

2019 MIAC Baseball Preview & Preseason Coaches' Poll

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BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – While more snow looms in the North Star State's forecast, Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) baseball teams are thinking warm thoughts in preparation for the 2019 season.

Several MIAC teams are set to return to the diamond as early as this weekend, as squads begin to head out to less arctic climates for their 2019 spring games. Prior to first pitch, however, MIAC coaches cast their ballots in the annual Preseason Coaches' Poll. The results show a league that is wide open, with three teams garnering first-place votes this year and seven programs gaining postseason experience over the last three seasons.

Saint John's is picked to repeat as MIAC champions, as the Johnnies collected 96 points and six first-place votes in the balloting. SJU finished the 2018 season with a 33-8 record and the program's first MIAC title since the 1998 season. Pitcher **Jake Dickmeyer** (Woodbury, Minn.) played a key role in helping the Johnnies win the league crown and make their ninth straight appearance in the MIAC Playoffs. The righty was named the MIAC's Mike Augustin Pitcher of the Year as a junior last season after posting a 5-2 record with a 1.19 earned-run average (ERA) and two complete games in eight conference appearances. The Johnnies received 14 votes in October's [D3baseball.com Preseason Top 25 Poll](#).

St. Thomas garnered 88 points and four first-place votes to come in at No. 2 in the preseason poll. Tied for third in the conference standings with a 13-7 mark in league play last season, the Tommies will be looking to add to their MIAC-record 36 regular season championships in 2019. Former MIAC Pitcher of the Year **Henry DeCaster** (Shoreview, Minn. | Mounds View) will return to the mound for his senior season. The left-hander has started 22 games and posted 164 strikeouts against just 39 walks in 143 innings of work during his time in a Tommie uniform.

Bethel is a close third in the preseason balloting, picking up 85 points and one first-place vote. The Royals earned their first-ever trip to the NCAA Regionals last season after sweeping through the MIAC Playoffs. BU has won 30-plus games in three of the last four seasons, picking up a pair of MIAC regular season championships along the way. Bethel returns reliever **Jake Marsh** (Plymouth, Minn. | Wayzata) to the bullpen in 2019. Named honorable mention All-America by D3baseball.com in January, Marsh is already the program's all-time saves leader with 16 midway through his collegiate career. His 0.84 ERA last season was the lowest on a Bethel pitching staff that led all of college baseball and set a new MIAC record with a 1.98 team earned-run average in 2018.

Gustavus is picked to finish fourth in the MIAC with 67 points in the balloting. The Gusties punched their tickets to the MIAC Playoffs for the first time since 2008 last season and anticipate a return trip to the postseason in 2019. **Sam Archer** (Zimmerman, Minn.) earned Third Team All-Midwest Region honors last year after totaling a 5-1 record and 1.44 ERA with a pair of complete games, including a one-run, six-hit performance against St. Thomas to close out the regular season and send Gustavus to its first postseason in a decade.

Saint Mary's is slated for a fifth-place finish with 62 points in the preseason balloting. The Cardinals made their second MIAC Playoff appearance in the last three years and fifth in the last seven in 2018. The play of 2018 MIAC Rookie of the Year **James Green** (East Bethel, Minn. | St. Francis) had a lot to do with that, as the Cards' first-year right-hander led the team with a 1.68 ERA in 59 innings pitched.

Macalester is No. 6 in the preseason poll with 57 points. The Scots are two years removed from the program's first MIAC Playoff championship and NCAA Tournament berth. Reigning MIAC Player of the Year **Graham Low** (Piedmont, Calif.) will be back behind the plate this season. Low - named a Second Team All-Region performer by both D3baseball.com and ABCA/Rawlings last season - has batted .305 with 95 hits, 16 home runs, and 81 runs batted in through 103 games in a Macalester uniform. He led the team with seven homers, 71 total bases, and a MIAC-best .710 slugging percentage as a junior last season.

Concordia logged 39 points to finish No. 7 in the poll. The Cobbers won their final three conference games of 2018 but just missed out on the MIAC Playoffs, settling for an even 10-10 record in league play. Right-hander **Austin Ver Steeg** (Glenwood, Minn. | Minnewaska Area) emerged as one of the top pitchers in the conference last year, going 3-0 in seven appearances to earn ABCA/Rawlings All-Midwest honors. The rising junior fashioned a team-best 1.25 ERA in 36.0 innings pitched with 34 strikeouts and just 26 hits allowed.

St. Olaf is eighth in the poll with 39 points. The Oles are set to confront another challenging schedule this spring, playing eight games against NCAA Regional-qualifying teams from a season ago, including non-conference clashes with Bethany Lutheran, Union, and Aurora - all of whom were champions of their respective conference tourneys in 2018. St. Olaf will look to build on some of its late-season success



from last year, including a 15-hit road win at MIAC-champion Saint John's in May. Outfielder **Sam Stuckmayer** (Northfield, Minn.) went 3-for-4 with a home run in the game. Three days prior, Stuckmayer belted three over the fence in the second game of a double-header at Macalester.

