

2011-12 MIAC Men's Basketball Preview and Preseason Coaches' Poll

11/14/2011

ST. PAUL, Minn. -- The 2010-11 Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) men's basketball season was unforgettable with the conference championship and playoff spots decided on the final day of the regular season. An exciting, memorable MIAC Playoff tournament followed, capped by the league's first-ever NCAA Division III Men's Basketball National Championship, claimed by 30-3 St. Thomas. Now, what will the conference do for an encore in 2011-12?

If last season was any indication, MIAC men's basketball fans will be in for a treat in 2011-12. The Tommies will have a distinctly different look during their national title defense, and the conference again appears to be loaded at the top, with several teams gunning for the MIAC title and a spot in the six-team conference playoffs.

This season, the conference coaches predict that St. Thomas will again be the team to beat, but they also predict significant improvement from a few teams towards the top of the standings and a close race for the championship. The Tommies received six first-place votes and 95 points to finish atop the 2011-12 MIAC Men's Basketball Preseason Coaches' Poll after earning a share of the MIAC's regular-season championship and the MIAC Men's Basketball Playoff title a year ago to spark its run through the Division III Tournament.

UST was 30-3 overall a year ago, but lost five seniors and saw head coach **Steve Fritz** retire on top after 31 years as the Tommies head coach. Fritz - still the school's athletic director - hired longtime assistant and former UST star **John Tauer** as his interim replacement, and part of St. Thomas's success a year ago was predicated on its depth. Replacing All-American **Tyler Nicolai** and fellow seniors **Alex Healy**, **Teddy Archer**, **Anders Halvorsen** and **Brady Ervin** won't be easy, but the Tommies still have a lot back. Starting center **Tommy Hannon** returns after receiving All-Tournament Team honors at the Division III Final Four, and guards **Peter Leslie** and **John Nance** are also experienced returners who could thrive with expanded roles.

However, UST wasn't a slam-dunk choice, as two other teams each received first-place votes and at least 80 points in the coaches' poll. St. Olaf is the coaches' choice to finish second with three first-place votes and 89 points, while Augsburg received the other two first-place votes and 80 points to finish third. A year ago, the Oles finished fourth in the MIAC with a 17-9 overall record and a 12-8 conference mark while the Auggies were 15-10 overall and 10-10 in the MIAC, good for a three-way tie for sixth, but they lost out on a Playoff spot due to tiebreaker criteria.

Both St. Olaf and Augsburg bring back talented rosters in 2011-12, which fuels the preseason optimism around their squads. The Oles will be led by the All-MIAC duo of guard **Bobby Fong** and forward **Stu Neville**, who will form one of the best inside-outside duos in the league. All-MIAC forward **Cory Polta** leads a talented crop of Augsburg returners who defeated Division I Houston Baptist in an exhibition contest last weekend to make a statement heading into the season.

The next two spots in the poll were also very close between two teams coming off memorable seasons. Carleton - which shared last year's regular-season title with St. Thomas - finished fourth with 73 points, and Gustavus - which had a thrilling run to the MIAC Playoff championship game - was fifth with 67 points. The Knights and reigning MIAC Coach-of-the-Year **Guy Kalland** graduated senior stars **Jeremy Sutherland** and **Seth Jonker**, but forward **Caleb Rosenow** will be back to help lead their title defense. Meanwhile, Gustavus brings back All-MIAC guard **Seth Anderson** who will again be among the best in the backcourt, but the Gusties also lost a pair of All-MIAC Honorable Mention players that were crucial during their postseason run.

The conference coaches predicted Hamline will return to the playoffs as well, finishing sixth with 61 points, despite the loss of one of the Pipers' all-time greats, center **Carl Hipp**, who was the MIAC Player-of-the-Year last season. Junior guard **Mike Campbell** and talented sophomore **Tyler Pannell** will be asked to handle more of the load with Hipp gone, and both showed last year they could be up to the task.

There was a tie for seventh place in the coaches' poll, as both Bethel and Saint John's received 39 points each, predicted to finish just outside the six-team playoff field. **Andy Burns** will try to ease the loss of All-MIAC star **Aaron Burtzel** for the Johnnies, while Bethel will count on the continued development from junior **Taylor Hall** and sophomore **Christian Skinner**.

Concordia (9th, 38 points), Macalester (10th, 23 points) and Saint Mary's (11th, 11 points) rounded out the final three spots in the poll. The Cobbers were a playoff team last year, but graduated All-MIAC selections **Darrin Olmscheid** and **John Fraase**, so coach **Rich Glas** will need to have some new faces step up. Macalester broke through with a pair of MIAC wins last year, and hopes to continue its development behind junior star **Pierce Peters**, while Saint Mary's hopes players like **Pat Freeman** and **Michael Burfeind** can increase their production after the Cardinals lost their top three scorers from 2010-11.

The 2011-12 season tips off tomorrow with several teams in action against nonconference opponents. MIAC play opens Nov. 30 and, with a short break mixed in for the Holidays, will run through Saturday, Feb. 18. The 2012 MIAC Men's Basketball Playoffs will take place the final week of February with quarterfinal games on Feb. 22, semifinal games on Feb. 24 and the championship on Sunday, Feb. 26, with the winner claiming the MIAC's automatic bid to the 2012 NCAA Division III Men's Basketball Tournament.



The 2011-12 MIAC Men's Basketball Preview continues below with complete results from the 2011-12 MIAC Men's Basketball Preseason Coaches' Poll, helpful links, and complete team-by-team previews for each of the conference's 11 teams.

