

2012 MIAC Men's Tennis Coaches' Poll and Preview

3/9/2012

ST. PAUL, Minn. -- The Gustavus men's tennis team took the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) by storm in 2011, capturing both the regular season and Playoff championships without dropping a match against a league opponent. In 2012, Tommy Valentini's team returns as the favorite, but several contenders appear poised to challenge the Gusties' crown.

With the bulk of the 2012 conference season yet to take place on the outdoor courts, the race for the title has gotten off to a terrific start. Four teams - including the defending champs from St. Peter - all have at least two wins without a loss, and with each slated to play one another over the course of the next six weeks, another memorable season is shaping up in the MIAC.

All discussion has to start with Gustavus, which was the "unanimous" pick to win another league title in the 2012 MIAC Men's Tennis Preseason Coaches' Poll. The Gusties received nine of the 10 first-place votes for a total of 81 points, and coaches weren't allowed to vote for their own teams. The bulk of Valentini's team is back to defend their conference titles, with six returning All-MIAC players back in the fold.

Leading the way are juniors Amrik Donkena and Tyler Johnson and senior Patrick Clark. All three were named All-Conference in both singles and doubles a year ago. All-MIAC singles selections Juan Luis Chu and Daniel Pomeranc are also back in Gustavus' line up, and All-Conference doubles performer Joey MacGibbon is also back again this season. Thus far, all six are undefeated in MIAC play in both singles and doubles competition as further evidence to establish the Gusties as the favorite.

However, Carleton returns five All-MIAC players after finishing as the runner up in both the regular and postseason a year ago and have been tabbed by the coaches as the best bet to knock off Gustavus with the other first-place vote and 71 points to finish second in the poll. The Knights return Joe Aranda, Paul Cooper and Austin Jiang who all earned singles and doubles All-MIAC honors last season, as well as doubles All-Conference honorees Peter Dunn and Dan Vollmann and, like the Gusties, Carleton is off to a good start in 2012.

St. Thomas was picked third in the poll with 65 points. The Tommies will lean on singles and doubles All-MIAC returner Brian McCarthy, and Dan Cooper is also among UST's leaders this season. St. Olaf occupied the No. 4 spot in the poll with 56 points, and the Oles return a trio of All-MIAC honorees. John Wight (singles and doubles), John Foss (singles) and Knute Gunderson (doubles) all bolster the Oles' hopes for another trip to the MIAC Playoffs as they challenge St. Thomas to earn a spot in the top three.

Rounding out the top five in the poll was Saint John's (46 points), which brings back returning All-Conference singles player Fabricio Moncada, as well as Ian Hansen who is off to a strong start in 2012. Hamline took the poll's No. 6 spot and hopes to also earn a trip to the MIAC Playoffs this season. Leading the way for the Pipers this season are David Croonquist and Robert Becker.

Macalester (33), Bethel (25), Saint Mary's (18) and Concordia (16) round out the final four spots in the poll, and all four will be looking to improve in 2012 and even compete to jump into the top six and head to the postseason. The Scots are led by returning All-MIAC singles honoree, and the Royals have a pair of All-Conference singles players back in the fold in Kent Nichols and Reggie Ronning. Michael Lunka and Bobby Steingraeber are among the Cardinal's top players in 2012, and All-MIAC doubles selection Devin Larson is the top returner for 2011 MIAC Coach-of-the-Year Troy Hanestad and the Cobbers.

The MIAC regular season is already under way with each team playing a nine-match season between now and late April. The top six teams in the regular season standings will advance to the 2012 MIAC Men's Tennis Playoffs, which will be held May 4-5 at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minn. The winner of the MIAC Playoff title will receive the conference's automatic bid to the 2012 NCAA Division III Men's Tennis Tournament.

Complete results from the 2012 MIAC Men's Tennis Preseason Coaches' Poll are listed below, as well as helpful links and team-by-team previews.

2012 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 (nine for first, eight 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.



