

2010 MIAC Softball Season Preview

Posted: Mar 31, 2010



St. Paul, Minn. – Perennial powers Gustavus and St. Thomas top the 2010 MIAC Softball Preseason Coaches' Poll. Gustavus received the top spot in the poll with eight first place votes. In 2009, the Gusties won the MIAC regular season title and placed third in the NCAA Tournament. St. Thomas had their five-year run as conference champs snapped last season by Gustavus, but were able to knock off the Gusties and claim the MIAC Playoff title. St. Thomas received four first place votes in the 2010 poll.

Hamline and Bethel qualified for the MIAC Playoffs last season and are slotted in the third and fourth spot in the 2010 preseason poll. Following close behind are strong teams from Saint Mary's, Augsburg, St. Catherine, and Saint Benedict. All four of those teams have squads capable of competing for a playoff berth. Look for Concordia, St. Olaf, Macalester, and Carleton to all push for a move up in the standings in 2010.

After completion of the 22-game MIAC schedule, the top four conference teams will earn berths in the MIAC Playoffs. The double-elimination tournament will take place May 7-8 at Mankato's Caswell Park.

2010 MIAC 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 (8)
2. St. Thomas (4)
3. Hamline
4. Bethel
5. Saint Mary's
6. Augsburg
7. St. Catherine
8. Saint Benedict
9. Concordia
10. St. Olaf
11. Macalester
12. Carleton

2010 MIAC Playoffs: Friday & Saturday, May 7-8 at Caswell Park in Mankato (Top four teams - double elimination)

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Augsburg

Coach: Tim Gormley (4th season)

2009 Finish: Tied 5th (10-12 MIAC, 12-28 overall)

Augsburg Season Preview

Versatility has been a hallmark of the Augsburg College softball team during head coach Tim Gormley's tenure. Having players able and willing to play multiple positions, taking advantage of unique and varied skills, has helped the program show strong improvement over the past several seasons.

This season should be no exception. With one of the largest rosters in school history – 22 players – to go along with eight returning starters, prospects are good for improvement for the Auggies. Last year, the Auggies finished 12-28 overall, 10-12 in MIAC play, winning 10 of their last 16 games.

“Our goals are always the same, for each individual player to be a better ballplayer, to appreciate the game a little bit more by the end of the year, and for our team to play better as a team,” said Gormley, entering his fourth season as Augsburg's head coach. “We're always trying to play that perfect game, that's always the goal. We want to strive for that perfect game, for all 22 players to strive to play the perfect game.”

With eight players pitching in at least one game last season, Augsburg claimed 140 strikeouts against just 85 walks. Five of the eight pitchers return, led by key returners Melissa Larsen (SR, Andover, Minn.) and Kylee Persing (SO, Mound, Minn./Mound-Westonka HS).

Larsen started 18 games and appeared in 28 last season, pitching a team-high 99.2 innings with 44 strikeouts against just 20 walks. Her control and accuracy in the pitching circle are keys to her success, Gormley noted.

Persing, who also plays multiple infield positions in addition to her pitching talent, recorded a 2-0 record in 11 appearances last season, and is continuing to establish herself as a strong pitcher.

There's plenty of experience throughout the infield, as starters return at four of the five positions. At third base, 2008 MIAC Rookie of the Year Jennifer Castillo (JR, Minneapolis, Minn./Washburn HS) returns. She hit .350 last year – tops among Auggie returners – with six doubles, three triples and 17 RBI.

Persing, who hit .290 last year with a team-high 25 RBI, will likely share significant time at shortstop along with returner Jessa Hinz (JR, Richfield, Minn.). Hinz hit .297 with 24 RBI last season. Saxe will likely see the bulk of time at second base, after starting 18 games there last season.

First base will likely be shared by newcomers Shawna Middleton (FY, Hastings, Minn.), a two-time all-conference player and all-section player in her high school days, and C.J. Rice (SO, Dayton, Minn./Elk River HS), a four-year all-conference and an all-state honorable-mention player transferring to the Auggies from Division II Northern State (S.D.).

