulk of the innings throughout year. Sophomores Keaton Schut (Des Moines, Ia.) and Matt Pearson (Rochester, Minn.) will also see extended time on the mound this season as they saw some time as freshmen in 2011. Freshman Joe Zorn (Stillwater, Minn.), who is also a member of the basketball team, will look to contribute to the pitching staff when he makes the transition to the diamond this spring.

The Royals have a trio of catchers who will look to anchor the defense this spring, as senior Jay Slick (River Falls, Wis.) will spend a majority of time behind the plate and freshman Grant Anderson (Andover, Minn.) and sophomore Bryce Walt (Bloomington, Minn.) will also add to this role.

The infield will see several familiar faces as seniors Mike Sedjo (West Chicago, Ill), Buddy Flaherty (Victoria, Minn.), Sean Bethke (Mahtomedi, Minn.), and Chris Davidson (Plantation, Fla.) will all be back vying for positions. Flaherty will also see some time on the mound this year for the Royals. Sophomore Ryan Hangartner (Watertown, Minn.) along with freshmen Nik Anderson (Arden Hills, Minn.) and Matt Pryor (St. Paul, Minn.) will also look to step in and see some time.

The outfield will also be a strong suit for the Royals, as they will return a veteran group to roam the deep grass this spring. Senior Travis Piepho (Minneapolis, Minn.) and juniors Jesse Nickols (Arden Hills, Minn.), Matt Rowley (Minnetonka, Minn.), and David Freed (North Oaks, Minn.) will all patrol the outfield this spring.

Coach Raabe will rely on the bats of Jay Slick, Travis Piepho, Matt Rowley, and David Freed this spring as this quartet of players all hit over .300 for the 2011 season. Slick led all returners as he hit two round-trippers last year and also batted in 28 runs.

Coach's Outlook:

Coach Brian Raabe is optimistic heading into the new season and new chapter in his life and is excited about what the future holds. When asked about the biggest adjustment from the high school to collegiate level Raabe commented by saying, "The game is the same, baseball is baseball, but the biggest change is the concept of recruiting." Raabe concluded by saying, "I didn't have the opportunity to recruit players in high school, but I am very excited about the recruiting process as I love that part of my position."

Play Ball!

The Royals will head down to the Metrodome on Monday, February 27th to open up the 2012 season. Their opponent for the 7:30 am doubleheader will be the Rams from North Central University. They will also play doubleheaders with the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater (March 7th) and Grandview University (March 12th) from Des Moines, Iowa before the team heads south to sunny Fort Myers, Florida. The varsity will play nine games and the junior varsity will have three contests during their time in the sunshine state. The team will also be practicing during time slots when no games are scheduled. The first MIAC contest for the squad will be on March 31st when they travel to Winona to take on the Cardinals from St. Mary's University.



Carleton

Coach: Aaron Rushing (8th season)

2011 Finish: T-9th (6-14 MIAC, 12-23 overall)

Carleton Season Preview

After finishing tied for ninth in the conference last year, the Knights look to make its way back to the MIAC playoffs for the first time since 2009.

While the Knights had some strong individual performances at the plate last spring, Carleton finished at the bottom of the conference in team batting average. Ray Yong (So./Elmhurst, Ill./York) looks to improve upon a rookie campaign when he led the team in runs batted (19) and runs scored (24). Alex Wirta (Sr./Corte Madera, Calif./Redwood) hopes to finish his career on a high note after finishing fourth in the MIAC with a .388 batting average in 2011. Jeff Dsida (So./Winnetka, Ill./New Trier) was having an impact campaign with the bat until suffering a shoulder injury. He batted.370 in his first year and was second in the MIAC in on-base percentage, reaching base nearly half the time (.485).

The pitching staff will be led by senior southpaw Paul Dimick (Northfield, Minn.), who posted a 3.88 earned run average over a team-high 48.2 innings of work in 2011. Joining him in the starting rotation will be Anderson Cole (Aspen, Colo.), who led the squad and was eighth in the MIAC with a 2.65 ERA as a rookie. He tied for the team lead in complete games with Dimick. Kiyota Gomi (Sr./Dobbs Ferry, N.Y./Ardsley) and Danny Shields (So./Richfield, Minn./Holy Angels) will also be featured in the starting rotation.

