

2009 MIAC Men's Tennis Season Preview

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St. Paul, Minn. -- The temperature may be cold outside, but the action on indoor courts is heating up throughout Minnesota as MIAC men's tennis teams begin their seasons. The goal of competing in May at the MIAC Playoffs will keep the competitive fires burning in each of 10 conference teams through the next three months.



Gustavus enters the season as the heavy favorite to win their 21st consecutive MIAC Championship. Carleton, Bethel, and St. Olaf all return a majority of their 2008 lineups will pose the biggest threat to the Gusties. St. Thomas, Saint John's, and Macalester will have talented rosters and should compete for a MIAC Playoff spot. Concordia, Saint Mary's and Hamline each have up and coming young squads that will look to surprise conference foes during the season.

The 2009 MIAC Men's Tennis Playoffs will take place May 1-2 on the campus of Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minn. Run in conjunction with the MIAC Women's Tennis Playoffs, the top six teams from the MIAC regular season standings will compete in the playoffs.

2009 MIAC Men's Tennis Preseason Coaches' Poll

Coaches voted for every team in the conference except their own team. Points were assigned for each vote (1 for first, 2 for second, etc.) Teams are ranked in order of lowest point total to highest with first place votes shown in parentheses.

1. Gustavus (9)
2. Carleton (1)
3. Bethel
4. St. Olaf
5. St. Thomas
6. Saint John's
7. Macalester
8. Concordia
9. Saint Mary's
10. Hamline

Bethel

Coach: Dan Morton (10th season)

2008 Finish: 3rd (10-7, 7-2 MIAC)

Bethel Season Preview

Last season, the Royals proved that their success in 2007 was no fluke by finishing the MIAC race in third place for the second consecutive season behind nationally ranked Gustavus and regionally ranked Carleton. At 7-2 in conference play and 10-7 overall, Bethel set a new school record for conference wins in 2008 and enjoyed a streak of seven straight wins over conference opponents before falling to Carleton in the second round of the MIAC playoffs.

Very little has changed from last year's team, but the biggest loss will no doubt be that of two-time All-MIAC player Chris Scheevel who was Bethel's #1 singles player for three years. However, with an additional year of experience under their belts, the Royals return four players who earned All-MIAC awards, including Tom Ronning (Jr., Alexandria, Minn.), who was an impressive 12-4 as the #2 singles player, and David Torres (Sr., Arden Hills, Minn.), who advanced to the championship round of the Midwest Open singles competition in the fall. All-MIAC fourth singles player Joel Cassens (Jr., Owatonna, Minn.) also looks to be a positive contributor to the 2009 team. Last season, he finished the regular season with a six-match winning streak to help Bethel reach their second straight playoff appearance.

Coach Morton is encouraged by both the youth and experience his team possesses. Torres and Alex Zabel are the only two returning seniors on the team, which means the younger players will have a chance to gain valuable match play experience, keeping Bethel strong for years to come. Morton says his team is disciplined, mature, and eager to return to the court to build upon the success of the past two seasons to make their run at another playoff berth.

Carleton

Coach: Stephan Zweifel (12th season)

2008 Finish: 2nd (21-4, 8-1 MIAC)

Carleton Season Preview

Carleton College starts the 2009 season the same way it ended 2008 – listed among the top 30 programs in the nation. The Knights open the indoor season ranked No. 8 in the Central Region by the Intercollegiate Tennis Association. They have put together an ambitious schedule, loaded with 10 regionally- and four nationally-ranked opponents.

The team has a very different look this season as three seniors graduated from last year's lineup. That trio was part of one of the most successful eras in the school's tennis history (leading the Knights to 73 team wins over their four seasons).

Two mainstays at the top of the roster return for their junior seasons. Colin Russell held down the #1 singles spot last season and concluded the year nationally ranked in singles. Winston Park, who started primarily at #3 singles in 2008, should be near the top again this year.

Head Coach Stephan Zweifel also expects significant contributions from three other returners: senior captain Jordan Hughes and sophomores Vince Heguy and Austin Taylor.

Five of the 10 players on the Knights' squad are first-year students. The rookies should see action early and often, with a number of them expected to challenge for spots in the starting lineup.

After being sidelined this fall with an injury, Ben Guzick makes his collegiate debut for Carleton this winter. The 2007 New York state doubles champion and three-star recruit, Guzick was rated among the nation's top 150 high school seniors last year by Tennisrecruiting.net.

Fellow three-star recruit Peter Dunn made an early mark this fall, advancing to the round of 16 in singles and to the semifinals in doubles at the ITA regional tournament.