Behind the plate, catchers Sabrina Siple (SO, Farmington, Minn.) and Bruzek return to a deep position, which also includes returner Ashley Whittenburg (JR, Brooklyn Center, Minn.) and newcomer Kelsey Rorabeck (FY, Hudson, Wis./Somerset HS), an all-conference recipient in high school.

Siple saw the bulk of time last season at catcher, starting 26 games there. She threw out five runners trying to steal last year. Bruzek, who started 13 games at catcher, threw out two runners attempting to steal.

In the outfield, one of the most improved players from last season will return in leftfielder Laura Strandell (JR, Pine Island, Minn.). Last year, Strandell hit .297 with five doubles and 10 RBI, while claiming three outfield assists.

In center field, Hinz started 16 games last year when not playing in the infield, and her leadership could be a key to the team's success.

Filling the right field spot will come from a group of several players, including Dorale, Ruedy, Larsen and Brittany Ranallo (SO, Minneapolis, Minn./St. Anthony Village HS).



Bethel

Coach: Rod Radcliffe (6th season)

2009 Finish: 4th (14-8 MIAC, 23-19 overall)

Bethel Season Preview

Bethel softball made some great strides in 2009 and the players experienced many team firsts, which made the season memorable. The Royals set new school records for wins in a season (23) and conference wins (14), earning them a top-four finish in the MIAC standings, which allowed them to make their first ever trip to the conference playoff tournament.

The Royals only lose two players from that team and both All-MIAC shortstop Kelly Berg (Jr., South Haven, Minn.) and All-MIAC pitcher Rebecca Akerson (Jr., Lakeville, Minn.) return to lead the team from their respective positions.

Berg was named to the Louisville Slugger/NFCA Division III All-Midwest Region Third Team and set new records for single season and career home runs at Bethel, while Akerson set a new single season ERA record and nearly recorded 100 strikeouts.

Overall, expectations will be high, but so will the excitement surrounding the team.



Carleton

Coach: Amy Erickson (13th season)

2009 Finish: Tied 11th (3-19 MIAC, 4-31 overall)

Carleton Season Preview

With a combination of maturing returners and promising new faces, the Carleton softball team enters the 2010 season hoping change is in the air. With a roster comprised of over two-thirds first-years and sophomores, the young Knights will try to grow up fast and improve their win total for the second straight year.

The largest hole to fill will be on the mound, where the Knights graduated former All-MIAC hurler Mari Jo Long. After throwing 55.1 innings a year ago, sophomore Karen Robinson moves into the primary pitching slot to start 2010. Joining her will be first-year Chelsea Yost, a tall, lanky right-hander with several pitches. Robinson will be a key to the lineup, as her .320 on-base percentage trailed only senior Michael Johnson a year ago.

Johnson once again anchors head coach Amy Erickson's lineup. The Knights' lone selection for the All-MIAC first team last year, Johnson led the team in nearly every meaningful offensive statistic, including a .309 batting average, four home runs, six doubles, 14 RBI, 16 runs scored, a .385 on-base percentage, and a .495 slugging average. The highlight of her season came April 14 against Concordia, when she belted two grand slams in the same game.

On defense, a year after shifting over to shortstop, Johnson will return to her native third base this season, with first-year Kelsey Parsons, an intelligent player with impressive range and a strong arm, stepping in at short.

Joining them on the infield will be sophomore Sarah Marks, who started every game as a rookie in 2009 and will see time at both second and first base. Also logging innings at second will be newcomer Ellen Levine. In addition to her pitching,

While the infield will be full of fresh faces, the Knights will feature experience and speed in the outfield with returners Jessie Briol, Dana Mackey, and Alex Schefter. All three started for the majority of last season, with Schefter leading the group offensively. Backing up the trio will be first-year Hye Mi Ahn, who will also serve as the team's backup catcher.