Rank	Institution	Total
1	Gustavus (9)	81
2	Carleton (1)	71
3	St. Thomas	65
4	St. Olaf	56
5	Saint John's	46
6	Hamline	39
7	Macalester	33
8	Bethel	25
9	Saint Mary's	18
10	Concordia	16

2012 MIAC Playoffs: Top six teams, May 4-5, Host: Gustavus, St. Peter, Minn., [Home Page](#)

| [2012 MIAC Schedule](#) | [2012 MIAC Statistics](#) | [MIAC Recordbook](#) | [MIAC Archives](#) |



Bethel

Coach: Dan Morton (12 seasons)

2011 Finish: T-6th (3-6 MIAC, 8-10 overall)

Bethel Season Preview

The Bethel University men's tennis squad comes into 2012 with a strong desire to compete with any team in the MIAC. At the conclusion of the 2011 season BU finished 8-10 overall, finishing seventh place in the conference with a conference record of 3-6.

The Royals return Kent Nichols (Sr., Zimmerman, Minn.) and Reggie Ronning (Jr., Alexandria, Minn.), who both were selected to the 19-player 2011 MIAC All-Conference team. In conference play last season Nichols finished 4-4 in singles competition and was electric down the final stretch of the entire season, winning six straight matches at one point. In the doubles competition Nichols and his doubles partner were victorious in five of six matches at one point, including big wins over Saint Mary's and Saint John's.

Reggie Ronning was equally impressive, as the junior out of Alexandria, Minn. won eight of his last nine singles competitions to finish the season 10-7 overall and 5-3 within the MIAC. Ronning did not fair as well in the doubles competition, but captured seven victories while paired with another BU player.

Bethel also returns Tucker Morris (Jr., Arden Hills, Minn.) and Steven Schull (So., Eagan, Minn.), who played in nearly every meet last season, along with Bryce Johnson (Sr., Blaine, Minn.).

One area the Royals found success last season was on a neutral court, as BU finished 4-2, which may play into Bethel's performances early on as they look to get dual and triangular events played.

BU will also receive contributions from Kirby Ronning (So., Blaine, Minn.), Eric Lundberg (Jr., Mora, Minn.), and Jared Wall (So., Maple Grove, Minn.).



Carleton

Coach: Stephan Zweifel (14 seasons)

2011 Finish: 2nd (8-1 MIAC, 17-5 overall)

Carleton Season Preview

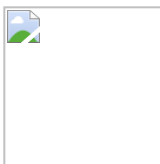
The Carleton men enter the 2012 season with high expectations after finishing second in the MIAC one season ago, posting an 8-1 record against conference opponents. 2011 marked the ninth straight year that the Knights finished the season as one of the conference's top two teams.

The Knights are poised to make another run this year, returning five All-MIAC performers from their 2011 squad. Senior Jon Aranda (Sr./Los Angeles, Calif./Loyola) and juniors Paul Cooper (Jr./Burr Ridge, Ill./Hinsdale Central) and Austin Jiang (Jr./Green Bay, Wis./Bay Port) earned all-conference accolades last year for both singles and doubles. Against conference opponents, the trio went a combined 17-4 in singles play and posted an 18-5 record in doubles matches.

Seniors Peter Dunn (Sr./Winnetka, Ill./North Shore Country Day) and Dan Vollman (Sr./Oak Park, Ill./Oak Park River Forest) were the Knights' other All-MIAC honorees, earning the distinction as doubles specialists. Dunn finished the year with a 5-1 record in conference matches, while Vollman posted a 6-2 mark. This was the third consecutive year that the duo earned All-MIAC honors, and they will look to continue their dominance this season.

Andrew Hwang (Fy./Brookfield, Wis./University School), who is currently ranked No. 16 in the central region, leads a deep rookie class that will be called upon to add depth to this experienced team.

With a combination of both experience and new talent, Carleton will once again look to make a push to the top of the conference standings and return to the NCAA Championships for the first time since 2010.



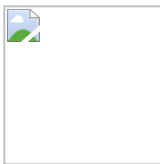
Concordia

Coach: Troy Hanestad (5 seasons)

2011 Finish: 5th (4-5 MIAC, 8-10 overall)

Concordia Season Preview

Concordia preview coming soon.



Gustavus

Coach: Tommy Valentini (2 seasons)

2011 Finish: 1st (9-0 MIAC, 18-9 overall)

Gustavus Season Preview

The Gustavus men's tennis team has started its 2012 campaign right where it left off last season – at the top of the MIAC. The Gusties started this season with two losses in Hawaii, but bounced back with five consecutive wins in the conference and placed seventh at the 2012 ITA National Indoor Championship in a field that included several of the top teams in NCAA Division III.

