

2017-18 MIAC Men's Basketball Preview & Preseason Coaches' Poll

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BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – With all five starters from a year ago set to return to the lineup, Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) men's basketball coaches have picked Saint John's University to claim the Conference crown this season, as the Johnnies rank first in the 2017-18 MIAC Men's Basketball Preseason Coaches' Poll, released on Thursday.

The Johnnies went 19-9 a season ago, qualifying for the Conference Playoffs for the 24th time in program history. Saint John's returns five starters and three key reserves from last year's team, including a pair of First Team All-Conference players in guard **David Stokman** and post **Tyler Weiss**. In addition to securing seven first-place votes in the MIAC Preseason Coaches' Poll, the Johnnies also received some national recognition heading into the season, as Saint John's is ranked No. 20 in D3hoops.com Preseason Top 25.

Bethel and St. Thomas tied for the 2016-17 regular season Conference title and the two teams will open the new year tied for second-place in the Preseason Coaches' Poll, each receiving two first-place votes and 87 total points in the balloting. The Royals earned a trip to the "Big Dance" last season after defeating Saint John's in the MIAC Playoff Championship Game, marking Bethel's first NCAA Tournament appearance since 1991.

The Tommies, meanwhile, are just two years removed from being crowned NCAA Division III National Champions. St. Thomas has won 12 straight MIAC regular season titles and will look to increase that number to 13 this season. They will need to find a way to do that without the services of 2016-17 Joe Hutton Player of the Year, Grant Shaeffer, whose four-year career in purple and white came to an end in the NCAA Tournament last March. However, with 17 NCAA Tournament trips in the last 25 seasons and two National Championships in the last six years alone, it would be foolish to think the Tommies will not be contending again in 2017-18.

Augsburg University is No. 4 in this year's Coaches' Poll. The Auggies won four of their final five regular season games to clinch a spot in the MIAC Playoffs last year and figure to be in the mix again this season. All-MIAC forward **Collin Olmscheid** sparked the Augsburg offense last season, as the D3hoops.com All-Region selection scored double-figures in 23 of his 26 games last year, including a career-high 43-point night against Macalester on January 18.

Carleton and Hamline tied for fifth in the Preseason Coaches' Poll, each receiving 62 points in the balloting. The Knights finished third in the Conference last year, reaching the semifinals before falling to eventual Playoff champion Bethel, 57-54. All-Conference and All-Defensive Team forward **Kevin Grow** will be back in the lineup for Carleton this season, as will reigning Sixth Man of the Year, rising sophomore **Kent Hanson**.

The Pipers made a ten-game improvement from 2015-16 to 2016-17 and anticipate that upward trend continuing in 2017-18. After clinching a spot in the MIAC Playoffs for the first time in six years, Hamline is out to prove some more doubters wrong this year, having lost just two seniors from last year's 14-win squad.

Complete 2017 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.



2017 MIAC Men's Basketball Preseason Coaches' Poll

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Institution</u>	<u>Total</u>
1.	Saint John's (7)	97
T2.	Bethel (2)	87
T2.	St. Thomas (2)	87

4.	Augsburg	66
T5.	Carleton	62
T5.	Hamline	62
7.	St. Olaf	45
8.	Gustavus	37
9.	Concordia	32
T10.	Macalester	15
T10.	Saint Mary's	15

Around the MIAC

- St. Olaf forward **Robert Tobroxen** ranked fourth in the MIAC last season with 159 rebounds in Conference play. The Third Team All-Conference selection started every game for the Oles, averaging just more than seven boards per contest.
- After leading the Gusties with 363 points as a sophomore last season, Gustavus wing **Riley Sharbono** is more than halfway to the 1,000-point plateau with 551 career points through two seasons in St. Peter.
- Saint John's guard **David Stokman** finished second in all of NCAA Division III with a three-point percentage of .503 last season. He also ranked ninth in the nation with a free-throw percentage of .885 on the year.

Can't-Miss #MIACtion

- Dec. 2, 2017: Bethel at Saint John's.* What better way to open up the Conference calendar than with a rematch of last year's MIAC title game? While the Johnnies open the year nationally ranked and the favorite to win the Conference, Bethel will no doubt like to remind people who won that playoff matchup last season and a road win over a ranked rival would certainly make a big statement.
- Dec. 29, 2017: Williams vs. Hamline.* The Pipers are scheduled to face a pair of teams currently ranked in the D3hoops.com Top 10, with a road game against Wisconsin-River Falls (No. 10) set for November 25 and this matchup against No. 3 Williams at the Cal Lutheran Tournament in Thousand Oaks, Calif. on December 29.
- Feb. 17, 2018: Saint John's at St. Thomas.* No matter the sport, magic happens when these two schools get together. That should be the case when they match up in January, and a whole lot more could be on the line when they meet in the regular season finale a month later.

2018 MIAC Men's Basketball Playoffs

The 2018 MIAC Men's Basketball Playoffs will feature the top six teams in the Conference standings playing in a high-seed-host, single-elimination postseason tournament. The two top seeds will receive a bye to the semifinal round, while the No. 3 seed will host the No. 6 seed, and the No. 4 seed will host the No. 5 seeds during the quarterfinals, which will be held Wednesday, Feb. 21, 2018. The top remaining seed will play at the No. 2 seed and the lowest remaining seed will play at the No. 1 seed during the semifinals, which are scheduled for Friday, Feb. 23. The Championship game is set for Sunday, Feb. 25, with the two semifinal winners meeting on the home court of the top remaining seed. The winner will receive the MIAC's automatic bid to the 2018 NCAA Division III Men's Basketball Tournament.

Odds and Ends

- Saint Mary's spent plenty of time behind the arc last season, scoring 186 three-pointers – three shy of the program record of 189, set in 1995-96.
- Macalester guard **Michael Gutierrez** was selected for a four-game tour of Brazil over the summer as a member of D3 Team USA. The Second Team All-MIAC honoree led the Conference in scoring with 21.6 points per game as a sophomore last year.
- Grant Hemmingsen enters his first season as head coach at Concordia, taking over for Rich Glas. The former Augsburg post player had been an assistant for the Cobbers for the last four seasons before being introduced as the program's next head coach last December.