Starting behind the plate will be another promising first-year, Jocelyn Friedman, a smart, strong-armed backstop with a powerful bat. Along with Parsons, Friedman figures to provide an immediate impact to the Carleton lineup.

Though the Knights are young, their sophomore class will be surprisingly experienced after starting a combined 102 games last season. Along with the other returners, led by Johnson, and an exciting crop of first-years, the Knights look to surprise some teams in the MIAC this year.



Concordia

Coach: Megan Johnson (2nd season)

2009 Finish: Tied 8th (9-13 MIAC, 14-22 overall)

Concordia Season Preview

The 2010 Concordia fastpitch softball team will be relying on the old adage that "pitching and defense win games." The Cobbers head into the new season with a 2009 All-Conference pitcher in the circle and a group of athletes in the field that will help keep CC close throughout the entire season. The big questions mark for Megan Johnson's squad will be on offense where the team graduated two of their top three hitters from a year ago and lost four players who drove in 50.5% of the team's runs last season.

The Cobbers will rely on sophomore Kesley Jones (Billings, Mont./Billings West HS) to handle the majority of the pitching duties in 2010. Last year she was named to the MIAC All-Conference Honorable Mention Team and set the school record for strikeouts in a single season (152). Jones finished her freshman season by winning 11 of the Cobbers' 14 games and posting a team-leading 3.13 ERA. She led the league in strikeouts in conference games for the year with 103. Jones also led the league in innings pitched (109.1), batters struck out looking (26), appearances and games started (16). Jones was also fifth in wins and ninth in opponent's batting average (.269). Finding a second and third pitcher to take the strain off of Jones' arm will be a key factor for Concordia. Brynn Johnson (So., Ulen, Minn./Ulen-Hitterdal HS) is the lone returning pitcher with college experience. Johnson pitched in two games last year and had a 3.00 ERA. She will be joined by freshman Joelle Link (Hardin, Minn.) in trying to give the Cobbers depth at the pitching position.

Jones is also one of the top returning hitters. Last year she finished fourth on the team in hitting with a .326 average. The top returning hitter for the Cobbers is third baseman Maddie Haroldson (Sr., Sartell, Minn.). Haroldson hit .368 in 2009 and was second on the team in batting average. She finished the year by hitting safely in six of the last seven games and seven of the final 10. Both Jones and Haroldson had seven multiple-hit games last year. Haroldson was also second on the team in doubles (6), home runs (3) and slugging percentage (.588).

After Jones and Haroldson, the Cobbers return only two players that hit above .200 in 2009. Emily Salo (So., New York Mills, Minn.) and Nicolle Diekman (Jr., Monticello, Minn.) will be counted on to step up their success in the batters box as the team heads into the new year. Salo played in all 36 games last year as the team's starting shortstop and hit .263. She is the top returning base stealer from last season and will be counted on to bring speed to the top of the lineup. Diekman appeared in 34 games a year ago and, like Salo, relies on speed to get on the base paths. She can play three infield spots and will help the Cobber defense limit opponent's chances in 2010.

The Cobbers have only one senior on this year's squad but has another good group of newcomers. Senior Becki Zimmerman (Chokio, Minn./Chokio-Alberta HS) played in 26 games last year and has appeared in 72 games in her three years in maroon and gold. That experience will help her lead a young team that will be searching to find its way at the start of the season.

Johnson has nine freshmen on the opening-day roster and several have a chance to step in and make an impact right away as Concordia tries to replace their starting catcher, first baseman and center fielder. The biggest hole to fill will be behind the plate where two-time All-MIAC catcher Amanda Michaelson graduated last spring. Michaelson was third on the team in hitting in 2009 but her ability to handle the pitching staff is where she made the biggest impact. A pair of freshmen and a sophomore will be in the mix for the starting catching spot. Sophomore Kayla Hendrickson (Sartell, Minn.) has a year of experience that should give her the leg up over newcomers Haley Vangerud (Fargo, N.D./Oak Grove HS) and Joelle Link.