2011-12 MIAC Men's Basketball 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.

2011-12 MIAC Men's Basketball Preseason Coaches' Poll		
Rank	Institution	Total
1	St. Thomas (6)	95
2	St. Olaf (3)	89
3	Augsburg (2)	80
4	Carleton	73
5	Gustavus	67
6	Hamline	51
T7	Bethel	39
T7	Saint John's	39
9	Concordia	38
10	Macalester	23
11	Saint Mary's	11

2011-12 MIAC Men's Basketball Playoff Dates

Quarterfinals (Wednesday, Feb. 22), Semifinals (Friday, Feb. 24), Finals (Sunday, Feb. 26)

[2011-12 MIAC Men's Basketball Playoff Page](#)

| [2011-12 MIAC Schedule](#) | [2010-11 MIAC Statistics](#) | [MIAC Recordbook](#) | [MIAC Archives](#) |



Augsburg

Coach: Aaron Griess

Career Record: 75-79 (6 seasons at Augsburg)

2010-11 Finish: T-6th (15-10 overall, 10-10 MIAC)

Augsburg Season Preview

The Augsburg College men's basketball team, under the direction of seventh-year head coach Aaron Griess, has its sights set on making a return to the MIAC playoffs after just missing out on a berth due to tiebreaker criteria a year ago.

The Auggies enter the 2011-12 season after recording five consecutive-double-digit victory campaigns. Augsburg has finished among the top six teams in the conference each of the past three seasons.

Augsburg will be led this season by one of the best big-man duos in the MIAC -- seniors Andy Grzesiak-Grimm (SR, Wyoming, Minn./St. Francis HS) and Cory Polta (SR, Spring Lake Park, Minn.), who led the Auggies in scoring, field goal percentage and rebounding a year ago. Polta averaged 12.9 points and 7.3 rebounds per-game while shooting at a 52.5-percent clip, while Grzesiak-Grimm scored 11.6 points and 7.2 rebounds per-game, converting on a team-leading 57.1 percent of his shots. Polta and Grzesiak-Grimm finished the 2010-11 season ranked fifth and sixth, respectively, in the MIAC's overall statistics in rebounding and second and 13th, respectively, in blocked shots.

"Our strength this year is without question, our interior presence," Griess said. "Cory Polta and Andy Grzesiak-Grimm are probably the most experienced post duo in the MIAC. We'll lean on them offensively and defensively this year. We've also got some guys who can really shoot the ball on the perimeter. We've got a chance to play a pretty balanced attack this season."

Brett Sorenson (SR, Lakeville, Minn./Lakeville South HS) and Anthony Humphrey (SR, Minneapolis, Minn./DeLaSalle HS) will also return to the lineup this year at the guard/forward positions. Sorenson, a two-time All-MIAC Defensive Team selection, has led the Auggies in steals for the past two seasons while also averaging 6.5 points and 4.6 rebounds per-game in 2010-11. Humphrey is a dynamic player who averaged 4.2 points and 1.6 rebounds per-game last year.

Grzesiak-Grimm, Polta and Sorenson are team co-captains this season, and all three bring valuable leadership skills to the team.

"These three guys have been major contributing members of our program for four years now. They've learned from some very good leaders and they've been through some terrific battles on the basketball floor. All of that experience has been shining bright since last spring. Not only did they work hard this summer, individually, but they've demanded the same effort from their teammates as well," Griess said. "They embody what our basketball program is all about on the basketball floor and in the classroom. I've really enjoyed being a part of their growth and development. When it's all said and done, they will have left their mark on our program after this year and I know they're anxious to make it a season to remember."

At the guard position, Augsburg graduated All-MIAC honorable-mention honoree Matt Quammen (Victoria, Minn./Holy Family HS) but returns All-MIAC First Year point guard Parker Hines (SO, Lakeville, Minn./Minnehaha Academy) and sharp-shooter Tyler Schmidt (JR, Le Sueur, Minn./Le Sueur-Henderson HS). Hines averaged 6.5 points and 2.6 rebounds per-game, and returns as the Auggies' leading assist-man, averaging 3.0 per-game. Schmidt led the team and the MIAC last year in field goal percentage, connecting on 52.8 percent of his shots from beyond the arc, setting the Augsburg single-season three-point field-goal percentage record in the process.

Andy Seidlitz (SO, New Hope, Minn./Robbinsdale Armstrong HS), David Weber (SO, Plymouth, Minn./Robbinsdale Armstrong HS) and Eren Curran (JR, Plymouth, Minn./Wayzata HS) also return to the Auggie lineup with a year of experience under their belts. Seidlitz played in 24 games last season averaging 4.6 points and 1.3 rebounds per-game, while Webber played in 15 games and Curran played in 12.

"We've got some experience in our backcourt, with Parker Hines having a full year under his belt as well as Anthony Humphrey and Tyler Schmidt seeing significant action for us last year," Griess said. "Andy Seidlitz has had a tremendous month of practice and I'm counting on him to play a big role for us this year."

Newcomers Noah Veach (SO, Grand Haven, Mich./Grand Haven HS) and Alex Schmidt (FY, Mound, Minn./Mound-Westonka HS) are expected to step into the lineup as early contributors. Veach transfers to Augsburg after averaging 7.8 points and 3.5 rebounds per-game last season at Trine University, while Schmidt transfers in after receiving a medical hardship at Concordia-Moorhead in 2010-11.

