

2017 MIAC Men's Hockey Preview and Preseason Coaches' Poll

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[Jump to:](#) | [Poll](#) | [Storylines](#) | [Marquee Matchups](#) | [Playoffs](#) | [Notes](#) |

BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – For the second consecutive year, the Augsburg Auggies are picked to win the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC).

Augsburg earned 62 points and six first-place votes to garner the top spot in the annual MIAC Men's Hockey Preseason Coaches' Poll. The Auggies have put together four consecutive 12-plus-win seasons and won back-to-back MIAC playoff titles, punching tickets to the NCAA Quarterfinals each of the last two years. Forward **Nate Flynn** is back for his senior season, aiming to make it three straight years as the Auggies' scoring leader, while rising junior goalie **Nick Schmit** will look to log a second consecutive season leading the MIAC in save percentage. The Auggies are ranked 13th nationally in both the USCHO.com and D3hockey.com Preseason Top 15 Polls.

Winners of the 2016-17 MIAC regular season title, St. Thomas opens the 2017-18 campaign at No. 2 in the Coaches' Poll. The Tommies have recorded 35 consecutive winning seasons and won the MIAC championship five of the last six years. While St. Thomas will be challenged to replace a quality core of graduated seniors, rising junior goalie **Benjamin Myers** will be back between the pipes. Myers closed out his first year as a starter last season with a 12-5-3 record, allowing two goals or fewer in 13 of those starts.

Saint John's is picked to finish third in the MIAC for the second straight year. The Johnnies ended up sixth last year, two points shy of fifth place and a playoff berth. Saint John's did record the program's sixth straight season with a .500 or better record in MIAC play. The Johnnies return a pair of All-Conference performers in sophomore defenseman **Cole Souto** and senior forward **Sam Valerius**. Souto was named to USCHO.com's six-man All-Rookie Team as a freshman last year, while Valerius led the Johnnies in goals (9), points (22) and power-play points (11) last season.

Coming in at No. 4 in this year's Preseason Coaches' Poll is Hamline University. The Pipers made their third straight appearance in the MIAC Playoffs last year, falling to Concordia in the opening round. However, Hamline returns nine of its 10 top scorers from a year ago, including First Team All-Conference and Second Team AHCA All-American **Mitch Hall**. Hall led the Conference with 23 assists in addition to six goals a year ago, while fellow All-MIAC selection **Russ Jordan** led the team with 18 goals on the season.

Concordia is picked to finish fifth in the Conference this season after clinching its fifth straight trip to the MIAC Playoffs last year. The Cobbers leading goal-scorer, forward **Jon Grebosky**, is back for his senior year, while the MIAC's leading save artist, goalie **Sam Nelson** returns after making quite a first impression as a freshman last year, totaling 500 saves in MIAC play in his first season in Moorhead.

Every MIAC men's hockey team will be in action this weekend at the annual [MIAC Men's Hockey Showcase](#) at the Schwan Super Rink in Blaine, Minn. The puck drops on the 2017 season at 6:30 p.m. Friday night.

Complete 2017 Preseason Coaches' Poll

Coaches voted for every team in the conference except their own team. Points were assigned for each vote (8 for first, 7 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 Hockey Preseason Coaches' Poll		
Rank	Institution	Total
1.	Augsburg (6)	62
2.	St. Thomas (3)	59
3.	Saint John's	45
4.	Hamline	37

5.	Concordia	36
6.	Saint Mary's	35
7.	Gustavus	21
8.	St. Olaf	20
9.	Bethel	9

Around the MIAC

- Bethel returns its top four scorers and eight of its top 10, including honorable mention All-MIAC forward **Justin Bonanna**, who logged seven goals and seven assists last season.
- Saint Mary's earned its second MIAC Playoff appearance in the last three seasons in 2016-17, thanks in part to its depth, as seven different Cardinals recorded their first collegiate goals last year – a trend that bodes well for the team's 2017-18 aspirations.
- St. Olaf forward **Drew Otto** closed out his junior year as the Oles' leader in both goals (15) and points (28), while accounting for four of the team's seven game-winning goals.

Can't-Miss #MIACtion

- Nov. 3, 2017: Hamline at Wisconsin-Stevens Point.* The Pipers have aspirations of title contention this season and will have an excellent opportunity to test their game very early in the year against a 2017 NCAA Quarterfinal team in UW-Stevens Point.
- Dec. 1, 2017: St. Thomas at Augsburg.* The rematch of last year's Conference title game kicks off the month of December. The Auggies will host the Tommies in Minneapolis on Friday night, while St. Thomas will return the favor on Saturday.
- Dec. 8, 2017: Augsburg at St. Norbert.* One week after battling a perennial challenger in the MIAC, Augsburg will have a chance to exorcise its NCAA Tournament demons in De Pere, Wis. against St. Norbert – the team that has knocked Augsburg out of the NCAA Quarterfinals each of the last two years.

2017 MIAC Men's Hockey Playoffs

The 2017 MIAC Men's Hockey Playoffs will feature the top five teams in the Conference standings playing in a high-seed-host, single-elimination postseason tournament. The lone quarterfinal game between the No. 4 and No. 5 seeds will now be played Thursday, Feb. 22, with the two semifinal games to follow on Saturday, Feb. 24. The MIAC Championship game is set for the following Saturday, March 3. The winner will receive the MIAC's automatic bid to the 2018 NCAA Division III Men's Hockey Tournament.

Odds and Ends

- While Gustavus finished with a 5-15-5 record last season, four of those wins came in Conference play, including three in a row during the final two weeks of the year.
- Hamline scored first in nine of its 10 wins last season and went 9-3-3 overall when scoring the first goal of the game last year.
- Eleven of Saint Mary's 26 games last season were decided by one goal or less.