Other newcomers looking to make a splash in 2010 will be Kaia Sele (Bemidji, Minn.) and Nikki Clouse (Fergus Falls, Minn.). Sele, who was an All-Section selection at Bemidji High School, could take over as the team's starting first baseman and Clouse could see time at shortstop as well as the outfield.



Gustavus

Coach: Jeff Annis (5th season)

2009 Finish: 1st (21-1 MIAC, 42-9 overall)

Gustavus Season Preview

The Gusties enter the 2010 season with high expectations as Head Coach Jeff Annis returns six starters in the field and all three starting pitchers from a squad that won the MIAC Championship with a 21-1 record and then went on to finish third at the NCAA Championship. The team compiled an all-time program best record of 42-9.

Annis has two big holes to fill with the graduation of All-America shortstop Rachael Click and All-Region centerfielder Emily Klein, however he is confident that the experience gained by the 16 returning letterwinners last season will allow the team to compete at the top of the MIAC again this season. The Gusties are ranked #6 in the National Fastpitch Coaches Association (NFCA) Division III Pre-season Poll that was released in mid-February.

Gustavus will build around a talented pitching staff that includes seniors Betsie Collins and Callie Nelsen and junior Erin Truebenbach. All three posted double digit wins last season and give the Gusties one of the deepest and strongest pitching rotations in Division III. Truebenbach, an All-Conference honoree, led the way with a 16-4 record and a 1.34 earned run average in 135.1 innings of work, while Collins, an honorable mention All-Conference honoree, was right behind Truebenbach with a 14-4 mark and a 1.80 earned run average in 108.2 innings on the mound. Nelsen, who registered a 12-1 record with a 2.15 earned run average in 75.0 innings, rounds out the talented pitching trio.

Behind the plate, the team returns two quality catchers who split the duties last season and they are juniors Dani Cattrysse and Kelly Myers. Cattrysse started 30 games and hit .295 with six doubles and 16 RBI, while Myers started 22 games and hit .320. The solid depth behind the plate allows Annis to keep his catchers fresh and healthy during a long and grueling season.

In the infield, the Gusties return three starters including senior third baseman Andrea Brown (an All-Tournament selection at the NCAA Championship), junior first baseman Emily Wendorff (also an All-Tournament selection at the NCAA Championship), and sophomore second baseman Lisa Klass (an All-Tournament selection at the NCAA Midwest Regional). The big question in the infield will be who will play shortstop with the graduation of Rachael Click. Annis will look to junior Jesse Pelzel, who backed up Click last season and junior Kirsten Prunty who started in left field last season. Senior Jenna Johnson will also add depth to the infield backing up Wendorff at first base. She will also contribute as the designated player.

In the outfield, Annis returns starting rightfielder Jenny Ewert. Ewert will likely move to centerfield to fill the opening created by the graduation of Emily Klein. Ewert started 47 games in the outfield last season, hitting .305 and posting an .846 fielding percentage. Others who expect to compete for playing time in the outfield include senior Sheila Arnold, junior Amy Lynch, and sophomores Dee Dee Arnold and Carrie Johnson.

Coach Jeff Annis is confident that with strong pitching and a veteran presence in both the infield and outfield the Gusties can once again challenge for the MIAC Title and contend for a berth in the NCAA Tournament.



Hamline

Coach: Jim Rubbelke (3rd season)

2009 Finish: 3rd (18-4 MIAC, 28-11 overall)

Hamline Season Preview

Third year head coach Jim Rubbelke looks to lead the Hamline University softball team to their fourth straight post-season appearance, and sixth in seven years, as he brings back a strong corps of returning players to the 2010 roster.

Rubbelke does enter this season looking to fill gaps left by the graduation of four starters from last year's team. 2009 All-MIAC honoree Jordan Ulrich, who is the school record-holder in stolen bases, hit .366 and leads the list of graduates. The Pipers also graduated 2009 All-Conference honorable mention honoree Grace Weinrich, and another key pair of players in Kellie Hoen and Sarah Dittberner.

