

2019-20 MIAC Men's Basketball Preview

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BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – For the third year in a row, the Saint John's University men's basketball team has been picked to win the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC). Six MIAC coaches gave SJU their top ranking in the annual Preseason Coaches' Poll, released on Monday.

Saint John's - ranked 12th in the nation in the [D3hoops.com Preseason Top 25](#) last month - went 17-3 in MIAC play last season en route to the program's sixth playoff championship and first since 2001. The Johnnies led all of NCAA Division III in shooting percentage (.536) last season, ranked second in rebound margin (+12.6 rebounds per game), and third in scoring margin (+18.0 points per game). Second Team All-MIAC selection **Lucas Walford** made an impact on both ends of the court last season, leading the conference in shooting percentage (.743), offensive rebounds (66), and blocks (34). The 6-foot-8 post also would have led NCAA Division III in field-goal percentage, but at 4.86 made field goals per game, narrowly missed the 5.0 requirement. Walford became the Johnnies' all-time leader in blocked shots last season as well, bringing his career total to 91.



Lucas Walford and the Johnnies are picked to win the MIAC this season. (Photo: Sean Donohue)

St. Thomas received five first-place votes and totaled 93 points in the Preseason Coaches' Poll. The Tommies will open the 2019-20 season ranked No. 15 in the nation after winning their 13th MIAC regular season championship in 14 seasons and reaching the Sweet 16 round of the NCAA Tournament last year. St. Thomas rolled to 21 consecutive victories at one point last season, with D3hoops.com Freshman of the Year **Anders Nelson** being a key element to the success. Nelson averaged 14.1 points, 5.3 rebounds, 4.5 assists, and 1.6 steals as a rookie, and posted a season-best 37 points in a three-overtime road win at Augsburg. He had five other contests with 20 or more points and the Toms went 10-0 in games when he finished with at least 16.

Augsburg is third in the Preseason Coaches' Poll with 84 points in the balloting. The Auggies reached the MIAC Playoff championship game for the second year in a row last season, coming up three points short against Saint John's. Augsburg - ranked No. 23 in the nation in the D3hoops.com Preseason Top 25 - has reached the conference tournament nine times in the last 11 seasons and return NABC Division III Player of the Year **Booker Coplin** to the lineup for his final season as an Auggie. Coplin finished second in D-III with 784 points last year - more than any MIAC player in recorded conference history. He also led the league in rebounds (264), field goals (276), steals (61), free throws (156), and free throw percentage (89.7) last year.

Bethel is fourth in the Preseason Coaches' Poll with 71 points in the balloting. The Royals went 15-5 in conference play last season, advancing to the semifinal round of the MIAC Playoffs. The Royals have gone to eight straight conference tournaments, winning it all two years ago. **Granger Kingland** was a freshman on the 2017 playoff championship team and will be looking to bookend his BU career with another conference title as a senior this year. Kingland earned First Team All-MIAC honors after averaging 15.2 points per game in MIAC contests last season.

St. Olaf garnered 63 points in the preseason balloting, good for fifth place in the Poll. The Oles have qualified for postseason play seven of the last nine seasons, including each of the last two. The Oles return several experienced players to the lineup this winter, including two-time MIAC All-Defensive Team selection **Dominic Bledsoe**. The junior guard averaged 10.1 points, 3.7 rebounds, and 2.9 assists per game last season and finished second in the MIAC with 2.1 steals per contest as a sophomore.

Gustavus picked up 57 points in the preseason balloting. The Gusties punched their ticket to the MIAC Playoffs for the first time in four seasons last February and will look to make it back to the postseason for the 26th time in program history this year. Leading the charge will be sophomore forward **Nolan Malo** who averaged 9.9 points and a team-high 5.3 rebounds per contest in his debut season. Malo had double-figures in 11 games last season with the Gusties going 8-3 in those contests.

Saint Mary's collected 44 points in the Poll. The Cardinals have been a team on the rise, winning eight games last season - their most since a nine-win 2015-16 campaign - and saw three of their last five losses coming by five points or fewer. Junior forward **Eli Cave** came into his own last year, earning First Team All-MIAC honors after leading SMU in both scoring and rebounding and eclipsing the 30-point plateau twice.

Concordia is eighth in the Preseason Coaches' Poll, in the same spot the Cobbers finished the 2018-19 campaign. The Cobbers remained in the MIAC playoff hunt into the final week of the 2018-19 regular season and figure to be back in the mix again this winter. Senior center **John Reiten** was a 24-game starter last season, shooting .629 from the floor and .814 from the free throw line as a junior. Reiten reached double-digit point totals in ten games last year.

