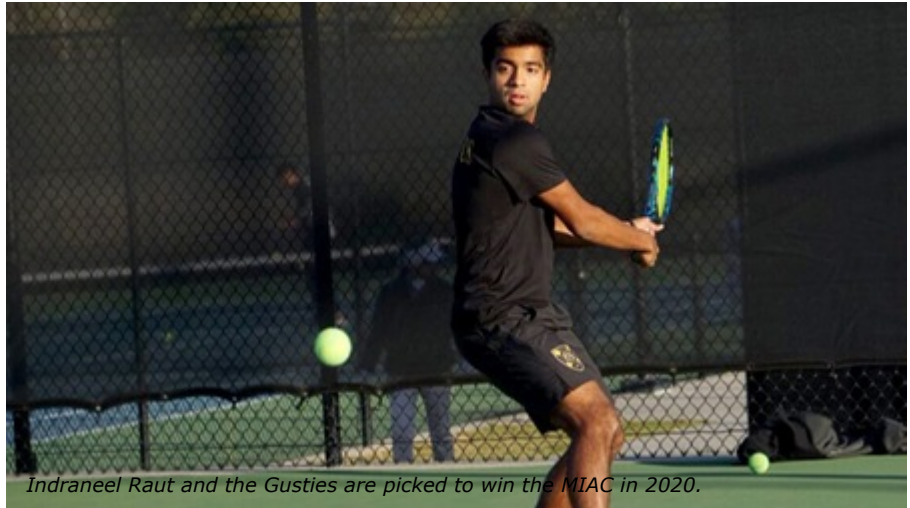


2020 MIAC Men's Tennis Preview

Posted: Jan 23, 2020

BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – The 2020 Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) men's tennis season is set to begin this weekend, but before teams take the court, league coaches submitted their ballots for the annual Preseason Coaches' Poll. When the votes were tallied, Gustavus edged Carleton for the top spot in the Poll with 80 points and eight first-place votes.

Gustavus finished no lower than second on any ballot in the Preseason Poll and with good reason, as the Gusties have won an unprecedented 31 consecutive regular-season conference championships and each of the last nine MIAC Playoff crowns. Gustavus is ranked No. 20 in Division III in the Oracle/ITA Preseason Top 40 Poll and will be led by the No. 8 singles player in the nation, sophomore **Indraneel Raut**, who earned All-America honors back in October when he advanced to the round of eight in the ITA Cup national competition. Three more Gusties – **Michael O'Neil** (No. 27), **Yassine Derbani** (No. 29), and **Nick Aney** (No. 38) – are nationally-ranked in singles play, while the Gustavus doubles team of **Daniel Fouchier** and **Michael O'Neil** is No. 17 in the country to start the year.



Indraneel Raut and the Gusties are picked to win the MIAC in 2020.

Carleton received 74 points and a pair of first-place votes to come in at No. 2 in the Coaches' Poll. The Knights – who, like Gustavus, finished no lower than second on any coaches' ballot – are No. 38 in the nation and No. 8 in the Central Region to start the year. Carleton returns national runner-up **Leo Vithoontien** to the lineup for his junior season in 2020. Vithoontien became the first Carleton tennis player ever to play in the title match of the NCAA Singles Championship when he did so last May. The two-time All-American is ranked No. 15 in Division III to begin the year.

Macalester earned 61 points in the balloting to come in at No. 3 in the Coaches' Poll. The Scots have reached the MIAC Playoffs in each of the last two seasons and four of the last five seasons, reaching the semifinals in 2018. Three of the team's four All-MIAC selections from a year ago are back in 2020, including sophomore **Jeffrey Jorgensen**, who earned All-Conference distinction in his debut season after going 6-2 in league play at No. 2 singles. Jorgensen advanced to the third round of the ITA Midwest Regional back in September.

Saint John's logged 55 points to come in at No. 5 in the Poll. The Johnnies clinched a fourth straight berth in the MIAC Playoffs last spring and have reached the postseason 10 times since 2007. Junior **Thomas Gillach** earned All-MIAC honors in both singles and doubles play for the second year in a row in 2019, leading the Johnnies with 12 singles wins overall, including six against conference opponents.

Bethel and St. Thomas tied for fifth in the Poll with 47 points apiece. The Royals reached the MIAC Playoff semifinals for the fifth time in program history last spring and did so with only one senior in the lineup. Among the Bethel returners this season is sophomore **Jason Reilly**, who earned All-MIAC honors in doubles play last year and advanced to the third round of the ITA Midwest Regional in singles play last September.