So far in 2012, the Knights have a record of 5-6 after returning from their spring trip in Arizona. Compared to 2011 numbers, the pitching staff has shaved off half a run from its earned run average and the offense is producing two more runs per game. An 8-6 victory over No. 13 Carthage College on March 22 was the Knights' first victory over a ranked opponent since 2009.



Concordia

Coach: Bucky Burgau (34th season)

2011 Finish: T-7th (8-12 MIAC, 13-14 overall)

Concordia Season Preview

The 2012 Concordia baseball team will be hoping a World Series champion and an extended outdoor preseason schedule will help return the team to the playoffs. The Cobbers have added former Philadelphia Phillies catcher Chris Coste to the coaching staff and have been able to practice outside since the early part of March as they try and improve on last year's seventh-place finish.

Coste, who was a three-time MIAC MVP when he played for the Cobbers and earned a World Series ring with the Phillies in 2008, joined the staff over the summer and will be the Associate Head Coach. Coste's years in professional baseball as well as his experience at playing the infield as well as being a standout collegiate pitcher for the Cobbers will help him teach all aspects of the program.

The other big asset for Concordia in 2012 will be the amount of pre-conference practice and game time. Last year, due to the collapse of the Metrodome and extended winter weather, the Cobbers were only able to play six games before the start of conference play on Apr. 9. They were also unable to conduct a full practice outside until the start of April. This year the team will have 15 games under their belt before they open MIAC play on Mar. 31 at Carleton. In addition, Concordia has been able to practice outside on their FieldTurf infield since the start of March.

The additional preseason training and extra coaching instruction will help Concordia deal with the loss of four seniors who earned MIAC postseason honors last year. The Cobbers will have to replace four starting everyday players as well as six pitchers who were all lost to graduation. The good news for Bucky Burgau's squad is that four of the top eight hitters from last year return including team leader Brad Olson. Olson hit .358 and also had a team-high .469 on-base percentage as the team's starting first baseman. Olson will move to the outfield this season.

The other top returning hitters include Chris Gilson, Jordan Doschadis and Michael Olson. Gilson hit .321 last year and was tied for second on the team in home runs. He was also second in slugging percentage (.528). Doschadis finished the year with a .306 average while Michael Olson hit .293 and led the team in RBI. He was also tied for second in home runs. Olson will make the move as the team's starting right fielder in 2011 to center field in 2012.

Three other everyday players could hold the key to the Cobbers' success in 2012. First baseman Brian Guler, shortstop Braden Rahman and catcher Jan-Erik Lindberg all have the capability to push Concordia back to the playoffs. Guler will take over the starting chores as the team's first baseman. His athletic ability and defensive prowess will help shore up the CC infield. Rahman will take over as the starting shortstop. He had a shortened season last year and has a chance to be the team's top hitter this year with the additional repetitions at the plate. Lindberg will be counted on to be the team's everyday catcher. He shared the duties last year and was among the league leaders in fielding percentage.

Perhaps the one area that will be most helped by the addition of extra preseason games will be the pitching staff. The Cobbers return only four hurlers from a year ago. The young staff will need all 15 preseason games to get acclimated to the college game. Zach Frappier and Shawn Krueger are the top two returning pitchers. Frappier was 3-2 last year with a 5.35 ERA. He started seven games in 2011 and will be the team's No.1 starter in 2012. Krueger led the team in ERA last season while coming out of the bullpen. He will make the switch to a starting role this season. The two other returning pitchers that should benefit from more playing time are Jackson Meland and Erik Simmons. Both pitchers showed promise in 2011 and both could be big factors this season. Simmons will be given the chance to be the team's closer at the start of the year.



Gustavus

Coach: Mike Carroll (16th season)

2011 Finish: 5th (10-10 MIAC, 14-21 overall)

Gustavus Season Preview

The Gustavus baseball team returns to the diamond with a mix of young talent and veterans as it looks for a return to the MIAC Playoffs in 2012. Although the team was relatively young last season, many first-year players gained valuable playing experience. Head Coach Mike Carroll was impressed with the team's self-motivation this season, despite being stuck indoors for some time. Carroll will use the early-season non-conference portion of the schedule to prepare new players and solidify positions among his veterans.