Last season, Augsburg finished ranked fourth in the MIAC in scoring defense and blocked shots. The Auggies only gave up 67.7 points per-game while blocking an average of 2.84 shots per-game. The Auggies also finished third in the conference in turnover margin (+1.36).

The Auggies have already gotten off to a positive start, beating Division I Houston Baptist University 74-68 in an exhibition contest in early November, Augsburg's first win over a NCAA Division I opponent in modern history. The Auggies open their regular season schedule with non-conference contests at Northland College (Wis.) and North Central College. Augsburg hosts St. John's University on Nov. 30 in the first of three straight home games to open the MIAC season.



Bethel

Coach: Jeff Westlund

Career Record: 72-58 (5 seasons at Bethel)

2010-11 Finish: T-9th (7-18 overall, 4-16, MIAC)

Despite a rebuilding effort in 2010-11 the Bethel University men's basketball program looks to build off of last year's knowledge in order to be competitive in the 2011-12 campaign. The Royals said good-bye to its lone senior last year and welcome back 14 returners who saw court time at one point or another.

Head Coach Jeff Westlund and his team of coaches are striving to engrain rhythm into the BU players. With that in mind the Royals will attempt to establish and maintain its own rhythm night-in and night-out. Westlund noted, "Scheduling doesn't make a difference to us. What matters is that we control the tempo against every opponent and execute our game plan. That said, our team needs to be marked by defense. It's key that we pay strong attention to detail and learn how to guard the opposing offenses. From there we can focus on controlling different elements of the game, including transition play, penetration, and rebounding.

Bethel is led by three seniors, which include Daniel Baah (Sr., Farmington, Minn.), Kellan Dahlquist (Sr., St. Cloud, Minn.), and Eric Hildebrandt (Sr., Faribault, Minn.). Throughout the 2010-11 season Baah was second on the team in scoring and 18th in the MIAC, totaling 320 points throughout the 25 games. The senior guard averaged nearly 13 points a game on just over 11 shot attempts a night. The Farmington, Minn. native led the team in scoring in six different competitions last season, including a 34-point effort against non-conference opponent Crown College. Baah also found success at the charity stripe as the guard was fourth in the MIAC, converting 84 percent of his attempts. Dahlquist was third among all teammates in rebounding with 117 boards. His ability to grab the board on offense was extremely exceptional, as Kellan was fourth in the MIAC with 2.24 offensive rebounds-per-game. His effort was a major reason why the Royals finished first in offensive rebounds-per-game, averaging 11.84 offensive boards a night. The defensive guard also showed his strength in shot-blocking, as he was second on the team in blocks with 13. Dahlquist's senior leadership and work-horse mentality deems him BU's "X-Factor" in the upcoming year. Eric Hildebrandt contributed solid minutes for the Royals last season and found a niche around the perimeter. Hildebrandt hit 21-of-63 shots from beyond the 3-point arc, boasting a .333 3-point shooting percentage.

Taylor Hall (Jr., Blaine, Minn.) will be a main proponent to the BU front court. Hall led the team in scoring throughout the 2010-11 campaign with 369 points, averaging 14.8 points-per-game. Hall and Baah both produced great field goal percentages, as each averaged a field goal percentage greater than .400. The junior forward finished eighth in the MIAC last year in points-per-game and 15th in rebounds-per-game, averaging 5.1 boards per match-up. Hall also tallied 1.60 steals-per-game, which was good enough for fifth among all conference competitors. Hall and the Royals finished second in steals-per-game at the end of the previous season, averaging 8.32 steals. Bethel not only capitalized on opposing offensive miscues, but did a good job to maintain the possessions they did have. Last season BU was second overall with a 1.64 turnover margin.

Other returners include juniors Greg Meyer, JD Robinson, and Bjorn Westlund, alongside sophomores Lucas Battenhoff, John De Cleene, Quinn Gorski, Derek Wolhowe, and Kyle Zimmerman. Meyer was the third leading scorer in 2010-11, averaging 12.6 points-per-game. Robinson added 4.1 points and 2.24 rebounds-per-game. Quinn Gorski added 2.1 points-per-game in just seven-and-a-half minutes a game one season ago.

Key newcomers to watch for the Royals include point guard Derek Dahl, who coach Westlund notes will have great responsibility in the upcoming season, along with Boyd Thomas, AJ Hatchett, Kyle Keck, and Joseph Zorn.

With so many faces returning to the BU squad in 2011-12, the Royals have an opportunity to compete with any team throughout the entire season. Bethel's focus on defense should provide several chances to stay in games and put points on the board.



Carleton

Coach: Guy Kalland

Career Record: 382-310 (27 seasons)

2010-11 Finish: T-1st (18-8 overall, 17-3 MIAC)

Carleton Season Preview

The Knights claimed a share of the MIAC regular-season crown in 2011, but if Carleton is able to return to the playoffs once again, it will have to do so with several new faces in the lineup. Graduation hit the Knights hard, claiming a trio of starters.

Gone are All-Region guard Jeremy Sutherland and All-MIAC forward Seth Jonker—both of them joined Carleton’s 1,000-point club last season—as well as one of the program’s all-time leaders in three-point shooting, Carter Biewen. That trio recorded the most victories (72) of any class in the 100+year history of Carleton basketball.

Top returners include Caleb Rosenow (Sr./ Red Wing, Minn.) who was tabbed All-MIAC honorable mention and chosen as the conference’s Sixth Man of the Year last season. He tallied 9.5 points per game, with 11 contests in double figures, as well as 4.6 rebounds per game. He ranked sixth in the MIAC in field-goal percentage (.575) and was also among MIAC leaders in rebounding.