However, returning to lead the Pipers is a veteran battery. 2009 All-MIAC pitcher Jessalyn Weaver (Sr., Eagan, Minn.) compiled a 2.27 ERA while posting a 16-5 overall record. Of her 19 games started, 18 were complete games. She was nearly unstoppable on the rubber for the Pipers in conference play, posting an ERA of 1.83 ERA in MIAC play with a 12-2 record and 12 complete games in 12 starts. Her only two losses in regular season MIAC play came against Gustavus and St. Thomas.

Sharing the pitching duties for the Pipers will be junior Kelsey Tacheny (Saint Paul, Minn.), who had a 2.62 ERA in 16 appearances, all starts. She ran up an 11-3 record.

Ashley Anderberg (Sr., Circle Pines, Minn.) returns behind the plate for the Pipers after an All-MIAC honorable mention season in 2009. She hit .358 in conference play with a team-high 24 RBI in MIAC games while hitting three homeruns and five doubles against conference foes.

The Pipers also return a solid group of infielders in third baseman Brenna Healy (Sr., Mounds View, Minn.), second baseman Heidi Larsen (Jr., Andover, Minn.), and first baseman Erin Farley (Jr., Saint Paul, Minn.). The trio combined for just 10 errors in all of 2009. Additionally, Lori Moldan (So., Sleepy Eye, Minn.) returns and will compete for a starting position in the infield.

Rubbelke's outfield will be the youngest group on the field, but the outfielders will be anchored by the return of Kristi Gravem (So., Maplewood, Minn.), who started 19 games last year and played in 27.

Rubbelke will look to newcomer Bethany Hine (Fy., Carver, Minn.) to help fill in some of the speed lost with the graduation of Ulrich. Also a lefty slapper at the plate, Hine will compete to the starting center fielder for Hamline.

Laura Randall (Fy., Fridley, Minn.) may also see time in the outfield and will add power to the Piper line-up this spring.

With a strong foundation and talented new players looking to make an immediate impact, Rubbelke's 2010 Pipers aim to battle for a top seed in the MIAC tournament and improve upon their third place standing from a year ago.



Macalester

Coach: Tom Cross (7th season)

2009 Finish: Tied 11th (3-19 MIAC, 10-28 overall)

Macalester Season Preview

The Macalester lineup is filled with four-year starters and the Scots are looking to use that experience to make a move up in the MIAC under seventh-year head coach Tom Cross.

Six Macalester returning starters are seniors, mostly four-year starters, including All-MIAC pitcher/infielder Olivia Abbott (Sr., Lakewood, Colo. / Green Mountain), who struck out 87 batters in 188 innings in the circle while also hitting .350 in 21 MIAC games. On the season, Abbott posted a .319 batting average and was second on the team with 24 runs scored while committing just three errors.

Catcher / outfielder Crystal Barriga (Sr., Broomfield, Colo. / Legacy) is Mac's most dangerous hitter in many years and goes into her senior campaign as a .368 career batter. The Scot slugger has 92 RBI's and 11 home runs in 104 games. She owns a .563 career slugging percentage and last year hit .382 with 34 runs driven in.

Infielder/outfielder Ali Nystrom (Sr., Minnetonka, Minn.) was named Mac's MVP in '09 after batting .315 with a team-leading 27 runs scored. Outfielder / catcher Amanda Cagan (Sr., Saratoga, Calif. / Monta Vista) was second on the team with a .351 batting average.

Also returning as four-year starting infielders are Alison Phillips (Sr., Vernon Hills, Ill. / Adlai E. Stevenson) at second base and Carly Klingensmith (Sr., New York, N.Y. / Nightingale-Bamford School). Shortstop Hayley Reeves (Jr., Oberlin, Ohio) didn't play last season for the Scots, but as a frosh, was second on the team with a .458 slugging percentage and 20 RBIs.

Outfielder /pitcher Chloe Souza (So., Los Angeles, Calif. / Windward, Calif.) is coming off a .299 rooking campaign.