Senior captains Taylor Fish (Brandon, S.D.) and Erik Sveen (Excelsior, Minn.) parallel Coach Carroll, and are both optimistic about this year's club. Last year's squad finished the season winning seven of its last 11 games. Sveen and Fish are expecting this year to be the best of their previous three seasons.

"We have a lot of young live arms and the leadership to bring it all together", stated Sveen. "We expect to compete in every outing. We are a young team and have a lot of hard work to put in, now all we have to do is execute".

The pitching staff will return six players who pitched 19 innings or more last season. Sophomore Kellan Euerle (St. Cloud, Minn.) is the top-returning pitcher for the Gustie staff, gaining valuable experience during his freshman campaign last season. Euerle went 3-3, starting eight games, posting a 3.00 ERA in 51 innings, the second most innings-pitched on last year's squad behind the graduated Cody Sukalski. Euerle also struck out a team-high 33 batters. Seniors Taylor Fish, Tom Jaede (Eagan, Minn.), Bryce Bintzler (Woodbury, Minn.) and juniors Connor Norris (Omaha, Neb.) and Tim Miller (Eden Prairie, Minn.) all will provide valuable depth and experience to the pitching staff. Euerle and Miller will play in the outfield when they are not on the hill, freshman Chris Kelly (Savage, Minn.) and Logan Peymann (Fairmont, Minn.) will also contribute to the Gustie pitching staff. Grant Soderberg (Eden Prairie, Minn.) will have a quick transition, joining the baseball team less than a week after the end of his freshman season on the Gustavus men's basketball team.

The Gusties will have a lot of depth and experience in the infield. Fish, the lone senior in the infield, will hold down one corner at third base. Junior Drew Block (Rochester, Minn.) will return to first-base this season after missing last season with a broken wrist. Block will be a valuable asset to have back for the Gusties after hitting .337 and recording a .986 fielding percentage in 33 games. Sophomore Michael Holbrook (St. Cloud, Minn.) will get the go at second-base after starting 32 games last season. Holbrook led the team in batting average in 2011, hitting .347, while posting a .461 on-base percentage and leading the team in runs scored with 17. At shortstop is Max Laureano (Plymouth, Minn.), who played in 16 games last season and hit .333. Scott Benjamin (Northfield, Minn.) will also get time in the infield after playing in 31 contests last season. Benjamin hit .328 and posted a .985 fielding-percentage. Behind the dish will be sophomores David Tranvik (Robbinsdale, Minn.) and Boyden Lee (Fergus Falls, Minn.) sharing duties.

There will be many familiar faces covering the outfield this season for the Gusties. Seniors Sveen and Kevin Roth (Richfield, Minn.) along with Miller and Euerle will share most of the outfielding responsibilities. Sveen hit .341 and stole seven bases. Roth will see time as the designated hitter after hitting .250 last season. Miller will play a majority of his time in center, with Roth and Sveen rotating between right and left field, and Euerle playing mostly in right. Miller started all 34 games last season and was second on the team in runs-batted-in with 14.



Hamline

Coach: Jason Verdugo (11th season)

2011 Finish: 3rd (15-5 MIAC, 29-15 overall)

Hamline Season Preview

Macalester Season Preview

Macalester shared the MIAC crown last spring, bringing the championship trophy to campus for the first time in 61 years, and returns a veteran lineup seeking another conference playoff bid and chance to play for a spot in the national post-season. The Scots are coming off an all-time best 26-14 season and went 16-4 in the MIAC. Macalester has improved its record four years in a row, going from 13-22 in 2008 to 19-19 in '09 to 22-17 in 2010 to 26-14 last year.

13th year skipper Matt Parrington, last year's MIAC coach of the year, loses quality starting pitching, but sees the return of three All-MIAC picks, and two-year team captains, to the lineup: All-Midwest Region second baseman Mitch Glasser (Sr., Chicago, Ill. / Latin School), and the catcher/first base platoon of Garrett Salzman (Sr., Glendale, Calif. / St. Francis) and Robert Williams (Sr., West Covina, Calif. / Northview).

