

2007 MIAC Volleyball Season Preview

Posted: Sep 07, 2007

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The 2007 MIAC volleyball season on paper looks to be a two horse race for the top spot between two nationally ranked teams: Concordia and St. Thomas. As the season plays out, a handful of teams should give the top two a run for their money. An equally competitive race should be fought in the middle of the pack with teams all trying to get in the top six and a place in the MIAC Playoffs.

Perennial power Concordia will be looking to make a fifth straight NCAA appearance. This year they will not be able to rely on a high-powered offense to overwhelm opponents. Senior captain Michelle Honek is the unquestioned leader of the offense, but defense and passing should be the Cobbers' strength. They return juniors Alyssa Dahl and Jill Hance to anchor the Cobbers defense.

St. Thomas should be fighting Concordia for the top spot all year, but will have to do it with a roster that includes 14 freshmen. Coach Thanh Pham does return Kristin Storrs, a two-time All-MIAC hitter, along with a solid core of veterans. With so many freshmen on the roster, St. Thomas will be counting on at least a few of the first-year players to step into prominent roles.

Gustavus will contend with Concordia and St. Thomas for the top spot in the standings again this year. The Gusties return a solid core of veterans led by MIAC Co-Defensive Player of the Year Emily Klein and All-Conference hitters Andrea Kron and Jennifer Thelemann. Gustavus hasn't had a dual offensive threat like they do now since the early nineties. Junior Bridget Burtzel will again be the main person setting up the one two punch of Kron and Thelemann.

Saint Benedict and Carleton have the look of playoff teams this year, but they will be doing it in different ways. Saint Benedict has only one senior, middle blocker Theresa Naumann. Sophomores Emma Jaynes and Beth Hanson will support Naumann. Sophomore transfer Lindsey Grauman will look to be the team's defensive specialist, but how quickly the freshman are able to contribute will go a long way to deciding Saint Benedict's fate in 2007.

Experience will not be a problem for Heidi Jaynes' team this year. Anchoring Carleton's team will be four-year starter Heather La Chappelle who is the team's returning assist leader. She will be setting up seniors Samantha Hendricks and Libby Ritz early and often. Even the younger players have experience because they were key contributors last year and will be expected to increase their roles this season.

Another experienced team coming into 2007 will be Bethel who returns all its starters from a 19 win team. Senior captain Liz Glesne who will challenge the school record for kills this season will lead the Royals offensively partly because of starting setter and captain Laura Naig. Defense has been Bethel's calling card in the past and with Joslin Geisler back, defense will continue to be the name of the game.

Challenging Bethel, Carleton and Saint Benedict for the final few playoff spots will be a young St. Olaf team and an experienced Saint Mary's team.

St. Olaf will have seven freshmen logging a lot of time this year and will rely on the experience of Jess Levin and Abby Fournier. St. Olaf's success will rely heavily on how fast the first-year players can adjust to the college game.

The opposite of St. Olaf is Saint Mary's. Saint Mary's only graduated one player off of last year's team and all of that experience, led by Theresa Perrini and Pam Stanton will attempt to improve last year's 10th place finish. Saint Mary's players were disappointed with last year and have dedicated themselves to improving greatly in 2007.

Augsburg returns an experienced team as well and along with Saint Mary's will attempt to improve on last year. The Auggies will be led by a solid group of returning players including Dani Bonner up front and Haley Bower and Dani Tanaka on the back line. Coach Jessica Rinehart will have a big freshman class as well as Division I transfer Laura Harms to push for playing time and add depth.

Looking to surprise some of the contenders and push for a playoff stop will be St. Catherine, Macalester and Hamline. St. Catherine will be led on offense by sophomore Maria Hoffman, on defense by senior Erika Kriechbaum and senior setter Whitney Sparby. Behind the trio will be a group of young players looking to step into prominent roles.