Joining Abbott to give the Scots a veteran one-two punch in the pitching circle is Amanda Knopf (So., Boulder, Colo.), who led the team with a 3.71 ERA in 103.2 innings.. Abbott and Knopf combined for 172 strikeouts against just 53 walks. They will each play first base while the other is pitching.

Newcomer Courtney Nussbaumer (Fy., Brookfield, Wis. / East) will get an opportunity to help out in the outfield and at third base.



Saint Benedict

Coach: Denny Johnson (24th season)

2009 Finish: Tied 8th (9-13 MIAC, 13-21 overall)

Saint Benedict Season Preview

The 2010 College of Saint Benedict softball team returns plenty of experience as they look to improve on their eighth place finish in the MIAC last season. CSB finished the 2009 season with a 9-13 record in the MIAC and a 13-21 record overall. The Blazers lost two key players to graduation, but they return seven starters and welcome back seniors Beth Hanson and Shannon Eveland, who both missed the 2009 season. Hanson has successfully recovered from offseason surgery, and Eveland studied abroad last spring. Both players will add depth to the CSB infield. Entering his 24th season as the head coach of the Blazers, Denny Johnson will rely on his ten upperclassmen to lead the team.

Sophomore pitcher Emma Alwin returns to lead the Blazers on the mound. As a first-year player, Alwin recorded seven wins and a 3.05 ERA while striking out 37 batters in 103.1 innings. Juniors Elle Borba and Laura Althoff give the staff 3 solid pitchers. Junior Carissa Hancock returns at the catcher position after starting 32 games last season.

In the infield, CSB will be led by junior middle infielders Devin Bowlin and Kristen Herges. Last season, Bowlin received All-MIAC honorable mention after batting .333 with 25 hits and 14 RBIs, while Herges batted .293 with 24 hits and 13 RBIs. The Blazers also return sophomore Lis Wieneke, who started 34 games at first base as a first-year player. Seniors Hanson and Eveland, both starters as sophomores, and sophomores Amy Mueller and Sierra Dooley will add depth to the Blazer infield.

Juniors Abby Richardson and Alyssa Kubesh will look to lead Blazers in the outfield after the loss of 2009 All-MIAC selection Jillian Rigg to graduation. Richardson is a strong defensive player in the outfield, and she added 19 hits and 16 runs on offense for CSB last season. Kubesh adds power to the Blazer lineup as she hit three homeruns last season and batted .286 with 28 hits and 11 RBIs. Juniors Kirsten Fasching, sophomore Kristi Schammel, and Hanson will compete for the final spot in the Blazer outfield.



St. Catherine

Coach: Madge Makowske (15th season)

2009 Finish: Tied 5th (10-12 MIAC, 12-23 overall)

St. Catherine Season Preview

The 2010 Wildcats softball team is a young group hoping to push into playoff position in the ever tough MIAC. The 2009 team finished one place short of qualifying for a MIAC playoff spot. This year's team is looking to use the experience of those returning players and blend it with the incoming talent of the first-year group to move into the top half of the conference standings.

Returning for St. Kate's is NFCA Third Team All-Region and MIAC All-conference player Jess Kniefel (Jr., Owatonna, Minn.). Kniefel led the team in hits (45), runs (22), stolen bases (14) and batting average (.417) in 2009. Other key returners will be MIAC All-conference honorable mention infielder Jenna Clark (Sr., Woodbury, Minn.), infielder Kaitlyn Frank (So., Billings, Mont.), utility Kelsey Luedtke (So., Spring Lake Park, Minn.) and the 2009 starting battery of Kayla Bergerson (Jr., Anoka, Minn.) and Katie Allen (Sr., Duluth, Minn.).

First year newcomers expected to have an impact include Morgan Bohmbach (Red Wing, Minn.) and Sarah McLennan (Brooklyn Park, Minn./Robbinsdale Cooper). The first year duo will shoulder much of the responsibility on the mound for the Cats. Other new impact players will include catcher/third baseman Regan Kriechbaum (Fr., Faribault, Minn./Bethlehem Academy) and utility player Heidi Sande (So., Grand Marais, Minn.).