INFIELD

Two-time All-MIAC pick Glasser is back for his fourth season at second base and brings a .365 career batting average into the year. Glasser hit a team-best .408 with four homers and a .617 slugging percentage. He struck out just once in 129 plate appearances, that coming on the final day of the season at the MIAC tournament, to rank first in the nation in toughest to strike out. Glasser missed seven league games with injured ankle so didn't qualify for MIAC batting crown, but batted .462 (24-for-52) in league play with .692 slugging percentage and .500 on-base percentage.

Glasser's double-play partner is MIAC All-Defensive team shortstop Jimmy Belfont (Jr., Olney, Md. / Our Lady of Good Counsel). Belfont registered a .955 fielding percentage and was in on 15 double plays. He led all shortstops in conference play in batting average.

Salzman and Williams will again bat in the middle of the lineup as four-year starters.

Salzman was last year's MIAC batting champ with .441 average in 18 league games. He ranked first in the conference in hits (30) and third in on-base percentage (.494) and his five-hit game late in season at Concordia helped Scots clinch tie for MIAC title with 13-inning victory. Williams topped the Scots with 34 RBI and 50 hits. He led the MIAC in total bases and ranked second in RBI. A candidate for catching and outfielder duties is Tom Forster (Fy., Stillwater, Minn.) .

Vying for other infield position include veterans Colin Carpenter (So., Harvard, Ill.) and David Melms (Jr., Wauwatosa, Wis. / Wisconsin Lutheran).

OUTFIELD

Graham Brown (Sr., Annandale, Minn.) is one of the MIAC's fastest players and has been successful on 41-of-44 base stealing opportunities. Several candidates are lining up to replace graduates Will Chen (an All-MIAC pick) and Bobby DeMeulenaere as starting outfielders, including Nathan Rubin (Sr., Venice, Fla.), CJ Smith (So., Ashland, Wis.), Ross Bronfenbrenner (So., San Anselm, Calif. / Marin Academy), Joe Famalette (Fy. Aliso Viejo, Calif. / Aliso Niguel), and Nick Mar (Fy. Sacramento, Calif. / McClatchy).

PITCHING

Alex Ingram went 8-1 last season and Eric Robinson was 8-2. Both graduated after making the all-region and all-conference squads, so Parrington will look for others to take over starting pitching duties. Several candidates appear ready for the task, including Nick Meerson (Sr., Los Angeles, Calif. / Harvard-Westlake), Nathan Kelleher-Crew (So., Cool, Calif. / Golden Sierra), Chase Kahn (So., Cooper City, Fla. / American Heritage Plantation) and Louis Mondale (Sr., St. Louis Park, Minn. / Benilde-St. Margaret).



Saint John's

Coach: Jerry Haugen (35th season)

2011 Finish: 4th (13-7 MIAC, 19-14 overall)

Saint John's Season Preview

At any level, baseball has always been about an arms race. The more quality arms - pitchers - you have, the better your chances of getting ahead.

That certainly holds true for the 2012 Saint John's University baseball team. The Johnnies return the bulk of a pitching staff which led the MIAC in ERA (3.45) last spring en route to a fourth-place finish in the MIAC (13-7 record) and a 19-14 overall record. That earned the Johnnies a trip to the MIAC playoffs, where they lost two well-pitched decisions to end their season.

While head coach Jerry Haugen, who begins his 35th season as the Johnnies' head coach with a 636-549-5 (.536) career record, has a pitching staff to build around, it will take some time to establish the offensive and defensive lineup. The five doubleheaders at the Metrodome and the spring trip (March 5-8) to Tucson, Ariz., should help get a lineup set for conference play.

Here's a pre-season look at the 2012 Johnnies, by position:

Pitchers

The conference's top pitching staff a year ago is expected to contend for that title once again as the Johnnies return senior Hayden Zimmerman (New Richmond, Wis.) and junior Connor Cline (Bloomington, Minn./Jefferson) as its top starters in 2012.

Zimmerman got off to a shaky start last season before recording a 2.89 ERA in his final four starts (28 innings) to end the year, including a seven-inning no-hitter against Saint Mary's. As a sophomore in 2010, he 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 to earn ABCA All-Midwest Region third-team honors.