Joining him will be point-guard Tom Sawatzke (Jr./Monticello, Minn./Monticello) who had 7.9 points per game last season and also posted 2.7 rebounds and a .725 free-throw percentage.

The other returning starter is Scott Theisen (Jr./ Champlin, Minn./Champlin Park) who tied with Jonker for a team-high 5.5 rebounds per game (13th in the MIAC) and also boasted a .732 free-throw percentage and a .479 field-goal percentage last year.

Also likely to see significant minutes once again are Danny Geiger (So./New Prague, Minn./New Prague) and Ty Goetz (Jr./Chaska, Minn./Chaska).

Taylor Hanson (So./Saint Paul, Minn./Minnehaha Academy) joins the team after averaging 9.2 points playing last season for Connecticut College. He was third on that team in scoring, second in rebounds (5.4) and assists (2.2), and tops on the roster in blocks (0.7) and steals (0.9).

The Knights also welcome four rookies to the roster, a group that will be called upon to contribute immediately.

The Knights are led by head coach Guy Kalland, who was tabbed as MIAC Coach of the Year last year. He is Carleton’s all-time leader in coaching victories (382-310, .552) and has led the Knights to 19 winning seasons in his 27-year tenure. The Knights have qualified for the MIAC Playoffs in 10 consecutive seasons and 19 times overall under Kalland’s watch.



Concordia

Coach: Rich Glas

Career Record: 38-38 (3 seasons at Concordia)

2010-11 Finish: T-6th (14-12 overall, 10-10 MIAC)

Concordia Season Preview

Concordia preview coming soon.



Gustavus

Coach: Mark Hanson

Career Record: 402-177 (21 seasons)

2010-11 Finish: 5th (15-13 overall, 11-9 MIAC)

Gustavus Season Preview

Two start the 2011-12 campaign; Head Coach Mark Hanson, now entering his 22nd season at the helm of the Gustavus men's basketball program, will need to address the loss of two-year starters Phil Wirtjes and Dan Schmidtknecht in the backcourt. Beyond that, the Gusties return eight players who averaged over ten minutes per game to the roster. Strong guard play and an increased presence are key this season as Senior captains Seth Anderson, Tyler Grey, and Bobby Johnson lead this year's Gusties on their quest to improve last season's 15-13 overall record and fifth place finish in the MIAC at 11-9.

Seth Anderson (Minnesota Lake, Minn.) returns to the backcourt as the team's leading scorer and only returning All-Conference performer from a year ago. Anderson shot 57.7-percent (161-279) from the field and scored an average of 13.7 points per game last season. Anderson was one of the hottest players in the MIAC down the backstretch last year, scoring over 40-percent of his total points in the last seven games. Within that time-frame, he scored an average of 23.7 points per game and shot 64-percent from the floor.

Along with Anderson on the perimeter returns junior Jim Hill (Edina, Minn.), senior Tyler Grey (Montevideo, Minn.), junior Ben Biewen (Edina, Minn.), and senior Adam Michel (New Prague, Minn.). Hill is Gustavus' only other returner that averaged double-figures last season at 11.0 points per game. Grey returns to the court as the squad's top three-point threat from last season, knocking down 29 triples at a 39.7-percent rate. Both Biewen and Michel will likely see an elevated role this season. Biewen will be called upon to split point guard duties, while Michel is an added lengthy wing on the perimeter. Adding depth to the backcourt will be sophomore Jordan Dick (Wabasha, Minn.) and senior Ty Moore (Brooklyn Park, Minn.).

Bobby Johnson (Edina, Minn.) will once again anchor the Gustavus frontcourt. Johnson averaged 8.5 points per game last season to lead all Gustavus post players, despite missing the early portion of the year due to injury. As his health increased, so did Johnson's production over the course of the season, finishing the year shooting 54-percent from the field and averaging four rebounds per game.

Coach Hanson also returns his top rebounder and shot blocker in Paul Blacklock (Winona, Minn.). Blacklock scored 5.5 points per game and averaged 6.2 boards while finishing with a total of 42 blocks (2nd/MIAC). Reed Sallstrom (Winthrop, Minn.) came off the bench to contribute 15 minutes per game while shooting 60.2-percent from the field and averaging 4.8 points per game. Blake Shay (Lakeville, Minn.) rounds out the group. Shay saw time in both the paint and on the perimeter last season and will likely reprise that role heading into the year.

Gustavus scored an average of 73.9 points per game last season and shot 48.8-percent from the field, the second-highest percentage in the league. Opponents shot 46.1-percent (8th/MIAC) from the field against the Gusties, as they gave up an average of 71.4 points per game (8th/MIAC).

The Gustavus men's basketball team will open up the 2011-12 season with a non-conference test against Buena Vista University on Tuesday, Nov. 15 at 7:30 p.m. in Storm Lake, Iowa.



Hamline

Coach: Nelson Whitmore

Career Record: 48-55 (4 seasons at Hamline)

2010-11 Finish: 3rd (16-11 overall, 13-7 MIAC)

Hamline Season Preview

In theory, it may seem odd to say that a team with a dozen returning players that made the MIAC playoff last year will have a new look about them in 2011-12. But that is truly the case for the Hamline Pipers.

Carl Hipp, the burly center who led Hamline in nearly every offensive category there is last year, has graduated and, as fifth-year head coach Nelson Whitmore notes, "You can't replace a guy like that."