Macalester lost its top three scorers from last year, but will be solid defensively with seniors Marie Godwin, Marisa Raether and Megan Thompson. If the Scots can find enough offense, they will look to improve on last year's 12-11 record.

Hamline will be hoping its young roster can get them into the MIAC playoffs for a second straight year. They will be counting heavily on the experience of senior Shelby Hyllengren and junior Amanda Booth. Their leadership will be valuable considering Hamline only has two seniors on its entire roster.

MIAC Preseason Coaches Poll: (1) Concordia, (2) St. Thomas, (3) Gustavus, (4) Saint Benedict, (5) Carleton, (6) Bethel, (7) St. Olaf, (8) Saint Mary's, (9) Augsburg, (T-10) Macalester, (T-10) St. Catherine, (12) Hamline.

MIAC Playoffs Dates (Top Six Teams): Quarterfinals (Tuesday, October 30); Semifinals (Thursday, November 1); Finals (Saturday, November 3).

Augsburg

Coach: Jessica Rhinehart

Career Record: 64-70 (4 seasons)

2006 Finish: Tied 11th/(2-9 MIAC, 11-17 overall)

Augsburg Players to Watch
Julie Jenkins (S/OH, 5-11, Jr., Edina, Minn.)
Haley Bower (DS, 5-6, Sr., Brainerd, Minn.)
Dani Boner (OH, 5-9, Jr., Omaha, Neb./Mercy)
Dani Tanaka (DS, 5-3, So., Bloomington, Minn./Jefferson HS)

Augsburg Season Preview
<p>The road to improvement for the Augsburg College volleyball team in 2007 actually began with the last match of the 2006 season. The Auggies closed the 2006 campaign with a thrilling victory in four games over Hamline University, a squad bound for the six-team Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference playoffs.</p> <p>Reaching the conference postseason tournament is a definite goal for the Auggies this season. It's a destination the team has not reached since the MIAC limited the playoffs to the top six teams in the league in 2001. The Auggies return eight letterwinners, including five starters, to this year's roster, and also have a strong recruiting and transfer class.</p> <p>"I'm looking forward to the experience we have coming back," said head coach Jessica Rinehart, entering her third season at Augsburg. "Last year, we started three freshmen and a transfer, so everyone was new to the court and to each other ... This preseason, we've been able to pick things up at a faster pace and start at a higher level."</p> <p>Last season, the Auggies finished with an 11-17 overall record, the most wins for an Augsburg squad since 2001 (12-18). With an experienced and hard-working lineup returning, Rinehart is aiming for strong improvement on the team's conference record, which was 2-9 last season.</p> <p>"We're very solid throughout every position," Rinehart said. "These girls have a great work ethic, day-in and day-out. It's very impressive. It makes for a competitive and fun practice environment."</p> <p>A solid group of players are back for the Auggies, a group that gained a valuable year of experience in Rinehart's system.</p> <p>Three returners are back at outside hitter, led by Dani Boner (Jr., Omaha, Neb./Mercy HS), a two-year starter who was second on the squad in kills (300), digs (246) and service aces (33) last season. Behind Boner will be two players who gained tremendous experience last season, senior Kristina Lurken (Sr., Kenyon, Minn./Kenyon-Wanamingo HS) and Breann Woelfel (So., Annandale, Minn.).</p>

"Dani has been our go-to left-side hitter the last two years," Rinehart said. "It will be great to have her as a junior. She has an attitude that shows she really wants it this year. She's committed to getting our team to the playoffs, and I'm looking forward to watching her compete in the MIAC."

On the opposite side, Julie Jenkins (Jr., Edina, Minn.) is back. A versatile player who split time between hitting and setting in the team's 6-2 alignment last season, Jenkins recorded three kill-assist-dig "triple-doubles" last season, finishing the year with 182 kills, 591 assists, 237 digs and 80 blocks (22 solo). Amanda Rueb (Jr., Plymouth, Minn./West Lutheran HS) returns to the middle, bringing a strong attitude and improved blocking skills to the position, Rinehart noted.