Cline, meanwhile, racked up a 6-1 record in his first full season as a starter last year with a 2.31 ERA. He also recorded a team-best .225 opponent batting average and struck out 35 batters in 46.2 innings. Cline posted an undefeated 4-0 record, including two complete-game shutouts, in conference play last spring.

The rest of the staff looks to be made up of juniors Joey Long (Belvidere, Ill./Rockford Boylan), Ryan Spengler (St. Cloud, Minn./Tech) and Adam Wenker (Sartell, Minn./Sartell-St. Stephen). Long posted a 3-2 record and four saves with a 1.40 ERA in 19.1 innings pitched last spring, including a 1.20 ERA in 10 MIAC appearances (15 innings). He struck out 16 while walking only two batters as the Johnnies' closer last season.

Wenker pitched 2.1 scoreless innings in three appearances and struck out three. Spengler took a line drive off of his shin in his first start of the year last spring in Arizona and missed the entire 2011 season.

Junior Max Forster (Minnetonka, Minn./Hopkins) is expected to reduce his role to more of a spot starter and serve as the Johnnies' everyday shortstop in 2012. He posted 2-3 record in 34.0 innings, eight appearances (six starts), on the mound last spring.

Junior Scott Schroeder (Richmond, Minn./Rocori) and sophomores Tony Gazich (Arden Hills, Minn./Mounds View) and Dylan Graves (Mora, Minn.) are expected to fill out the Johnnies' bullpen. The three combined for a 3.44 ERA in 12 relief appearances last season. Freshmen Collin Felhaber (North St. Paul, Minn.) and Jack Hamilton (Minnetonka, Minn./Hopkins) are expected to contribute right away this spring.

The Johnnies need to replace Brett Kramer, a 2011 ABCA All-Midwest Region second-team selection, who graduated in May. Kramer led the conference (min. 30 innings pitched) with a 0.95 ERA in 38 conference innings to earn All-MIAC honors for the second consecutive season. He tallied a 3-0 record in MIAC play with 34 strikeouts and a .239 opponent batting average. Kramer ended the season with a 4-3 record with a 1.44 ERA in 62.1 innings (10 starts). He struck out 59 to just 18 walks and recorded a .239 opponent batting average. Righties batted only .207 (34-164) off the Johnnies' right-handed ace.

Infielders

The Johnnies enter the 2012 season in need of replacing both middle infielders, including a three-year starter at shortstop. To do that, Forster is expected to slide over to shortstop from third base this spring. He started 28 games at third for the Johnnies and totaled three doubles, one triple and eight RBI.

Sophomore Luke Larson (Bloomington, Minn./Jefferson), a transfer from conference-foe Saint Mary's, is expected to take over for Forster at the "hot corner." He was named to the All-MIAC first team after batting .333 with four doubles and 14 RBI as a freshman for the Cardinals last year. Sophomore Josh Groth (Fridley, Minn.) is penciled in as the backup at third and may also see time at shortstop.

In addition to closer duties from the bullpen, Long is expected to see more time at second base in the absence of Kramer and Andrew Hengel, who both graduated last May. He tallied six RBI in 12 games between second and third base last season. Hengel batted .288 (.341 in 19 MIAC games) with a triple, home run and a .423 slugging percentage in 27 games last season. Kramer, meanwhile, batted .358 with seven doubles and 13 RBI in 21 games at second base last year.

When Cline is not pitching, he may find a spot at first, second or as the designated hitter. He started 25 games for SJU and finished last season with two doubles, two homers and 14 RBI. Senior Ben Moen (Rochester, Minn./John Marshall) and juniors Matt Chuppe (Bismarck, N.D./St. Mary's Central) and Charlie Perrine (Edina, Minn./Benilde-St. Margaret's) will also all vie for time at first base this season.

When he's not on the mound, Zimmerman may find a home in the lineup at either second base or as the Johnnies' designated hitter. A pair of 2011 Lions' All-Stars, freshmen Brett Becker (North Oaks, Minn./Mounds View) and Aaron Pfaff (New Ulm, Minn./Cathedral), are expected to provide depth as utility players in either the infield or outfield this season.