So the 2011-12 Pipers may approach things a bit differently. There may a different scoring leader every night. No two trips down the court may look the same. But, if Whitmore's will works out, the concept will look the same: five guys going full-blast at both ends of the court.

"Hopefully, we'll have a lot of games in the 80s and 90s," Whitmore said. "It's the style I like to play and it's the style that suits our talent. It should be a lot of fun."

While Hipp is gone, seven of last year's Top Ten scorers do return. Mike Campbell (Sr., Burnsville, Minn.) is an explosive guard was second to Hipp in many categories, averaging over 14 points per game.. An All-MIAC pick last year, he shot nearly 50 percent from the field, 80 per cent from the free throw line and often plays larger than his 6-3 status. "He's got a chance to be one of the best players in the conference," Whitmore said.

Whitmore is also high on Noah Aguirre (Jr., Fillmore, Calif.), who averaged nearly 10 points per game last year and led the team in steals with 44. "He understands the game well and is a good three-point shooter," Whitmore noted. "Technically, he's our center. But he really could be a guard in a lot of programs."

Tyler Pannell (So., Portland, Ore.) had a terrific first season, starting 25 games, averaging six points a game. "He can penetrate and is very unselfish," Whitmore said. "He was one of the best freshmen in the league last year." Another very effective guard is 5-10 Levi Wenrich (Sr., Newhall, Calif.), last year's team leader in assists.

Those four are likely to be starters. But nobody played more than 26 ½ minutes per game last year. And the hope is this year's team is deep enough to allow that to be the case again.

Whitmore estimates that returnees like Brandon Rieg (Sr., Riverside, Calif.), a three-point threat, Victor Easter (Jr., Portland, Ore.), Christian Taber (Jr., Brooklyn Park, Minn.) and Sam Gullickson (So., Rosemount, Minn.) will be coming off the bench a lot and may compete for a starting position. "At times, I expect we'll look like we have five guards on the court," he said.

Al Tillman (Jr., Richfield, Minn.) and Dior Ford (Fy., Tucson, Ariz.) are newcomers who may work their way into the lineup in a hurry. Tillman comes to HU from the Rochester (Minn.) CTC team that was 30-3 and played in the national JC championship game. Ford is an athletic 6-5 scorer who "makes things happen" according to Whitmore.

A year ago, the Pipers played the sixth hardest D-III schedule in the country. The 2011-12 version is just as demanding. In addition to the rugged 20-game MIAC slate, the Pipers have non-conference games against two teams that played in last year's NCAA Tournament (Northwestern and Chapman) as well as two tough WI foes – UW-Eau Claire and UW-Whitewater. "We're not afraid of anybody," Whitmore said. "Last year, we were picked for ninth place and finished third. The key for us will be if we can dictate the tempo of the game and if the new guys can adjust to the intensity level needed to win games. If we do that, we'll be fine. I'm excited about this team. We intend to be fun to watch but hard to play against."

Macalester



Coach: Tim Whittle

Career Record: 4-46 (2 seasons at Macalester)

2010-11 Finish: 11th (2-23 overall, 2-18 MIAC)

Macalester Season Preview

Macalester begins its third season under head coach Tim Whittle when the Scots open the campaign Nov. 18 against Wisconsin-Stout. The Scots showed some progress throughout last season and are now looking for that advancement to show up in the form of MIAC wins and a move forward in the conference standings.

"I am anxious to see year three unfold for this team," said Coach Whittle. "They have worked extremely hard to improve in the off-season, and I know it will show on the court. We finally have some experience and as anyone with familiarity with the MIAC knows, you must have experience to compete in this conference. The seven returners, along with the six new faces, are focused on taking a big step with this program."

Leading the way for the young Macalester squad is All-MIAC honorable mention forward Pierce Peters (Jr., Glenwood, Minn. / Minnewaska Area), who heads into his junior campaign with 659 career points. Peters led the Scots in scoring in 16 out of 25 games in 2010-11 and finished with a 16.2 scoring average. In 20 MIAC games, Peters ranked fourth overall in scoring (15.9 ppg.), 10th in rebounding (6.1), 12th in free throw percentage (.780), 11th in steals (1.2), fifth in three-point shooting (.431) and sixth in blocked shots (1.2).

MIAC All-Newcomer pick Justin Wasik (So., Park Ridge, Ill. / Maine South) was the team's top outside shooter and was third on Macalester with a 10.5 scoring mark. He drained a team-best 38 three-pointers. Wasik ranked ninth in the MIAC in three-points made per game (1.6) and 11th in three-point percentage (.408).

Point guard Chris Quinn (So., Medford, Mass. / Beaver Country Day) returns to run the offense after contributing 5.5 points and 3.3 assists a night. Quinn ranked third in the MIAC in assists as a frosh.

Veterans Andy Bowman (Jr., Perry, Kan. / Perry-Lecompton), Patrick Piepkorn (Sr., Sauk Rapids, Minn. / Sauk Rapids-Rice) and Lamont Diggs (So., Fridley, Minn.) return to the front court with Peters. Bowman averaged 3.7 boards a game. Williams College transfer Sam Marshall (Jr., Sun Prairie, Wis.), the starting tight end on Macalester's football squad, will play a big role in the front court.

Macalester will look to its freshmen for immediate contributions to help add depth and competition at every position.



Saint John's

Coach: Jim Smith

Career Record: 727-510 (47 seasons)

2010-11 Finish: T-6th (14-11 overall, 10-10 MIAC)

Saint John's Season Preview

Half-full, or half-empty? Both terms apply to the 2011-12 Saint John's University basketball team.