Coach Makowske has been impressed with the focus and work ethic of this year's team and hopes that it will translate into a successful season.



Saint Mary's

Coach: Jen Miller (4th season)

2009 Finish: Tied 5th (10-12 MIAC, 18-22 overall)

Saint Mary's Season Preview

Three years ago, Saint Mary's University fastpitch softball coach Jen Miller went 21 straight games with the same lineup. This year Miller doesn't know if she'll go two straight games with the same 10 players on the lineup card.

"We have more depth than ever before and more players that are capable of playing multiple positions for us," said Miller, who is in her fourth year as head coach of the Cardinals. "It's a good problem to have, but it also means we will have a lot of good players sitting on the bench."

Miller and the Cardinals will start their lineup experiments on March 18, when the team travels to Orange, Calif., for the Sun West Tournament. Miller says she'll continue to play around with the line up during the season in hopes of finding the best combination when it comes down to tournament time.

The Cardinals will be looking to return to the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference Tournament, after missing it by one spot in both 2008 and 2009. SMU went 10-12 in the MIAC last season, while finishing 18-22 overall.

"Our first goal is to return to the conference tournament," Miller said. "But that isn't our only goal. We really believe we have a shot at winning the conference this season and playing in the regional tournament."

Leading the Cardinals will be sophomore Nicole Olson (New Brighton, Minn.), and juniors Mallory Betzold (Farmington, Minn.), Katy Gannon (Roselle, Ill.), Jaci Prondzinski (Ettrick, Wis.) and Kellie Simons (Richfield, Minn.) — the Cardinals' top five returning offensive performers of last season, all of which hit .300 or better a year ago

Betzold, who was named to the All-MIAC First Team last season, and Prondzinski will shoulder the bulk of the pitching duties this season, while also splitting time with senior Angie Diercks (Red Wing, Minn.) at first base. Other returning infielders include Olson, Gannon, Simons, senior Hanna Schmitt (Rosemount, Minn.), and junior Joanna Mangan (Chicago, Ill.) Olson, Gannon and Simons.

"We are returning a lot of experience on the mound and in the infield, and that will definitely be a strength for us," Miller said.

Where the Cardinals will be inexperienced is in the outfield, after the graduation of standouts Cassie Otte and Danielle Geske. Only sophomore Morgan Stock (Amboy, Minn.) and junior Jessica Sharpe (Ottawa, Ill.) saw playing time on the grass last year.

"We are going to be inexperienced in the outfield, but everyone's been doing very well in practice and we're optimistic," Miller said. "We're very excited about our freshman class this year and hope they can help out in that area."



St. Olaf

Coach: Ruthie Neuger (6th season)

2009 Finish: 10th (5-17 MIAC, 9-29 overall)

St. Olaf Season Preview

The 2009-10 St. Olaf Softball team will be led by two seniors, two juniors and a host of first years. The Oles expect to improve on last season's 9-29 mark overall and a 5-17 record in league play.

The Oles will look to three-time All-MIAC senior Ali Berens to lead the way. Senior Ellen Larson, and juniors Katie Truax and Kjirsten Speer will also have major roles.

The Oles have five first years -- Jess Laurinaitis, Jessica Wilson, Mackenzie Wolter, Cara Lemmon and Maggie Scholer -- who are expected to be major contributors to the Oles' success.

On the mound, the Oles will be led by Truax. She started in 22 of her 25 appearances, tossing 104 innings with 57 strikeouts with an ERA of 6.31. Natalee McNeff, who appeared in 13 games last spring, will most likely see more innings. The Oles will also look to first year Amy Prok to see some innings.

Berens had led the team in almost every statistical category last year and is expected to play third base this year. Berens played and started in all 38 games and collected a .398 average on 47 hits, four homeruns and 14 doubles.