SJU needs to find a way to replace Matt Butorac at shortstop, and, more importantly, in the lineup. A 2011 ABCA All-Midwest second-team selection, Butorac was one of only two players to start all 33 games for the Johnnies last season. He batted .393 in conference play and posted a .339 average with the team-lead in hits (37), doubles (15), extra-base hits (17), RBI (29) and slugging percentage (.523). Butorac ended his career as SJU's all-time leader in doubles (41) and seventh in school history in three different career categories: hits (129), total bases (191) and RBI (84).

Catchers

Haugen must replace a four-year starter behind the plate, Brian Skluzacek. Sophomore Justin Thompson (Chanhassen, Minn./Chaska) is expected to lead a group of catchers that includes freshmen Billy Gregg (Minnetonka, Minn./Hopkins) and Kurt Jantscher (Plymouth, Minn./Robbinsdale Armstrong). Jantscher topped out in the upper 80's this spring and could also see a few innings on the mound in 2012.

A two-time MIAC All-Defensive team selection, Skluzacek started all but one game behind the plate for the Johnnies and tallied his best season, in regard to stolen-base percentage, throwing out potential base stealers (.630, 87-138) in 2011. The school's all-time leader in runners caught stealing (51), Skluzacek finished second in school history in walks (52), fifth in both doubles (27) and games played (125), and 10th in RBI (74). He hit eight doubles in MIAC play last year, including a school-record three in one game against Carleton April 17. Skluzacek ended his career a .266 hitter with 97 hits, 69 runs scored with a .384 on-base percentage.

Designated Hitter

Senior Bert Marsnik (Annandale, Minn.) is expected to bounce back from a disappointing junior season in which he posted only four RBI, 14 total bases and 12 hits in 18 games last spring. He batted .438 with a .625 slugging percentage in conference play, as well as 17 RBI, 40 total bases and two home runs to earn All-MIAC honors as a sophomore in 2010. Aside from DH duties, Marsnik may also see a few innings behind the plate in 2012.

Outfielders

Haugen hopes that his fast and athletic outfield will serve to spark the Johnnies, both offensively and defensively, this spring. SJU returns junior Alex Powell (Hopkins, Minn.), an All-MIAC selection last season, who played in 26 games for the Johnnies and will look to replace Matt Boys in center field. He played in 26 games for SJU and was fourth on the team in hits (25), including two doubles, two triples, nine RBI. Powell also led the team with 12 walks and ended the season on an eight-game hitting streak. The coaching staff is hopeful Powell can return from a wrist injury in time for the MIAC schedule this season.

Graves will be the likely replacement for Powell in centerfield early in the season. He batted .348 with a .522 slugging percentage in 11 conference games last season.

Senior Jimmy Loonan (Waseca, Minn.) returns to the SJU outfield after missing all of the 2011 season due to shoulder surgery. He batted .293 with 11 RBI in 28 games in 2010.

Sophomore Joe Lampe (Osceola, Iowa/Clarke) and junior David Naughtin (Plymouth, Minn./Benilde-St. Margaret's) are expected to contend for the vacant outfield position and provide depth. Lampe hit four homers in 13 junior varsity games as a freshman last year, while Naughtin missed all of last season due to a knee injury. Sophomores Jeremy Klein (Brooklyn Center, Minn./Totino-Grace) and Tom Lambert (Broomfield, Colo./Holy Family) may also be a pair of names to watch for in 2012.

The Johnnies need to replace Boys and Eric Smith, who both graduated last May. Boys played in all 33 games for the Johnnies and finished second on the team in hits (29) and ended his career and the school's all-time leader in triples with 11. He collected three triples, one home run, 14 RBI and 41 total bases on the year. Smith, meanwhile, batted .324 in 22 games with two triples and one home run.

Season Information

The Johnnies begins their 2012 season with the first of five doubleheaders at the Metrodome Feb. 21 against Valley City State (N.D.). SJU is scheduled to play eight games in four days during its annual spring break trip March 5-8 in a new venue, Tucson, Ariz. The MIAC opener is April 4 at Carleton before the Johnnies return to Collegeville for the home opener against Concordia-Moorhead April 7.