The Johnnies return two three-year starters, senior captains Aaron Barmore (6-5, 215; Bloomington, Minn./Jefferson) and Andy Burns (6-0, 185; Shorewood, Minn./Minnetonka). The two have combined for 153 games played, including 141 starts, and total a combined 1,352 points over their respective careers.

But the Johnnies are looking for three starters from a largely inexperienced group of 13 players that have combined for one career start and 117 points in 113 career games, as well as a handful of incoming freshmen who will challenge for playing time.

How well those new players adapt will play a key role for SJU, which looks to improve upon its 14-11 overall record last year. The Johnnies finished 10-10 in the MIAC, which tied them for sixth in the league and missed the conference playoffs due to a tie-breaker.

Head coach Jim Smith begins his 48th season with a 727-510 career record (.588) in 2011-12. College basketball's all-time wins leader in Minnesota, Smith became the 27th coach in NCAA men's basketball history to record 700 career wins two seasons ago. Smith's win total of 727 ranks him second among active NCAA Division III coaches for most victories, second all-time in Division III basketball history and 27th all-time in all divisions of collegiate basketball. He has led the Johnnies to seven MIAC titles, five MIAC playoff titles, nine trips to the NAIA tournament, and eight trips to the NCAA Division III tournament.

Here's a preview of the Johnnies by position:

Backcourt (Point, No. 2 Wing)

One of Saint John's key returning players is Burns, who begins his fourth and final season as the Johnnies' starting point guard. Burns appeared in all 25 games last season, averaging 30.3 minutes per game. He averaged 10.9 points per game, including a career-high 35 against the University of Chicago last November. Burns finished second on the team in assists (88) and points (272). He led the squad behind the arc, however, with 49 three-pointers and a .419 shooting percentage. Burns was named All-MIAC honorable mention for the second consecutive season after earning a spot on the MIAC All-Rookie team as a freshman. He enters his senior campaign seventh on the SJU all-time assist list with 284, is 10th with 124 career treys and is 253 points shy of 1,000 for his career.

Sophomore Kevin McKenzie (5-8, 150; De Pere, Wis./Notre Dame Academy) returns as the most experienced sophomore after appearing in all 25 games last season, averaging eight minutes per contest. Junior Sam Dittberner (6-0, 175; New Prague, Minn.) is also expected to contribute at point this winter after appearing in 12 games a year ago.

Four sophomores are expected to compete for the second guard position this season: Patrick Butcher (6-0, 180; Louisville, Ky./St. Xavier), Dominic Devine (6-5, 185; Litchfield, Minn.), Nick Meyer (6-1, 190; Plymouth, Minn./Benilde-St. Margaret's) and Jack Wittenborg (6-1, 175; Bloomington, Minn./Jefferson). Butcher averaged 6.6 minutes in 21 appearances last year for the Johnnies. A solid shooter, Butcher knocked down 41.7 percent of his three-pointers and averaged 1.9 points per game. Wittenborg finished the season with 10 rebounds and seven points, while Devine appeared in one game for the Johnnies last season. Meyer transferred to SJU last spring from the University of Wisconsin, but did not play basketball in Madison.

The four need to replace Sam Blank, who graduated in May. Blank finished third on the team with an average of 10.8 points per game last season.

Frontcourt (Nos. 3 & 4 Wing)

Junior Josh Hibbison (6-3, 185; Monticello, Minn.) and sophomore sharp-shooters Luke Januschka (6-5, 185; St. Cloud, Minn./Cathedral) and Seth Marx (6-4, 205; Maple Grove, Minn./Benilde-St. Margaret's) are expected to compete for the No. 3 wing position this season. Hibbison (7 games), Januschka (9) and Marx (10) combined for 24 points in 26 games last winter. The Johnnies need to replace a pair of graduated seniors, Todd Herman and Chris Schwartz, at No. 3. Schwartz ended his career with 958 points and 161 career three-pointers, which is good for third in school history. Herman, meanwhile, averaged 10.4 points in 46 career games for SJU.

Barmore returns to the No. 4 spot after playing in all 25 games with 18 starts last year. The second-best shooter on the squad a season ago (.580 shooting percentage), Barmore looks to continue his solid play and take on more of a prominent role in his final year at SJU. He averaged 25.1 minutes and 7.8 points per game last season. The seasoned starter is expected to be backed up by junior Chris Neumann (6-4, 200; Winsted, Minn./Holy Trinity) and sophomore Travis Whiting (6-6, 215; Aurora, Minn./Mesabi East). Both look to play some crucial minutes for the Johnnies this season.

Smith needs to find a way to replace Aaron Burtzel, a three-time All-MIAC selection and 2011 All-American, who graduated last spring. He led the Johnnies in scoring (14.6 ppg.), rebounding (9.0 rpg.), shooting percentage (.629), assists (98), steals (40) and minutes per game (34.7) last season. He also tallied nine double-doubles to finish with 26 for his career, as well as 1,153 points (14th in school history), 887 rebounds (2nd), 393 assists (1st) and 135 steals (3rd) with a .598 shooting percentage (432-for-723).

Post (No. 5)

The post, one of the Johnnies' deepest yet inexperienced positions, is expected to feature the talents of junior Chris Orgas (6-8, 250; Lakeville, Minn./North), sophomore Brandon Schaust (6-6, 215; Lester Prairie, Minn./Holy Trinity), and freshmen Jacob Peterson (6-8, 250; Golden Valley, Minn./Hopkins) and Otto Pfefferle (6-9, 200; Northfield, Minn.). None of the four candidates, however, have varsity experience on the collegiate level.