Setter Shanna Reed (So., Eagan, Minn./Holy Angels HS) returns to the lineup, after recording 595 assists and 194 digs while splitting duties with Jenkins last year. In the back row, liberos Haley Bower (Sr., Brainerd, Minn.) and Dani Tanaka (So., Bloomington, Minn./Jefferson HS) are back. Bower recorded 517 digs last year, while Tanaka had 234 digs.

"Haley is the most consistently tough player we have on our team," Rinehart said of Bower, a three-year veteran. "She's a really good communicator. She starts our entire offense, so she's really important to us."

Eleven newcomers will join the Auggie volleyball program this season, led by Laura Harms (Jr., Little Falls, Minn.), a transfer from Division I Mercer (Ga.). Harms, a middle hitter who was a two-time all-conference selection in high school, recorded 109 blocks and 394 kills in her two seasons at Mercer as a key contributor for the Bears.

"Laura is a great player. She's very athletic and will be a threat on offense," Rinehart said. "Teams will have to target her, which should really open up our offense."

Right-side hitter Melissa Larsen (Jr., Andover, Minn.) transfers from Minnesota-Duluth, where she played softball for a season. She was an all-conference volleyball player in her high school days, and Rinehart described her as a very consistent player.

Bethel

Coach: Gretchen Hunt

Career Record: 112-80 (6 seasons)

2006 Finish: Tied 6th/(5-6 MIAC, 19-12 overall)

Bethel Players to Watch

Liz Glesne (Sr., OH, 5-11)

Laura Naig (Sr., S, 5-6)

Joslin Geisler (Sr., Libero, 5-7)

Jennifer Stoa (Jr., MB, 5-10)

Bethel Season Preview

The 2007 volleyball season is beginning very optimistically for a Bethel squad that returns their entire starting line-up and their Libero player from a team that went 19-12 last season. Without a senior in the regular line-up in 2006, the young Royals defeated nationally ranked St. Thomas and Rhodes College during the season, and took an Emory squad, ranked 4th in the nation at the time, to five games on their own home floor. "It's an indication of how close we really were to being an elite team," says Head Coach Gretchen Hunt. "Our conference and our region are so tough night in and night out, anyone can beat anyone. But elite teams don't just knock off one or two top teams; they do it on a consistent basis."

With II Corinthians 4:7 as their foundation, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us," the coaching staff and captains hope to gain that consistent excellence by focusing their team on the quality of "toughness" – doing the difficult things when no one else wants to do them. "But we want the world to know that any 'toughness' or power that we have comes not from our own strength, but from the strength we have through a relationship with Christ," explains senior captain Kayla Smith (Lakeville, MN.).

In this quest, Hunt and her staff will rely heavily on senior captain Liz Glesne (Underwood, Minn.). A two-time all-conference selection, she was an AVCA All-Region First-team selection in 2006, she has already amassed 1418 kills in her career, and remains only 318 kills short of holding Bethel's all-time career record. "Liz is a competitor and brings great confidence to the floor," says Hunt. "We will rely on her significantly for both offense and defense this season."

Along with Glesne, top hitters for Bethel will include returning players Amy Anderson (Alexandria, Minn.), Jennifer Stoa (Brooklyn Park, MN), Stephanie Schmidt (Montgomery, Minn.), and Chelsea Falck (DeForest, Wis.). "We are looking to do some exciting things with our offense, so while we don't know where these players will fit exactly, these players are strong offensive weapons," says Coach Hunt. Anderson tallied 560 kills in the past two seasons, averaging more than three kills per game. Stoa led the Royals with 129 blocks in 2006, landing her sixth on Bethel's all-time single season list, and she also was selected by her teammates as a captain for 2007. Schmidt returned to volleyball after not playing since she graduated high school in 2003, and was an immediate contributor averaging more than two kills a game. Coach Hunt believes, "After a year of college volleyball under her belt, Stephanie is going to be an impact player in our league." Falck saw limited action as a reserve on the right side, but has really shown versatility and athleticism throughout spring practices and preseason.