Dan Vollman, who helped lead Oak Park to a top-five finish at last year's Illinois state team tournament, is another rookie to watch. Jon Aranda, who brings national USTA tournament experience to Carleton, and Sam Megowen, a semifinalist in the 2008 Massachusetts high school doubles tournament, will also see action.

Concordia

Coach: Troy Hanestad (3rd season)

2008 Finish: Tied 7th (8-11, 2-7 MIAC)

Concordia Season Preview

For the second straight season the Concordia men's tennis team will have to replace their No. 1 singles player from the previous year. Unlike last season when the team had to replace three of the top players, this year's Cobber team will only have to replace one player from last season's top six players. Lost to graduation was top singles player Will Wischer who won ten matches and earned All-Conference honors as part of the team's top doubles team.

The good news for head coach Troy Hanestad is the he returns all five of his other top players from 2008 and he has even added five freshmen that could all break into the team's lineup in 2009.

For all practical purposes the Cobber lineup will just move up one spot from last year's squad. That will mean that sophomore Matt Edin (Staples, Minn./Staples-Motley HS) will assume the No.1 singles position. He won nine matches as the team's No.2 singles player last year and was named to the MIAC All-Conference Team. Junior Kirby Johnson (Crookston, Minn.) will also factor into the top of the Cobbers' lineup and will be counted on to be part of the team's top doubles squad. Johnson was named to the MIAC All-Conference Team as a doubles player in 2008. He is also one of only two juniors or seniors on this year's team and will need to provide the leadership for an inexperienced 2009 squad.

Jordan Swanson (So., Thief River Falls, Minn./Lincoln HS) and Arnie Andreasen (Sr., Savage, Minn./Burnsville HS) are the other two returning players that played significant singles roles last season. Swanson played primarily at the No.4 singles spot and Andreasen was the team's No.6 player. Swanson teamed with Edin as the team's No.2 double tandem last year. Andreasen was part of the No.3 doubles team for the Cobbers.

A pair of newcomers could factor heavily into the Concordia lineup in 2009. Chad Smith (Fr., Grand Forks, N.D./Red River HS) and Lao Vang (Fr., St. Paul, Minn./Johnson HS) both have a chance to crack the top six in singles and be part of the doubles action for CC.

The Cobbers will be looking to improve on their 2-7 conference record from last year. Concordia ran off a streak of five straight MIAC playoff appearances from 2003-07 and will be hoping to start another streak in 2009.

Gustavus

Coach: Steve Wilkinson (39th season)

2008 Finish: 1st (29-6, 9-0 MIAC)

Gustavus Season Preview

The Gustavus men's tennis team has set its sites on claiming its 21st consecutive MIAC title as Head Coach Steve Wilkinson returns 14 upperclassmen from a squad that finished fifth at last year's NCAA Championships and compiled an overall record of 29-6.

The Golden Gusties are led by seniors John Kauss, Mike Burdakin, and Charlie Paukert. John Kauss is the top-ranked singles player in the Division III after winning the ITA Small College Championships in Mobile, Alabama last October. Kauss and doubles partner Mike Burdakin will play at #1 doubles for Gustavus this year. The duo finished second at the ITA Small College Championships to earn the No. 2 national ranking heading into the spring season. Burdakin and Charlie Paukert, a member of the 2008 NCAA Doubles Runner-Up team with Andy Bryan, will compete for the #2 and #3 singles positions. Paukert is expected to team up with senior Ben Tomasek in doubles at the #2 spot. Rounding out the doubles lineup at #3 will most likely be the tandem of seniors Nick Hansen and Kevin Stickney.

Coach Wilkinson will have tough decisions to make regarding the rest of the lineup as he looks to replace All-American Andy Bryan and Aaron Zenner, both of whom graduated last spring. Hansen, Stickney, Tomasek, along with seniors Ashok Jethwa and David Koppel and first-year players Patrick Clark, and Daniel Pomeranc, are all in the chase for spots at #4, #5, and #6 singles.

The Gusties, who begin the spring season ranked #9 in the Intercollegiate Tennis Association Division III poll, have added motivation this season as it will be Coach Steve Wilkinson's final year at the helm. Wilkinson recently announced his retirement at the end of the 2009 season after 39 years with the program. The Gusties will once again host the MIAC Championships on May 1-2 at the Swanson Tennis Center.

Hamline

Coach: Jon Henning (2nd season)

2008 Finish: 10th (6-13, 0-9 MIAC)

Hamline Season Preview

The 2009 season embarks on a new journey for the Hamline University men's tennis team. The Pipers are looking to start a positive tennis tradition with many new, dedicated, and hard-working competitors. These individuals are hopefully going to push this team to the next level and be the base of some very good things to come.

