

2018-19 MIAC Men's Hockey Preview and Preseason Coaches' Poll

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BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – The puck is set to drop on the 2018-19 Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) men's hockey season this Friday night. Before teams take to the ice this weekend, MIAC coaches voted in their annual Preseason Coaches' Poll, selecting the University of St. Thomas as the prohibitive favorite to repeat as regular season MIAC champions.

The Tommies garnered 60 points and four first-place votes in the annual MIAC Men's Hockey Coaches Preseason Poll, released on Wednesday. The results of the balloting come with good reason, as Jeff Boeser's squad returns the scorers responsible for all but 18 of its 217 points from a season ago, including First Team All-MIAC selections **Johnny Panvica** and **Brett Gravelle**, who shared the team lead in goals (14), assists (16), and points (30) last winter.

Saint John's and Augsburg tied for second in the preseason balloting with 54 points apiece, though the Johnnies claimed three first-place votes to the Auggies' two. SJU finished one point behind rival St. Thomas in the 2017-18 regular season standings and the Johnnies' 11 MIAC victories were the program's most since the 2005-06 campaign. Five of the team's top six scorers from a season ago figure to be back in the lineup, including First Team All-MIAC forward **Brady Heppner**, who led the team with 24 points as a sophomore last year.

The three-time defending MIAC Playoff Champion Augsburg Auggies reached the NCAA Quarterfinals last season before being ousted by top-ranked and eventual national champion St. Norbert. Augsburg returns several key players from last year's squad, including honorable mention All-MIAC goalie **Nick Schmit**, who started 27 of the team's 29 games last winter, compiling a 2.23 goals-against average and a .922 save percentage on the year. The Auggies are ranked No. 12 in the nation in the season's first USCHO.com Preseason Top 15 Poll, released on Monday. St. Thomas and Saint John's both received votes in the Poll as well.

Gustavus was the surprise team of last season, not just reaching the MIAC Playoffs for the first time in four years, but landing a spot in the title game after being picked to finish seventh in the 2017-18 Coaches' Poll. The Gusties will not be overlooked this season, as Brett Petersen's crew received 42 points in the 2018-19 balloting - double that of last year - to settle in at fourth in the Poll. Gustavus closed out the 2017-18 campaign with seven players totaling 11 or more points, including rising sophomore **Caleb Anderson**, one of the team's three MIAC All-Rookie picks, who led Gustavus with 10 assists in his debut season.

Concordia is No. 5 in the 2018-19 Coaches' Poll after registering 38 points in the balloting. The Cobbers have qualified for the MIAC Playoffs in each of the last six seasons and - despite losing the services of graduated senior and 2017-18 MIAC Player of the Year, Zach Doerring - figure to be back in the heart of the race again this year. **Mario Bianchi** is the team's top offensive returner, having scored seven goals and assisting on 15 more last season.

St. Olaf is sixth in the Preseason Coaches' Poll with 27 points. The Oles finished the 2017-18 campaign two points back of the fifth and final MIAC Playoff spot in a race that went down to the final game of the regular season. St. Olaf had seven players reach double-figures last season, including First Team All-Conference selection **Tuukka Totto**. Totto and teammate **Roshen Jaswel** each tallied 18 points on the year.

Hamline earned 22 points in the preseason balloting, good for seventh place in the Poll. The Pipers went 9-14-2 a season ago with five of the team's losses coming by way of a one-goal margin. Though the team returns just one of its top five scorers from a season ago, that one happens to be **Mitch McPherson**, who led all MIAC scorers with 15 goals last season.

Saint Mary's garnered 19 points in the Coaches' Poll, which slotted the Cardinals in eighth place. Bill Moore's team finished the 2017-18 season admirably, going 6-2-2 in their final 10 games, just missing out on a Playoff spot. Twelve of the team's 25 games - including seven of their last eight - were decided by one goal or less, including six overtime contests. The Cards scored 17 power-play goals last winter, including four from rising junior **Kyle Meeh**.

Bethel received eight points in the balloting and will enter the new season with a new head coach in Chris McKelvie. McKelvie spent the past two seasons at NCAA Division I Army-West Point. **Dallas Marvin** totaled five goals and eight assists for the Royals last season, one of five BU players to post 10 or more points on the year.



*Brett Gravelle and the Tommies enter the new season as favorites to win the MIAC.
(Photo: Mark Brown)*

Complete 2018-19 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.

2018-19 MIAC Men's Hockey Preseason Coaches' Poll

| Rank | Institution (First-Place Votes) | Total |
|-------------|--|--------------|
| 1. | St. Thomas (4) | 60 |
| T2. | Saint John's (3) | 54 |
| T2. | Augsburg (2) | 54 |
| 4. | Gustavus | 42 |
| 5. | Concordia | 38 |
| 6. | St. Olaf | 27 |
| 7. | Hamline | 22 |
| 8. | Saint Mary's | 19 |
| 9. | Bethel | 8 |

2019 MIAC Men's Hockey Playoffs

The 2019 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. 21, with the two semifinal games to follow on Saturday, Feb. 23. The MIAC Championship game is set for the following Saturday, March 2. The winner will receive the MIAC's automatic bid to the 2019 NCAA Division III Men's Hockey Tournament.

Odds and Ends

-For the better part of the last decade, the MIAC Men's Hockey season has begun with an annual "Showcase" of all nine conference teams in action. This year's Showcase games are set to get underway on Friday, October 26 at Schwan Super Rink in Blaine, Minn. with contests scheduled for 6:30, 7:00 and 7:30 PM on both Friday and Saturday. Sunday's slate is set for 2:30, 3:00 and 3:30 PM. The full Men's Hockey Showcase schedule can be found [here](#).

-MIAC membership approved a one-year trial for a [new overtime protocol](#) earlier this fall. If the score remains tied at the end of regulation, teams will play the NCAA standard 5-on-5 five-minute overtime. If no team scores during that five-minute period, the game will technically go into the record books as a tie; however, the action will continue in the form of a second five-minute overtime period, this time in a 3-on-3 format with a point in the Conference standings on the line. If the score remains tied after the 3-on-3 period, the tie will be broken in a shootout.

-A year after Hamline moved into its new home at TRIA Rink, another MIAC program will head into a new arena in 2019. The [newly-constructed St. Olaf Ice Arena](#) will open its doors in January 2019 and become the on-campus home of Ole men's and women's hockey.