Other returning hitters to the program who also have Varsity experience include Alissa Martin (Williams Bay, Wis.) and Lauren Erickson (Woodbury, Minn.). Martin appeared in 26 matches for the Royals in 2006 as a valuable reserve middle hitter. Erickson (formerly Darrell) appeared in seven matches in 2006, and after taking her freshman year off from volleyball, has been making great strides in learning the college game.

Running the court for this group of hitters will be returning starting setter and captain, Laura Naig (Kasson, Minn.) Naig tallied over 1200 assists in 2006, and was named to the All-Tournament team at the competitive Emory University Invitational. "Laura is a great leader by example and is really starting to grasp all of the nuances of running a college offense," says Hunt. "We ask our setters to do a lot on the court, and she has really risen to the challenge."

Defense has always anchored teams coached by Hunt at Bethel, and 2007 will be no different. Both Joslin Geisler (Grand Rapids, Minn.) and Smith, the top two dig leaders from 2006, return for the Royals. Geisler led the team with 587, and Smith tallied 339. "Kayla and Joslin have a great deal of experience as primary passers and covering the floor defensively. They work well together and will be the keys to our ball control," says Hunt. Another returning player who will push Geisler and Smith for time is Bethany Shearer (Prior Lake, Minn.). According to Hunt, "Bethany is probably the quickest of all three, and she plays with great confidence. I am looking forward to seeing Bethany work full-time with the Varsity group."

Finally, there are a group of players from the 2006 Junior Varsity squad that are hoping to make their own contributions to the team. Laura Anderson (Alexandria, Minn.), Danielle Johnson (Tacoma, Wash.), and Alyssum Roe (Copper Center, Alaska) are all returning to compete for positions in 2007.

While the 2007 Royals will be built on experience, a few newcomers hope to make their presence known immediately. Transfer Kelly Otto (Plymouth, Minn./Trinity International University) was a huge off-season addition for the Royals. An All-State (Honorable Mention) selection in 2005, and a starter at Trinity International University (NAIA) in 2006, Otto brings a lot of club experience and a year of college experience the team. Hunt says, "Kelly is a great blocker and gives us several offensive options."

Besty Naatjes (Sioux Falls, S.D.), South Dakota's "Miss Volleyball" and "Gatorade Player of the Year," who led her Sioux Falls Roosevelt team to a state title in 2006, will be pushing for time at the setter position. Brianna Falck (DeForest, Wis.), the younger sister of Chelsea, is an explosive athlete who excelled at three sports in high school, and she can play setter or any front row hitter position. Hannah Parks (Wayzata, Minn.) brings a resume full of elite level club experience and a State Tournament appearance with one of the elite high school programs in the State, Wayzata high school. Lindsay Snyder (Alexandria, Minn.), younger sister of Bethel grad and All-MIAC and All-Region setter Katie (Snyder) Bjorklund, brings great quickness to her position as a defensive specialist – along with great experience from club volleyball and a State tournament appearance with Alexandria.

"I am so excited to get all of these players together in the gym working toward one goal," says Hunt. "They all bring unique gifts to our team, and they have been working so hard this summer. I had the chance to see several of them at our summer volleyball camps, and I can tell that this is going to be a really fun group. But they are also going to work hard and challenge each other. It's going to be a great year."