Larson and junior Mel Brooks will start the year on the right side of the infield, playing second and first base. Larson started in all 38 games last season and had 30 hits in 116 at bats (.259). Brooks has two solid years of experience as the Oles' first baseman. Last year she started in 35 games last season and hit .237 in 93 at bats.

First year Jessica Laurinaitis could also see time at second base although returning sophomore Esti Zimmerman could battle for the spot as well.

Mackenzie Wolter will most likely hold down the shortstop position and Esti Zimmerman will be another option for the team.

First year Maggie Scholer and sophomore returner Kari Zimmerman will share time behind the dish.

Speer returns for her third season in the outfield. She started in all 38 games of last season and went 26-for-106 (.245). Speer and first year Cara Lemmon will most likely split the center and right field positions.

Left field will likely be filled by another first year, Jessica Wilson.

Julie Fergus is expected to have a presence with her bat at the designated hitter and may see time in the outfield as well.

Head Coach Ruthie Neuger enters her sixth season as the St. Olaf Softball team's head coach.

Joining Coach Neuger this year as assistant coaches will be Matt Neuger and Patrick Wadzinski, two '2009 St. Olaf graduates.



St. Thomas

Coach: John Tschida (10th season)

2009 Finish: 2nd (20-2 MIAC, 40-6 overall)

St. Thomas Season Preview

Young is the word for Coach John Tschida as he prepares to open the 2010 Tommie softball season. St. Thomas has only three seniors among its 16 returning players, and also has eight freshmen.

St. Thomas graduated eight seniors from last spring's 40-6 team that was MIAC runner-up, conference tournament champion, and an NCAA playoff qualifier.

In his 15 seasons as a college head coach, Tschida has won three national championships and is the winningest Division III coach, active or retired, (winning percentage, .854) with a 573-98 record.

Among Tschida's key losses was 2009 All-American OF Missy Bruggemann (184 hits in 185 career games); 2008 All-American 2B Kaitlyn Wightman (last three seasons in 135 games had 167 hits, 145 runs, 84 RBI); catcher Steph Moores (14 HRs, 112 RBI, 151 hits in 159 career games); shortstop Morgan Betker (21 HRs, 112 RBI, 34 doubles, 153 hits in 154 career games); and All-Region IB Colleen Owen (.429 BA last season, 12 career HRs).

Leading the UST returners are two seniors -- two-time first-team All-American OF Alison Wright and senior pitcher Marta Radcliffe.

Wright is on pace to become the conference career hits leader as she needs 43 to pass ex-Tommie Michelle Wong. She had a 34-game hitting streak -- the third longest in D-III history -- from April 2008-April 2009. That included hits in her first 23 games of 2009. In all 46 games she had 76 hits, 49 runs, 16 doubles, 10 home runs, 59 RBI, 10 walks and 13 steals. The 76 hits were four shy of the MIAC season record set in 2006 by UST's Carrie Embree.

On her three-year career, Wright has helped UST post a 124-15 record (73-2 vs. conference teams). She's batting .465 on her career with 197 hits, 119 runs, 126 RBI, 23 homers, 44 doubles and two triples in 136 games. Wright has 65 career multi-hit games. Her 23 career homers rank sixth in MIAC history. She was named MVP of the April 30-May 1 conference tournament.

Radcliffe, 42-9 on her career, was named the 2009 MIAC Pitcher of the Year. She went 22-6 last season with 173 strikeouts in 160 innings and a 1.80 era. Radcliffe held opposing batters to an average of .150, second best in the conference.

Two other sophomores add pitching depth -- Christy Gries was 8-0 with a 1.88 ERA, and Angela Phillips was 9-0 with a 0.26 ERA.

Junior 2B Sydney Marquardt started 20 games last season and hit .362 with 25 hits and 18 RBI. Sophomore Becky Eischens started 37 games in the outfield and batted .279 with 19 hits and 12 runs.

UST's prime task is to find replacements at the key defensive positions of catcher, shortstop and third base.