Saint Mary's

Coach: Nick Winecke (4th season)

2011 Finish: 11th (3-17 MIAC, 11-27 overall)

Saint Mary's Season Preview

Saint Mary's University baseball coach Nick Winecke entered the 2012 season with plenty of questions — and 12 game into the season, the Cardinal head coach has gotten plenty of answers.

With the loss of several key individuals to graduation, Winecke wasn't sure who would step up and fill those on- and off-field leadership roles.

Enter Curt Swanson (Woodbury, Minn.), Danny Geraghty (Chicago, Ill.), Vince Lulic (Mendota Heights, Minn.), Justin Kronebusch (Altura, Minn.), Teddy VanRanst (St. Paul, Minn.) — to name just a few.

"Our upperclassmen are doing a great job of leading the way," said Winecke, whose team opened the season with a doubleheader sweep of NCAA Division II Northern State University — and head into the final stretch of games before conference play with a 7-5 record. "Everyone has been stepping up for us, and that's key — if we are going to be successful this season, we are going to need everyone doing their part."

Swanson enjoyed a banner junior season in 2011, hitting a team- and career-best .356, while also leading the team in at-bats (132), hits (47), and total bases (59). He put together hitting streaks of 11 and eight consecutive games, had at least one hit in 30 or the team's 36 games, and reached base safely in 33 of his 36 games played.

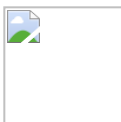
The senior catcher has picked up right where he left off this season, boasting a .341 batting average, with six doubles and 10 RBIs in 12 games.

But Swanson has been just the tip of the iceberg for the SMU offense this season. The Cardinals boast 10 players hitting .300 or better, led by Pat Krieger (Mendota Heights, Minn. / .500), Andy Edholm (Hudson, Wis. / .480), Geraghty (.429), Kevin Gannon (Roselle, Ill. / .400), Jon Schlemmer (De Pere, Wis. / .400), VanRanst (.400) and Zach Wolfe (Wabasha, Minn. / .400).

"We're swinging it pretty good right now," said Winecke, whose team is hitting .344 and has scored 84 runs in 12 games. "And we are getting solid pitching — we've still got a little work to do defensively, but for early in the season, I'm pretty happy with where we are at."

VanRanst and Sam Nord (Mendota Heights, Minn.) have each collected a pair of pitching wins, while Kronebusch has thrown a team-best 14.1 innings, one-third of an inning more than VanRanst. ... Kronebusch also leads the team with 11 strikeouts, while newcomer Tyler Krysiak (Bloomington, Minn.) has earned three saves in five appearances and owns a 1.80 earned-run-average.

"Things have been going pretty well thus far," Winecke said. "But we've got a long ways to go."



St. Olaf

Coach: Matt McDonald (18th season)

2011 Finish: 6th (9-11 MIAC, 21-18 overall)

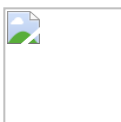
St. Olaf Season Preview

The St. Olaf baseball team is poised to ride a solid southern trip to kickstart its conference schedule later this week.

The Oles (6-10), who stumbled to an 0-6 start in the Metrodome in early March, went 6-4 in its trip to Florida. St. Olaf picked up quality wins, among them a victory over sixth-ranked UW-Stevens Point.

The team's pitching staff has solidified itself lately, as the Oles have won four of their last five. Brady Sand has been the most consistent, going 2-1 in five appearances this spring with a 1.80 ERA in 25 innings. Alex Lampert (1-3, 3.44 ERA) and Joey Voss (1-0, 4.08) have worked 18- and 17-plus innings in the early going. Jake Schmiesing, Kyle Watson and Anders Dzurak have also drawn starts and could find themselves in the rotation.

Offensively, the Oles have leaned on a trio in the middle of the lineup - Nick Kulla, Dan Lee and Jack Schechinger. Kulla has been solid all year, hitting safely in 14 of the team's 16 games. He's leads the team in hitting (.356), slugging percentage (.467) and on-base percentage (.453). Lee is hitting .333 and Schechinger .313 with team-bests in doubles (5), RBIs (9) and runs (11).