Carleton

Coach: Heidi Jaynes
Career Record: 120-92 (8 seasons)
2006 Finish: Tied 4th/(7-4 MIAC, 13-11 overall)

Carleton Players to Watch
Laura Barsness (So., L-DS, Lakeville, Minn./Lakeville North)
Annie Eckhoff (So., MH, Northfield, Minn./Northfield)
Samantha Hendricks (Sr., MH-OH, Watertown, Minn./Watertown-Mayer)
Heather La Chapelle (Sr., S, Eagan, Minn./Eagan)
Megan La Chapelle (Jr., OH, Eagan, Minn./Eagan)
Libby Ritz (Sr., RS-MH, Madison, Wis./West)

Carleton Season Preview

The Carleton College volleyball team heads into the 2007 season with an experienced and deep roster. Head coach Heidi Jaynes returns 11 players from last season's squad that went 13-11, including a 7-4 mark in the MIAC as Carleton tied with St. Thomas for third in the conference standings.

Leading the returnees for the Knights is senior Heather La Chappelle (Eagan, Minn./Eagan), who is a four-year starter for the Knights and averaged 8.7 assists and 3.2 digs per game last season. For her career, she has totaled 2,606 assists, an average of 9.62 per game.

Samantha Hendricks (Sr./MH-OH/Watertown, Minn./Watertown-Mayer) was third on the squad last year in kills with 2.56 per game while Libby Ritz's (Sr./RS-MH/Madison, Wis./West) .225 hitting average ranked third on the team.

Laura Barsness (So./L-DS/Lakeville, Minn./Lakeville North) established herself as the Knights' best passer and will once again play the important role as the libero, the position she used last year to total a team-best 5.9 digs per game. Sarah Kunelius (Jr./MH/Eagan, Minn./Eagan) was a force at the net last season, leading the Knights in blocks (77) and attack percentage (.264) while ranking second in kills with 2.7 per game.

Annie Eckhoff (So./MH/Northfield, Minn./Northfield) started 22 matches last year at middle hitter as a rookie and was second on the team in blocks (75) and attack percentage (.239) in addition to ranking fourth with 2.0 kills per game. Megan La Chapelle (Jr./OH/Eagan, Minn./Eagan) finished fourth on the Knights in kills with 1.8 per game and was third with 3.2 digs per game.

Concordia

Coach: Tim Mosser

Career Record: 269-170 (14 seasons)

2006 Finish: 1st/(11-0 MIAC, 25-2 overall)

Concordia Players to Watch

Michelle Honek (Sr., RH, Staples, Minn.)

Jill Hance (Jr., S, Hopkins, Minn.)

Alyssa Dahl (Jr., S, Willmar, Minn.)

Abby Scheel (Jr., MH, Fergus Falls, Minn.)

Angie Bonde (So., OH, Nertrand, Minn.)

Concordia Season Preview

This is the year that the rest of the MIAC has been pointing to for several seasons. It is supposed to be the year when Concordia's cupboards are finally bare and the string of four straight NCAA playoff appearances comes to an end.

Don't tell head coach Tim Mosser or the rest of this year's Cobbers that theory. They are out to prove the Concordia volleyball program has the staying power of a multi-hit band and not just a quick rise to the top followed by a drop off the charts like a one-hit wonder.

Mosser will have to do a little more coaching in 2007 if he wants to keep the Cobbers at the top of the conference charts. Gone are the days of simply filling out the lineup card and watching his multi All-American front line dismantle opponents at will. This year's team will have to rely on superior defense and their ability to wear MIAC opponents down on a slow grind. The loss of two-time All-American Becca Shane and 2006 All-American Honorable Mention teammate Danielle Dahl means that the CC offensive attack will feature brand new faces. Shane and Dahl were the

top two offensive players on the team last season. They led the team in kills, total attacks, attack percentage, points and blocks. Add Lindsay Sipma, who was also lost due to graduation, and the trio accounted for 58.1% of the team's total kills and 48.4% of the squad's total offensive attacks.

The lone returning offensive threat from 2006 is senior captain Michelle Honek (Staples, Minn./Staples-Motley HS). She has been the consummate team player in her first three seasons as a Cobber. She has allowed other players to step into the spotlight and fill the stat sheet. In 2007, she will need to be the consistent force on offense and be counted among the league leaders in kills and attacks. She is one of the best outside hitters in the conference and should have an all-conference type season.