The 2009 team does return five letter winners from the squad last year that finished 6-13 overall and 0-9 in the MIAC. Despite losing 2008 co-captains Dan Vogel and Kyle Warner, there are returning players who are ready to improve from last year and first-years who are accepting the challenge of being called upon to compete right away. Dan Cromwell (Jr., Forest Lake, Minn.) leads this young team as captain this year. Returnees Kyle Helgemoe (So., Lakeville, Minn.), Phu Cao (Jr., St. Paul, Minn.), Ben Goligowski (So., New Brighton, Minn.), and Andy Cope (So., Kohler, Wis.) had success in the lineup last year, and look to improve in MIAC play this year.

Several newcomers this year are going to be asked by Piper head coach Jon Henning to compete right away. These include ranked junior players Robert Becker (Fr., Hopkins, Minn.) and Sam Teitelbaum (Fr., Stillwater, Minn.). Also, MSHSL state tournament participants Andrew Lutz (Fy., Pine City, Minn.) and Myles Peterson (Fy., Saint Peter, Minn.) along with Brendan FitzPatrick (Fy., White Bear Lake, Minn.) and Javier Aguirre (Fy., San Diego, Cal.) will provide the much needed depth and stability that will become the foundation of the Hamline tennis program.

The 2009 Pipers have committed themselves to the necessary dedication and hard work it will take to improve as a team. With productive off-season workouts and hitting, the Pipers look to surprise their MIAC opponents this season.

Macalester

Coach: Jason Muhl (5th season)

2008 Finish: Tied 7th (6-12, 2-7 MIAC)

Macalester Season Preview

After winning just a couple conference matches over five years prior to last season, Macalester took a big step forward in 2008 when it went 2-7 in the MIAC while also nearly knocking off another team. The Scots graduated their two best players, including All-MIAC and Academic All-District 5 player Aaron Heerboth, but with a strong first-year class ready to step right in, expect continued progress for the Scots under fifth-year head coach Jason Muhl.

Much of the team's optimism for a successful spring is generated by the squad's performance last fall at the ITA regionals, where Macalester was led by newcomers Chris Fowler (Fy., Toronto, Ont. / Royal St. George's) and Ali Bandeali (Fy., Karachi, Pakistan / Karachi Grammar School).

Macalester doubles teams at the ITA tourney twice defeated pairs from Gustavus and one team toppled the region's No. 4-tanked tandem from Luther.

Charlie Edelman (Sr., Tucson, Ariz. / University) is a four-year regular in the middle or top of the singles and doubles lineup and is coming off an 8-8 campaign in 2008. Edelman's career singles record at Macalester is 31-18. Michael Coleman (So., Westlake Village, Calif. / Agoura) will move up in the lineup after going 8-8 last season, including 4-5 in MIAC singles matches. He was also 4-4 in conference doubles matches. Edelman went 10-7 in doubles play, while going 7-3 (4-2 in the MIAC) with Titus Levy (Jr., New York, N.Y. / Fieldston School).

Macalester also returns a pair of sophomores who handled the third and fourth spots in the singles lineup as frosh last year: Paul Mairet (Rochester, Minn. / Century) and Justin Margolies (Madison, Wis. / West). Their progress will be a key to the team's success this year.

Saint John's
Coach: Jack Bowe (12th season)
2008 Finish: 5th (10-9, 5-4 MIAC)

Saint John's Season Preview

The return of three experienced players leaves the 2009 Saint John's University tennis team hopeful of improving upon its fifth-place finish in the MIAC last season.

The Johnnies finished 5-5 in the MIAC and 10-9 overall in 2008, but believe the return of several experienced upperclassmen, along with the help of some new talent, will help them improve.

Seniors Mark Steelman (St. Paul, Minn./Holy Angels) and Kevin Goihl (Litchfield, Minn.) and junior Luke Odegard (Forest Lake, Minn.) are expected to lead the way for the Johnnies in 2009.

Last season, Steelman was 5-4 (3-1 MIAC) in singles competition and 9-2 (5-0 MIAC) in doubles. Steelman recorded wins in both the singles and doubles competition at the Wilson/ITA Men's Division III Championships this past fall.

Goihl was 9-8 (5-4 MIAC) in singles and 9-7 (5-5 MIAC) at No. 2 doubles and received All-MIAC honors last season. At the ITA Championship, he led the Johnnies with a 3-2 singles record.

Odegard led the Johnnies with a 16-4 (7-2 MIAC) singles record and a 13-8 (7-3 MIAC) record in doubles competition to earn All-MIAC honors in 2008.

Other experienced players include juniors Dutch Hansen (Dawson, Minn./Dawson-Boyd) and Tyler McKay (Rochester, Minn./John Marshall). Hansen finished last spring season with a singles record of 3-1 and 2-1 in doubles competition, while McKay was 2-1 record in both singles and doubles competition.