SJU needs to replace 6-foot-9 graduate Nermin Hujdurovic. Hujdurovic played in all 25 games for the Johnnies last winter and finished with a .538 shooting percentage, averaging nine points per game. He led the team with 27 blocks and finished second with 97 boards.

Schedule

Saint John's unofficially opens the season with an exhibition game Nov. 5 at NCAA Division II Concordia-St. Paul, nearly two weeks before the actual season opener at another Division II institution, St. Cloud State, Nov. 18. The Johnnies host Wisconsin-Stevens Point for their home opener Nov. 22 and travel to face Augsburg for the first of 20 conference games Nov. 30. SJU is scheduled to host 11 more home games, including another non-conference tilt against Martin Luther Dec. 12, and defending national Division III champion St. Thomas Jan. 2.



Saint Mary's

Coach: Todd Landrum

Career Record: 25-50 (3 seasons at Saint Mary's)

2010-11 Finish: T-9th (9-16 overall, 4-16 MIAC)

Saint Mary's Season Preview

For Saint Mary's University men's basketball coach Todd Landrum, when the Cardinals take the court for their season opening game against the University of Dallas in Dallas, Texas, on Nov. 18, there will be plenty of players in unfamiliar positions.

And it will have nothing to do with their positioning on the court.

With the loss of his top three scorers, Landrum will be on the lookout for this season's leaders — and, fortunately for the Cardinal head coach, there is a long line of candidates eager for the opportunity.

"We've got a number of guys who are finding themselves in new roles this year — and they seem to like it," said Landrum, who graduated six seniors off last year's team — including four-year letterwinners and two of SMU's top three scorers in Will Wright and Lukas Holland — and lost another who did not return to school in the fall. "It's always tough when you lose that many players, but it also creates opportunities for others to step out of the shadows.

"I've told every guy on this team that I have great confidence in all of them, and this is their chance to take the reins and run with it."

One player who has already stepped out of the shadows and into the spotlight, according to Landrum, is senior Pat Freeman (Brooklyn Park, Minn.).

"Pat has worked very hard and has done a lot to bring this team together, both on the court and off," Landrum said. "He is an outstanding leader."

And Landrum is hoping Freeman's lead-by-example attitude on the court will wear off on the rest of the team.

After all, the Cardinals do need to replace more than a third of their offensive production from a year ago.

"We are certainly going to have to rely on a more balanced offensive attack this year, and I'm sure we are going to have different people step up in different games and lead the way offensively," said Landrum, whose top two scorers returning are Michael Burfeind (Lewiston, Minn. / 6.2 ppg) and Freeman (5.1 ppg). "This is probably the best passing and most unselfish team I've had, and if we are going to be successful, the point-production will have to be much more evenly distributed."

Landrum admits that there are plenty of questions yet to be answered as his squad completes preparation for the upcoming season, but there is one area in which the Cardinals

The Cardinals enter the 2011-12 season as the nation's leader in free-throw percentage, draining 394 of their 496 attempts a year ago. SMU's effort from the charity stripe also ranked No. 4 among all NCAA men's basketball teams, trailing only Wisconsin-Madison (81.8 percent), Findlay (80.9 percent) and Harvard (80.8 percent).

"We are very proud of that team accomplishment," said Landrum. "And, hopefully, we can build on that this year.

"I like what I've seen thus far, but I also know it's going to take some time for this team to be blended together," added Landrum, whose team finished 9-16 a year ago, including a 4-16 mark in the MIAC. "We got off to a great start (a year ago), but then kind of leveled off — I want us to be better in January and February this time around."



St. Olaf

Coach: Dan Kosmoski

Career Record: 178-234 (17 seasons)

2010-11 Finish: 4th (17-9 overall, 12-8 MIAC)

St. Olaf Season Preview

The St. Olaf men's basketball team will look to a veteran team as it shoots for its second straight postseason berth. The Oles return four starters and all but two from the 2010-11 team that finished 17-8 and 12-8 in MIAC play before being bumped in the first round of the MIAC playoffs.

Backcourt

Bobby Fong (Sr., Bloomington, Minn. / Kennedy) and Alfred Jaryan (Sr., Bloomington, Minn. / Kennedy) will anchor the back court. Fong, one of the leagues top shooting guards, averaged 15.2 points / game, good for fifth in the conference, in his All-MIAC junior campaign. He shot a blistering 46.8 percent from the arc and added 5.7 rebounds a game. Jaryan will be back at the point after his most productive season. He posted 9.0 points and 5.3 assists per game and was second in the MIAC in assist-to-turnover ratio.

Another senior, Mark Wieloch (Rosemount, Minn.) will also bring experience to the backcourt. Wieloch has 73 career games to his credit and will likely see more minutes in his final campaign.

Sophomores Nathan Kuck (Lino Lakes, Minn. / Centennial) and Michael Jenson (Zimmerman, Minn.) played key minutes in their first season and will again this winter. Kuck was the team's top scorer off the bench in 2010-11, scoring 7.0 ppg in a mere 15.1 minutes. Jenson was a 40.4 percent shooter from the arc. Another sophomore, Andrew Bestler (Woodbury, Minn./Hill Murray) is also back this winter.