Hamline picked up 31 points in the preseason balloting, two shy of Concordia. The Pipers just missed out on a MIAC Playoff bid a season ago. Guard **Trey Prince** will look to take on a greater role as a junior this season. Prince started all but two games last year, averaging 4.9 points per contest. His three-pointer with less than six seconds to play against Saint Mary's kept HU's postseason hopes afloat late in the year.

Carleton received 19 points in the preseason balloting. After back-to-back winning seasons in 2016-17 and 2017-18, the Knights will look to rebound from a tough 2018-19 campaign. Back in the Carleton lineup for one more season is All-West Region forward **Kent Hanson**, who was one of only three players in the region to average at least 18.0 points and 8.0 rebounds last year while registering 25 or more steals on the season.

Macalester earned 14 points in the preseason balloting. The Scots more than doubled its win total in head coach Abe Woldelessie's first year at the helm last season and ended the year with plenty of momentum, picking up victories in three of the team's final four games - including an upset win in the season finale over MIAC playoff runner-up Augsburg. The Scots will look to continue their upward trajectory this year with Second Team All-MIAC forward **Jackson Henningfield** back in the lineup. Henningfield averaged a team-high 18.4 points per game, reaching double-figures in 23 of 25 contests and eclipsing 20 points nine times as a sophomore.

Complete 2019-20 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.

2019-20 MIAC Men's Basketball Preseason Coaches' Poll

Rank	Institution (First-Place Votes)	Total
1.	Saint John's (6)	96
2.	St. Thomas (5)	93
3.	Augsburg	84
4.	Bethel	71
5.	St. Olaf	63
6.	Gustavus	57
7.	Saint Mary's	44
8.	Concordia	33
9.	Hamline	31
10.	Carleton	19
11.	Macalester	14

2020 MIAC Men's Basketball Playoffs

The 2020 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, and will be played in a Tuesday-Thursday-Saturday format. The top two 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 Tuesday, Feb. 25, 2019. 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 Thursday, Feb. 27. The Playoff Championship game is set for Saturday, Feb. 29, 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 2020 NCAA Division III Men's Basketball Tournament.

Odds and Ends

-The MIAC returns all 11 coaches to the bench this season. Four of those coaches have been at their respective institutions for more than a decade with three - Guy Kalland (Carleton, 36th season), Mark Hanson (Gustavus, 30th season), and Dan Kosmoski (St. Olaf, 26th season) - sticking around for more than a quarter-century. Aaron Griess is the next-longest-tenured head coach, entering his 15th season at Augsburg.

-Seven of the 11 MIAC head coaches also competed in the conference. Gustavus' Hanson, Hamline's Jim Hayes, Macalester's Abe Woldelessie, Saint John's Pat McKenzie, and St. Thomas' Johnny Tauer are all coaching at their alma maters, while Concordia grad Guy Kalland is at Carleton and Augsburg grad Grant Hemmingsen is at Concordia.

-Former Augsburg standout Devean George was one of seven individuals selected by the NCAA Office of Inclusion and Human Resources to be recognized as "Living Legends" during the NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Final Four week last April for significant contributions in the Minneapolis and St. Paul communities, and for furthering inclusion within athletics. George was a two-time MIAC MVP at Augsburg and the first NCAA Division III player ever to be selected in the first round of the NBA Draft.

For the Record

The MIAC continues to overhaul its sport record books to provide a better historical perspective of the conference and the accomplishments of its student-athletes over the last century. The 46-page MIAC Men's Basketball Record Book contains annual conference championship information, year-by-year standings, all-time award winners, individual records, and more. The information included in the 2019-20 Record Book is based on available data and research for additional historical documents is ongoing. The 2019-20 MIAC Men's Basketball Record Book is now available for download [here](#).

Celebrating a Century

The MIAC is celebrating its 100-year anniversary throughout the 2019-20 season. The conference's Centennial celebration will highlight the many outstanding moments, memories, and individuals who helped build the MIAC over the last century. Initiatives will include student-athlete, coach, and administrator spotlights, historical photos showcasing the evolution of MIAC sports and teams through the years, recognition of former MIAC student-athletes who continued their time in the conference as coaches and administrators, and more. The official #MIAC100 webpage is housed at <https://www.miacathletics.com/miac100>.