The Gusties' quest for their unprecedented 24th-straight MIAC title is off to a great start as they boast a 5-0 record in the league. The Gustie men returned three All-Conference performers in both singles and doubles play – juniors Amrik Donkena (Rochester, Minn.) and Tyler Johnson (West Bend, Wis.), and senior Patrick Clark (Glen Ellyn, Ill.). Joining them as All-Conference singles selections from a year ago include sophomore Juan Luis Chu (Lima, Peru) and senior Daniel Pomeranc (Sao Paulo, Brazil). 2011 All-MIAC doubles performer sophomore Joey MacGibbon (Apple Valley, Minn.) also returned to the lineup.

So far this season, Donkena and Smith-Dennis have manned the No. 1 doubles spot with a 7-1 overall record, including seven consecutive wins. Donkena has also handled the No. 1 singles spot with a 5-2 mark overall, while Smith-Dennis has taken control of No. 2 singles with a 3-2 mark in that role. Last week, Donkena was named MIAC Men's Tennis Athlete of the Week.

Pomeranc and Luis Chu have teamed up recently at No. 3 doubles and have compiled a perfect 5-0 record as teammates, including three impressive tiebreaker victories against nationally ranked squads at the ITA National Indoor Championship. Pomeranc earned MIAC Athlete of the Week honors for his performance at the tournament.

The Three Crowns have 10 more non-conference matches over the next month and return to MIAC action on April 21 against Carleton College in St. Peter, Minn.



Hamline

Coach: Jon Henning (4 seasons)

2011 Finish: T-6th (3-6 MIAC, 8-11 overall)

Hamline Season Preview

For the first time in years, Hamline field a veteran men's tennis team. Coach Jon Henning has five seniors returning from last year's team that went to the MIAC Playoffs for the first time ever.

Robert Becker, who already stands 4-0 in singles and Bernard Mitambo lead the senior class. They are ably backed up by Sam Teitelbaum, Andrew Lutz and Brendan Fitzpatrick.

The Pipers No. 1 singles player, however, is junior David Croonquist. Last fall, Croonquist advanced to the quarterfinals of the ITA Tournament in singles and doubles. He missed the first two weeks of 2012 with an injury but is rounding into form. He opened the season ranked No. 15 in singles. He and Becker started the season ranked No. 16 in doubles.

Sophs Derek Lutz and Robert Johnson have also seen action in the early going.



Macalester

Coach: Jason Muhl (7 seasons)

2011 Finish: T-6th (3-6 MIAC, 7-8 overall)

Macalester Season Preview

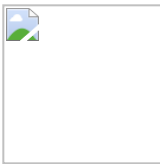
The Scots graduated No. 1 player and multiple-time All-MIAC performer Michael Coleman, as well as Justin Margolies and doubles standout Paul Mairet, but eighth-year head coach Jason Muhl believes his Scots can be competitive in the tough MIAC.

Following three years in the second and third position in the lineup, Chris Fowler (Sr., Toronto, Ont. / Royal St. Georges) takes over from Coleman at the No. 1 singles spot for the Scots. Fowler was 9-6 in 2011 at No. 2 singles, including 4-5 in the MIAC.

Top contenders for the second, third and fourth spots include transfer Stephen Tyndel (Jr., Toronto, Ont. / City Academy), Evan Elderbrock (Sr., Madison, Wis. / West) and Max Edwards (Jr., Rochester, Minn. / Mayo).

Macalester has a deep roster and through the season's early-going has received contributions from several others, including veterans Lewis Wilcox (Sr., Minneapolis, Minn. / Southwest), Max Soghikian (So., Piedmont, Calif.) and Kai Peterson (Jr., St. Paul, Minn. / Central).

Before resuming their conference slate, the Scots will play five matches over Spring Break March 11-16 at Hilton Head Island, South Carolina.



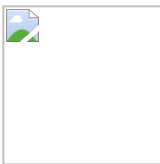
Saint John's

Coach: Jack Bowe (14 seasons)

2011 Finish: 9th (2-7 MIAC, 6-9 overall)

Saint John's Season Preview

Saint John's preview coming soon.



Saint Mary's

Coach: Jeff Halberg (13 seasons)

2011 Finish: 10th (0-9 MIAC, 7-11 overall)

Saint Mary's Season Preview

Michael Lunka (Eagan, Minn.) and Bobby Steingraeber (La Crosse, Wis.) have made a name for themselves around the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference the first two years of their collegiate careers.