St. Thomas

Coach: Chris Olean (3rd season)

2011 Finish: T-1st (16-4 MIAC, 28-18 overall)

St. Thomas Season Preview

Tommie baseball is off to a good start in 2012 and ranked nationally in the top-20 of both polls. Several transfers and freshmen joined a solid nucleus of returners. UST is off to a 9-4 start despite playing nine games thus far against nationally-ranked teams.

Last season, after an uncharacteristic 8-13 start, St. Thomas won 17 of its last 18 regular-season games. That April-May surge let it tie Macalester for the MIAC championship -- UST's ninth consecutive conference baseball crown.

St. Thomas later went 3-4 in postseason games, with four defeats by a combined five runs. The Toms advanced to the NCAA playoffs for the 16th time in 17 seasons but went 1-2, with losses by 3-2 and 2-1 scores, and finished the season with a 28-18 record.

St. Thomas' graduation losses include a four-year starter in center field, Matt McQuillan (192 career hits); All-Region pitcher Kris Edwards (Career: 13-9, 2.15 ERA, 131 Ks in 163 innings); plus All-Region outfielders Tayler Rahm and Drew Cremisino.

Leading the returners in the field are senior 3B Charles Bruchu and sophomore catcher J.D. Dorgan, an All-Region and MIAC Rookie of the Year honoree. Bruchu hit .358 last spring with 17 multi-hit games. He went 4-for-5 in the Siebert Field win over the Gophers on April 13. He was named to MIAC All-Conference 1st Team, ABCA All Midwestern Team and also made the Capital One Academic All-District 1st team with a 3.65 gpa in Biology. He's had 104 hits in 85 career games over his last two seasons with 5 homers and 52 RBI. Dorgan hit .375 with 51 hits, five HRs, 30 runs, 32 RBI and 19 extra-base hits in 38 games. He became the first UST freshman position player in 30 years to make the All-MIAC team.

Other position players back include sophomore OF Tim Kuzniar (2011: .339 BA, 41 hits, 20 walks in 38 starts); senior 1B Dan Reichert; and senior 3B Nick Reichert. The inside infield slots will be manned by junior Jon Kinsel (SS) and sophomore Sam Miller (2B). Soph Ryan Gerber will start in RF.

Senior LHP Bryce Gapinski (2011: 7-2, 3.22 ERA, 59 innings, 11 appearances) leads the pitching returners. He has two March victories to reach 21 on his career. Senior John Licht (2011: 3-2, 4.64 ERA, 33 IP, 10 appearances) and three sophomores, lefties Mark Ulrich (2011: 1-1, 2.14 ERA, 33 IP, 18 appearances) and Zach Franz (2011: 3-1, 3.66, 39 IP, 38 strikeouts), and RHP Tommy Danczyk (2011: 1-1, 5.84, six appearances) have pitched well thus far.

The team's depth has been bolstered by several transfers and 2011 HS grads:

--sophomore RHP Steve Maher, a 2009 Holy Angels grad, signed with D-I Illinois State and pitched last year at Iowa Central CC. Maher is 4-0 with an 0.71 ERA in his first four games, including wins over ranked St. Scholastica, Stevens Point and Whitewater.

--freshman CF Ben Podobinski, who attended the University of Minnesota last season but didn't play with the Gophers, has shined thus far as the team's leadoff hitter --junior RHP/DH Dylan Thomas of Lakeville North pitched in the NJCAA College World Series last spring for Des Moines (Iowa) Area CC. The 2009 Minnesota HS all-stater struck out 51 in 51 innings last season for the Bears.

--junior RHP Josh Kubitschek of Centennial pitched the last two seasons out of the pen at D-II MSU Mankato; --freshman RHP Colin Wendinger went 16-0 with an 0.61 ERA in his prep career at New Ulm Cathedral and also was a starting WR on Cathedral's state champion football team --freshman OF Jack Hogan, a redshirt at D-I St. Louis University last spring, batted .431 as a senior at Holy Angels; --freshman 3B Adam LaMere was an all-stater from Centennial High School.

St. Thomas faces Hamline, Augsburg and St. John's in the first 11 days of the MIAC season.