

2018 MIAC Baseball Preview & Preseason Coaches' Poll

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BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – While winter weather lingers across the North Star State, Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) baseball teams are preparing to begin the 2018 season.

Several MIAC teams will be back on the diamond as early as next week, with some securing a reprieve from the snow down in Florida and others headed to U.S. Bank Stadium to start the season a bit closer to home.

Before the season gets underway, however, MIAC coaches cast their ballots in the annual Preseason Coaches' Poll. The University of St. Thomas is once again tabbed to win the Conference crown, as Chris Olean's club garnered 99 points and nine first-place votes in the balloting. The Tommies are coming off their 14th solo or shared title in the last 15 seasons, and return several key pieces from their 2017 squad, including a trio of All-Region starting pitchers in junior **Henry DeCaster** and seniors **Ryan Zimmerman** and **Drew Molin**.

Saint John's wound up at No. 2 in the Preseason Coaches' Poll with 85 points and one first-place vote. Along with All-Region pitchers **Jake Dickmeyer** and **Ben Etzell**, the Johnnies will have **Wyatt Ulrich** back in the lineup after an outstanding freshman campaign that resulted in MIAC Player of the Year honors. A Third Team All-America selection in his rookie year, Ulrich ended the 2017 regular season as the Conference's leader in batting average (.494), on-base percentage (.523), runs scored (26) and hits (40) in MIAC play, all from the leadoff spot – not to mention, he tied for the national batting title with a .500 average overall.



Bethel came in just behind SJU in the balloting, earning 83 points and one first-place vote to land at No. 3 in the Preseason Coaches' Poll. The Royals seemed to take the results of last year's Coaches' Poll personally, as the team picked to finish sixth in the Conference last February rolled to a 31-8 record and a share of the MIAC regular season title – the program's second in three seasons. While BU would no doubt love to enter the year as the clear-cut favorite, the role of underdog has suited them well – though it is unlikely that any MIAC team is overlooking the Royals now.

Less than 12 months removed from a stunning postseason run that secured the program's first MIAC Playoff championship and NCAA Tournament appearance, Matt Parrington's Macalester team is slotted at No. 4 in the Preseason Coaches' Poll. The Scots tied a program record with 26 victories last year and return eight position players who started at least 33 games in 2017, including All-Region catcher **Collin Brantner**, first baseman **Nick McMullen** and outfielder **Alex Baretta**. Macalester received 71 votes in the 2018 Preseason Coaches' Poll.

Concordia came in at No. 5 in the Preseason Coaches' Poll, collecting 54 points in the balloting and edging No. 6 Saint Mary's by one point. The Cobbers just missed out on the MIAC Playoffs last year, a result that coach Chris Coste and his team aim to remedy in 2018. Junior shortstop **Nate Hoeft** figures to play a key role in achieving that goal – he hit safely in 15 MIAC games and led the Cobbers with a .349 batting average in Conference play last season.

Complete 2018 Preseason Coaches' Poll

Coaches voted for every team in the conference except their own team. Points were assigned for each vote (10 for first, 9 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.

2018 MIAC Baseball Preseason Coaches' Poll

Rank	Institution (First-Place Votes)	Total
1.	St. Thomas (9)	99
2.	Saint John's (1)	85
3.	Bethel (1)	83
4.	Macalester	71
5.	Concordia	54

6.	Saint Mary's	53
7.	Hamline	45
8.	Gustavus	41
9.	St. Olaf	37
10.	Augsburg	27
11.	Carleton	10

Around the MIAC

-Carleton pitcher **Austin Heuer** developed into the team's ace as a sophomore last season, allowing two earned runs or fewer in five starts en route to becoming just the Knights' second underclassman pitcher since 1989 to receive All-MIAC honors.

-Gustavus pitcher **Casey Lewandoski** made a program-record 19 appearances out of the bullpen last season, posting a 2.95 earned-run average (ERA) and a 5-1 record after 36 and two-thirds innings of work.

-St. Olaf's **Jake Mathison** did a little bit of everything last season, starting all 39 games for the Oles and leading the team in runs (26), doubles (12) and ERA (2.31). The senior utility player went 5-3 on the mound and knocked in 16 runs with a .468 slugging percentage to earn All-Midwest Region honors.

2018 MIAC Baseball Playoffs

The 2018 MIAC Baseball Playoffs will emanate from a new home in 2018, as the four-team tournament will head to CHS Field in St. Paul, Minn. The double-elimination playoff will be held Thursday, May 10 – Saturday, May 12, 2018. The winner of the 2018 MIAC Baseball Playoffs will receive the Conference's automatic bid to the 2018 NCAA Division III Baseball Tournament.

Odds and Ends

-Augsburg outfielder **Jordan DeCroock** was one of just nine NCAA Division III baseball players nationwide to be named to the American Baseball Coaches Association/Rawlings Gold Glove Team last summer. DeCroock played error-free ball in 106 fielding chances with 102 putouts and four assists for the Auggies in 2017.

-Hamline coach Jim Weyandt eclipsed 100 wins for his career in dramatic fashion last April, as HU topped Macalester, 5-4, in 13 innings at CHS Field. Entering 2018, the Pipers have won 108 of the 195 games played with Weyandt at the helm.

-Saint Mary's will break ground on a 2,500-square-foot baseball clubhouse in May, made possible by a generous lead gift from alumnus Marc "Pudge" Weisenburger, who played catcher for the Cards from 1971-75.