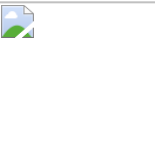
And Saint Mary’s University men’s basketball coach Jeff Halberg doesn’t see any reason why their junior seasons will be any different.

“Michael and Bobby have proven then can play with the best in our conference — and I’m looking for more of the same from them this year,” said Halberg. “We’ve got a very talented nucleus to build around this year.”

Lunka, who has manned the Cardinals’ No. 1 singles spot throughout his career, compiled an 8-9 singles record a year ago, while Sam Puff (Eden Prairie, Minn.) picked up a team-leading 10 singles wins in his first year with the Cardinals.

Halberg tinkered with eight different doubles lineups a year ago, with Lunka and Steingraeber teaming for a 6-5 record when together at No. 1 doubles. Lunka and Steingraeber each finished with 10 doubles victories a year ago, one shy of team-leader Steven Mino.

“I’m excited about this season,” Halberg said. “I think we have the talent and the depth to make some noise this year — now it’s just a matter of the guys going out and playing up to their abilities day-in and day-out.”

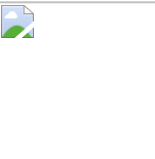


St. Olaf

Coach: Scott Nesbit (21 seasons)
2011 Finish: 4th (6-3 MIAC, 9-7 overall)

St. Olaf Season Preview

After graduating just one player from a team that finished fourth in the MIAC, the St. Olaf men’s tennis team looks for a return trip to the MIAC playoffs this spring. Will Mitchell, who played fifth and sixth singles and first doubles, is the lone departure for the Oles. The team returns every other key contributor from a team that finished 9-7, 6-3 in the MIAC before bowing out to Gustavus in the MIAC Playoff semifinals. In singles, seniors John Wight and Knute Gundersen will play at the top two spots, while the order of the final four spots is yet to be determined. The three through six spots will be filled by senior Jon Foss, juniors Andy Catania and Charlie Reinertsen, and first-year Stephen Nolan. Wight is coming off a 10-4 season, including a 6-2 MIAC record. Foss and Catania, who had an impressive ITA tournament, each had winning records last spring. In doubles, the team will miss the play of Mitchell, but Wight and Catania have won their first four matches at first doubles. The second and third doubles spots will see various combinations of pairings with Gundersen, Reinertsen, Nolan, Foss, junior Ryan Abdella, and sophomore Jack Dutton all featuring.



St. Thomas

Coach: Terry Peck (21 seasons)
2010 Finish: 3rd (7-2 MIAC, 15-4 overall)

St. Thomas Season Preview

The 2012 Tommie men's tennis team (5-2 overall) opened up their season with a non-conference victory over UW-LaCrosse on Feb. 4th. The Tommie have started their season strong opening up with a 3-0 record in conference play with wins over St. John's, Concordia, and Macalester. Their lone loss of the season thus far came at the hands of Division II St. Cloud State on Feb. 25th in a 5-2 decision.

Terry Peck, who's starting his 22nd season directing the UST men and 16th as women's head coach, achieved his 500th career victory with Tommie tennis last fall. The Tommie men were 15-4 last season, with all four defeats coming against ranked opponents. They finished third in the MIAC with a 7-2 record with a 37-17 conference record in singles matches and a 19-8 conference record in doubles matches. They graduated two starters but return a good nucleus, led by senior Dan Cooper and juniors Brian McCarthy and Brendan O'Connell.

Cooper went 9-5 in singles matches and 6-3 in double matches last spring. Cooper, who was named All-MIAC in doubles as a sophomore has a three-year 32-17 career singles record and a 28-13 career doubles record.

McCarthy who was an All-MIAC in doubles last season had a 10-8 overall record in singles matches and 12-6 in doubles matches last spring.

O'Connell, who made All-MIAC in both singles and doubles his freshman year went 10-5 in singles and 9-5 in doubles last spring. He is 22-8 in career singles matches and 20-9 in doubles matches.

Sophomore Grant Bakke was named All-MIAC in singles as a freshman last spring. Bakke has a 13-3 singles record, including a 7-1 singles record against conference opponents. Bakke also had a 10-2 record in doubles matches, which included a 6-1 record in conference.

Other seniors back are Henry Mandell (Career: 6-0 in doubles, 9-6 in singles) and Peter Wright (Career: 1-0 in doubles, 7-0 in singles)