St. Thomas will be looking to return to the postseason for the first time since 2017. The Tommies enter 2020 with an experienced lineup that features six seniors and a pair of juniors. St. Thomas got quality play from underclassmen last year as well, in particular, **Tristan Fjelstad**. The Eden Prairie, Minn. native earned All-MIAC honors after going 5-2 against conference foes in his debut season.

Concordia came in at No. 7 in the Preseason Coaches' Poll with 34 points. The Cobbers reached the MIAC Playoffs for the third time in program history two years ago and will look to get back to the postseason again this year with the guidance of a strong senior class. The All-MIAC tandem of **Erik Porter** and **Jared Saue** reached the round of 16 at the ITA Midwest Regional last September and both men won their first-round singles contests at the tournament. As a doubles team, the pair went 6-3 in conference play in 2019 and accounted for 11 of the team's 12 top doubles victories last season.

St. Olaf picked up 26 points in the balloting. The Oles went 3-6 in conference play last season and will be looking to snap a four-year postseason drought in 2020. After picking up a pair of conference victories at No. 2 singles last spring, **Spencer Wick** began his junior campaign with three more wins at the 2019 ITA Midwest Regional last September. Wick advanced to the third round in singles action and came away with a win in doubles play as well.

Saint Mary's received 15 points in the balloting. The Cardinals were tough to beat in Winona, Minn. last spring, where five of the team's seven victories came on SMU's home court. Saint Mary's has also been good against uncommon opponents, boasting a 60-23 mark against non-conference foes since 2012. **Trevor Smiley** was a positive addition to the team as a freshman last year, leading the Cards in both singles (8) and doubles (11) victories in 2019. Smiley played at Nos. 2, 3, and 4 singles last season.

Hamline received 10 points in the Preseason Poll. The Pipers return four competitors from last year's squad, including **Nazeer Robinson**. Robinson – who spent the majority of last season at No. 3 singles – began his junior season with a win at the ITA Midwest Regional last September. He earned five victories at No. 3 singles last spring.

Complete 2020 Preseason Coaches' Poll

Coaches voted for every team in the conference except their own team. Points were assigned for each vote (9 for first, 8 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.

2020 MIAC Men's Tennis Preseason Coaches' Poll

Rank	Institution (First-Place Votes)	Total
1.	Gustavus (8)	80
2.	Carleton (2)	74
3.	Macalester	61
4.	Saint John's	55
T5.	Bethel	47
T5.	St. Thomas	47
7.	Concordia	34
8.	St. Olaf	26
9.	Saint Mary's	15
10.	Hamline	10

2020 MIAC Men's Tennis Playoffs

The 2020 MIAC Men's Tennis Playoffs will include the top five teams in the conference standings, squaring off in a single-elimination, high-seed host tournament. The No. 4 and 5 seeds will square off on April 29 in the quarterfinals, with the winner joining the top three seeds in the semifinals on May 1. The championship match will be held on May 2 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 Tennis Tournament.

Odds and Ends

-Five MIAC men's tennis coaches have been at their current institutions for more than a decade. Saint John's **Jack Bowe** is celebrating 23 years as a Johnnie after seven seasons at Saint Benedict. Two more coaches - Carleton's **Stephan Zweifel** (24th season) and Saint Mary's **Jeff Halberg** (22nd season) - have been at the helm of their current programs for more than 20 years. Macalester's **Jason Muhl** and Gustavus' **Tommy Valentini** are the next two longest-tenured coaches in the conference at 14 and 11 years, respectively.

-Five MIAC men's tennis coaches are alumni of conference schools. Concordia's **Zach Zitur**, Gustavus' **Tommy Valentini**, and Hamline's **Spencer Jones** are all coaching at their alma maters, while St. Olaf alumnus **Jeff Halberg** is at Saint Mary's and St. Thomas Hall of Famer **Drew Fernelius** is at Bethel.

-There are three new tennis coaches in the MIAC this season, with **Spencer Jones** at Hamline, **Ken Cychosz** at St. Thomas and **Chris Kuna** at St. Olaf. Jones and Cychosz will coach both the men's and women's teams for the Pipers and Tommies, respectively, while Kuna will take over the Oles' men's program.

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>.