Freshmen Ian Hansen (Dawson, Minn./Dawson-Boyd), Matt Peckskamp (Sartell, Minn./Sartell-St. Stephen) and Chris Voigt (Plymouth, Minn./Wayzata) are all expected to see action this spring. Hansen and Peckskamp both won two matches at the ITA Championship, while Voigt won one.

Saint John's plays nine MIAC matches and nine non-conference contests this spring, starting with a non-conference match Feb. 7 against Luther (Iowa) at Gold's Gym in Sartell.

The Johnnies will again call three different locations home in 2009 - Gold's Gym in Sartell, and the SJU tennis courts and the Donald McNeely Spectrum in Collegeville. The Johnnies host five matches to open the season before traveling Feb. 28 to March 4 to California for four matches during their annual spring break trip.

The MIAC Tournament takes place May 1-2 in St. Peter, Minn.

Saint John's tennis coach Jack Bowe begins his 12th season with the Johnnies. Bowe holds a 112-107 career record (55-45 MIAC). He was named the MIAC Coach of the Year in 2003.

Saint Mary's

Coach: Jeff Halberg (11th season)

2008 Finish: Tied 7th (8-10, 2-7 MIAC)

Saint Mary's Season Preview

It was a year of ups and downs for the Saint Mary's University men's tennis team.

On the up side, the SMU men collected eight wins in their 18 matches.

On the down side, when the MIAC Tournament kicked off in late April, SMU was not on the invite list.

And that, Cardinal head coach Jeff Halberg hopes, will change this season.

"The men's team enjoyed a lot of success last year," said Halberg, whose team kicks off their season on Feb. 7, hosting Carleton. "But we weren't able to close out the season the way we wanted to, with conference tournament berths.

"Hopefully we can clear that final hurdle this year."

To do so, however, Saint Mary's will have to overcome the loss of an all-conference performer. Walter Mannino, a first-team All-MIAC selection twice during his stellar career, graduated in May.

"It's tough to lose a quality performer like that," said Halberg. "But every year you lose players and have to find people to step into those spots."

After a strong freshman campaign, Pawel Szczepkowski (Opolskie, Poland) appears to be poised to step into Mannino's shoes, while juniors David Reckase (La Crosse, Wis.), Tony Clafton (Grand Rapids, Minn.) and Andy Weigman (Maple Plain, Minn.) will provide some much-needed veteran leadership.

"It's like putting a puzzle together," Halberg said of his search for the perfect lineup. "Hopefully, I can find a way to get all the pieces to fit."

St. Olaf

Coach: Scott Nesbit (19th season)

2008 Finish: 6th (5-11, 4-5 MIAC)

St. Olaf Season Preview

The St. Olaf men's tennis team returns all but one player from last year's squad. Senior captain David Narvaez and number one singles player Ian Pray are expected to lead the Oles this season. Pray was 7-7 at the No. 1 singles spot while Narvaez held the same record, including a 6-2 mark in league play, at the third spot.

The Oles will also benefit from first years Knute Gundersen and John Wight and junior Brian Tolly. Tolly returns for his second season after sitting out last year due to a knee injury.

The Oles finished last season with a 5-11 record, going 4-4 in conference play. St. Olaf hopes to improve on their MIAC finish after they were defeated by Bethel 6-0 in the first round of the playoffs.

St. Thomas

Coach: Terry Peck (19th season)

2008 Finish: 4th (10-8, 6-3 MIAC)

St. Thomas Season Preview

Head coach Terry Peck, who is beginning his 19th season at St. Thomas, coached 500th match with the Tommies in 2008 and will reach 400 victories in 2009. He has a combined men's and women's dual record of 397-137 (.744 win%). Over the last 11 seasons, UST has had five seconds and three thirds in the men's conference standings, and an overall dual record of 146-60. Peck's men's teams are 197-86 since 1994.

Last season, the Tommies won seven of eight matches late in March and April before losing to champion Gustavus in the MIAC playoff semifinals. St. Thomas lost four of its top players from a 2008 team that placed fourth in the conference and posted an 11-7 dual record. The Toms graduated Ben Herding, Josh Tomashek and Kevin Manzel, and Arya Vayghan transferred to Division I George Washington University. Vayghan finished 19-2 at first singles and 14-4 in doubles last year as a Tommie freshman.

Leading the St. Thomas returners are senior Phil Hanke, junior Andrew Michels and sophomores Tyler Rice and Matt Bergstrom. Rice went 13-3 last year in doubles. The top newcomer is freshman Dan Cooper.