Hamline collected 32 points in the balloting to land at No. 9 in the poll. Now three years removed from a 28-win season, the Pipers will be looking to get back to the form that made them a MIAC title contender in 2016. Senior utility player **Nolan Schoonveld** (Middleton, Wis.) will be key to doing just that. Only the second All-Midwest selection in program history, the versatile Schoonveld spent time on the mound and manning first base in 2019. He led the Pipers with 45 hits and stole 19 bases without being caught once all season. He also started eight games at pitcher for the Pipers, going at least six innings in four of those contests and issuing only eight walks in 37.2 innings of work.

With 23 points in the balloting, Augsburg is No. 10 in the preseason poll. The Auggies went 18-20 overall last season with a 7-13 mark in MIAC play, which included signature victories over perennial contenders Bethel and St. Thomas. Second baseman **Mike Brookshaw** (Prescott, Wis.) missed 10 games early in the season due to injury but the former MIAC Rookie of the Year still managed to put together the second All-Region campaign of his career with a team-best .464 batting average to go along a .539 on-base percentage and 25 runs scored, all while playing in less than three-fourths of the Auggies' conference schedule.

Carleton is in the No. 11 spot of the poll with 10 points in the balloting. The Knights got hot late in the 2018 season, with victories in three of the team's final four home games. Southpaw **Matt Stamets** (Bloomington, Ill. | University) transitioned from the pen in May and made an immediate impact as a starter, striking out 16 batters in a complete game three-hitter for a 2-1 non-conference victory over Martin Luther College. No MIAC pitcher since 2013 had struck out more batters in a single start. Stamets closed out the year yielding only one unearned run on four hits in 9.2 innings of work with an opponent batting average of .125 in three appearances.

Complete 2019 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.

2019 MIAC Baseball Preseason Coaches' Poll

Rank	Institution (First-Place Votes)	Total
1.	Saint John's (6)	96
2.	St. Thomas (4)	88
3.	Bethel (1)	85
4.	Gustavus	67
5.	Saint Mary's	62
6.	Macalester	57
7.	Concordia	46
8.	St. Olaf	39
9.	Hamline	32
10.	Augsburg	23
11.	Carleton	10

Around the MIAC

-With no games at U.S. Bank Stadium this year due to the upcoming NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Final Four, MIAC teams will play ball in seven different states over the next six weeks, with games scheduled in Arizona, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, and Ohio. Adding in April non-conference contests in North Dakota and Wisconsin, MIAC teams are poised to hit nearly a fifth of the country during the regular season.

-The MIAC returns all 11 head coaches along with 10 All-Midwest Region selections from a season ago. Six - Augsburg's **Mike Brookshaw**, Bethel's **Jake Marsh**, Hamline's **Nolan Schoonveld**, Macalester's **Graham Low**, and Saint John's **Jake Dickmeyer** and **Max Jackson** - were double-honorees in 2018, receiving All-Midwest Team recognition from both D3baseball.com and ABCA/Rawlings. The latter also honored Bethel's **Michael Bohlke**, Concordia's **Austin Ver Steeg**, Gustavus' **Sam Archer**, and Saint John's **Bennett Wiggins** with All-Region accolades.

-Several MIAC players kept their skills sharp by playing in the Northwoods League, a 20-team collegiate summer league for high-caliber student-athletes with NCAA eligibility remaining. Included in the MIAC contingent were Augsburg's **Joe Rydel** (Bismarck) and **Clayton Bodine** (Thunder Bay), Bethel's **Michael Bohlke** (Willmar) and Jake Marsh (Willmar), and Saint John's **Danny Kuhn** (Bismarck), **Wyatt Ulrich** (Bismarck), **Bennett Wiggins** (Bismarck), and **Joey Stock** (St. Cloud).

2019 MIAC Baseball Playoffs

The 2019 MIAC Baseball Playoffs will once again emanate from CHS Field in St. Paul, Minn. This will be the second year in a row the four-team tournament will be played at the home of the Hamline Pipers and St. Paul Saints. Due to field availability, Game 4 of the tournament on Friday, May 10 will be held at Bethel University. The double-elimination playoff will be held Thursday, May 9 – Saturday, May 11, 2019. The winner of the 2019 MIAC Baseball Playoffs will receive the Conference's automatic bid to the 2019 NCAA Division III Baseball Tournament.

Odds and Ends

-Saint Mary's held a ribbon-cutting ceremony in January to unveil its new \$704,000 baseball clubhouse to the team for the first time. The 2,500-square-foot facility was made possible by a generous lead gift from alumnus Marc "Pudge" Weisenburger.

-Two Tommies signed professional contracts following the 2018 season, as pitcher Ryan Zimmerman and shortstop/outfielder Jake Smith were added to the St. Paul Saints roster.

-Bethel first-year pitcher **Ty Koehn** received an honorary ESPY Award over the summer after his outstanding display of sportsmanship in last year's Minnesota state semifinal went viral.