First year Sterling Neilsen (Sioux Falls, S.D.), a two-time all-state selection, will also see key minutes for St. Olaf. Nielsen helped his O'Gorman High School team to back-to-back state titles in his final two seasons. Transfer Josh Pratt (Soph., Roseville, Minn. / St. Anthony) could also see time at the off guard.

Front Court

Senior Stu Neville (Eden Prairie, Minn./Benilde-St. Margaret's) will hold down the middle for St. Olaf in 2011-12. Neville had a breakout season last year, averaging 14.8 points and 7.0 rebounds a game. He scored in double digits in all but five games and shot 53.6 percent from the floor.

Sophomore Connor Gunderson (Austin, Minn.), who was second in the league at 61.9 percent from the field, returns to the starting lineup as well. Gunderson scored in double digits in six of his last nine regular season games, a stretch where he shot a remarkable 79.1 percent (38-of-48) from the floor.

Off the bench, St. Olaf will look to its sophomore group -- Matthew Hultgren (Maple Grove, Minn.), Charlie Aslesen (Edina, Minn. / STA), Sam Daly (Rochester, Minn. / Lourdes) and Nick Hanson (Waseca, Minn.) -- and junior Andrew Sathoff (Mankato, Minn. / West). The Oles have also added 6-6 Elkhart, Ind. product Mason Braden to the roster.



St. Thomas

Coach: John Tauer

Career Record: First Season

2010-11 Finish: T-1st (30-3 overall, 17-3 MIAC,
2010-11 D-III National Champions)

St. Thomas Season Preview

St. Thomas men's basketball had a storybook season in 2010-11 as it finished 30-3, won its final 12 games and captured its first national championship, reigning over 403 Division III programs.

The Tommies trailed in the second half of 15 of the 30 victories. They needed a come-from-behind win on the last day of the regular season to share the MIAC title with Carleton, and later erased a 19-point deficit in the MIAC playoff semifinals on their way to that championship.

St. Thomas made an 8-0 run through the postseason, including four wins over top-seven ranked teams in the last nine days of the season. As icing on the cake, the Tommie program also won a sixth consecutive conference crown and surpassed 1,500 all-time victories.

The Tommies' 31-year head coach Steve Fritz swept D-III National Coach of the Year honors, and retired from coaching on top. Fritz built a 594-246 record (.707 win%) with only one losing season, while winning or sharing 16 MAC regular-season crowns.

St. Thomas will look for a smooth transition with the appointment of John Tauer to replace Fritz. Tauer, a 1995 St. Thomas graduate, has been an UST assistant coach the last 11 seasons and is a former all-conference and Academic All-America player with the Tommies. Tauer is the lone MIAC individual to play in and coach in separate Division III Final Fours. His staff returns longtime assistants Jon Hughes, Don Johnson and Tommy Fritz and added respected MIAC assistant Jim Hayes and former Tommie standout Mike Keating.

The bad news: Tauer lost four starters and one key reserve to graduation. The good news: UST returned 10 players with varsity experience and added a strong group of freshmen recruits.

The graduation losses include All-American guard Tyler Nicolai, who started all 119 career games and had 251 3-point baskets; all-conference guard Alex Healy (984 points in 111 career games); forwards Teddy Archer (122 career games) and Anders Halvorsen (119 games). An important role player off the bench who graduated was forward Brady Ervin, who also was a Division III All-American safety in football and played in 22 career postseason games in those two sports in his three seasons at St. Thomas. That senior class won 106 games and helped UST post the best won-loss record in NCAA men's hoops (83-8) over the last three seasons.

The 2011-12 team is expected to use another deep rotation of players seeing time. Senior honorable mention All-MIAC center Tommy Hannon is the Tommies' only returning starter (12.2 ppg, 6.7 rpg, 59% FG).

Leading the backcourt will be senior guard Peter Leslie; junior guard-forward John Nance; junior guards Will DeBerg and Noah Kaiser; and sophomore guards Eric Tengwell and Brendan Gay. Nance averaged 9.0 points and 3.0 assists in 25 minutes a game off the bench in the 2010-11 postseason run.

At center, senior Josh Pedretti and junior Garrett Maloney are still competing with the nationally-ranked UST football team in its playoff run. Other front-line hopefuls include three juniors, 6-9 Ryan Duxbury, 6-5 Jake Lippert and 6-4 Drew Mathews, plus 6-4 Zach Riedeman and 6-5 Josh Pella, both sophomores.

St. Thomas has four true freshmen on its 18-man varsity roster, and all will get a chance to break into the rotation – 6-7 Conner Nord and 6-3 Dylan Stewart of Eden Prairie; 6-0 Marcus Alipate of Bloomington Jefferson; and 6-6 Jimmy Ancius of LaCrosse (Wis.) Aquinas.

The Tommies, who received the No. 8 preseason ranking by D3hoops.com, will be tested early. They will start on the road in the Los Angeles area against Occidental and Pomona-Pitzer on Nov. 18-19. Their next five games come in a 14-day stretch – at ranked UW-River Falls; at Division II Concordia-St. Paul; then three clashes against expected conference championship contenders St. Olaf, Gustavus and Hamline.

"We know we have a lot of work in front of us," Tauer said. "We graduated five outstanding seniors who cannot be replaced, and Coach Fritz is one of the all-time great college basketball coaches. That said, we embrace the challenges of the season, and look forward to writing another chapter in the long tradition of St. Thomas basketball. The hallmarks of the basketball program have been teamwork, hard-nosed defense, full-court pressure, and offensive unselfishness – that will not change. We look forward to working with a passionate and talented group of returners mixed with an excellent recruiting class."