After Honek, the Cobber frontline will be a mix of unknowns, up-and-comers and freshmen. The biggest presence in the middle of the court will be junior Abby Scheel (Fergus Falls, Minn./Hillcrest Lutheran Academy). Scheel was second on the team in blocks, finishing with 106 – only the fourth player in program history to record over 100 blocks in a single season. She will have to be more of an offensive force if CC will be able to defend its title.

A trio of unknown sophomores will be thrown into the deep end of high-level competition. Angie Bonde (Nerstrand, Minn./Faribault HS), Meghann Southwick (Byron, Minn.) and Maggie Olson (Fargo, N.D./Fargo North HS) showed big potential as freshmen. Bonde garnered the most experience, finishing fifth on the team in kills with 163. Southwick had 25 kills in only 84 attack chances and Olson was a late call-up to the varsity squad. All three have the potential to be among the better players in the MIAC and fill the shoes of former top Concordia players.

The rallying points for the Cobbers in 2007 will be their defense and experience in the passing game. Led by a pair of junior setters who have played since they were freshmen, the CC frontline should be on the receiving end of quality sets match in and match out. Alysaa Dahl and Jill Hance have been at the forefront of Mosser's offense for two years and will not be overcome when the team plays against nationally and regionally ranked opponents. Hance had 395 assists last year and Dahl was right behind with 393. The two have combined for 1,790 assists in their first two seasons.

Junior Anna Tinkham (Fisher, Minn.) will step into the role of defensive specialist at the start of the season. She takes over for Anna Walden who graduated in the spring and led the team in digs (410) last year. Tinkham's athletic ability and leadership characteristics will be needed when the team heads to Missouri to participate in the prestigious Washington University Invitational in the early stages of September.

The key for Concordia will be to find the right mix of players who can blend together in a hurry. That's where Mosser will have to earn his keep. The 2006 AVCA Region Coach of the Year, Mosser has kicked the program into the national spotlight in the past four seasons by fashioning a record of 96-19, capturing three MIAC Tournament championships and landing four straight NCAA playoff berths. His calming nature will help Concordia face the tough battle of defending their regular season and conference tournament titles in 2007.

If Concordia can get through the middle of September with their confidence intact and their record above .500, then Mosser could be staring down another trip into the postseason. All that would just further cement the fact that the Cobber volleyball program is turning into one of the constant hit makers in the business.

For more on Cobber volleyball go to: www.cord.edu/dept/sports/fall/vb/index.php

Gustavus

Coach: Kari Eckheart

Career Record: 151-133 (10 seasons)

2006 Finish: 2nd/(9-2 MIAC, 18-9 overall)

Gustavus Players to Watch

Andrea Kron (Sr., Rightside Hitter, Cold Spring, Minn./ROCORI)

Jennifer Thelemann (Sr., Outside Hitter, LeSueur, Minn.)

Emily Klein (Jr., Libero, Red Wing, Minn.)

Bridget Burtzel (Jr., Setter, Cold Spring, Minn./ROCORI)

Gustavus Season Preview

After a second-place conference finish and an 18-9 record last fall, the Gustavus Adolphus College volleyball team will look to contend for the MIAC title again in 2007. Head Coach Kari Eckheart will be looking for MIAC Co-Defensive Player of the Year Emily Klein and all-conference performers Andrea Kron and Jennifer Thelemann, to join eight other returning letterwinners.

Klein (Red Wing, Minn.), a junior libero, will be asked to continue anchoring a defense that ranked second in the MIAC last season. Klein is set to become the all-time dig leader at Gustavus this year, as she needs only 159 digs to accomplish this feat. Senior outside hitter Andrea Kron (Cold Spring, Minn.) will be relied on to provide much of the offensive firepower this year after finishing last season with 410 kills. Kron needs 229 kills to move into third place on the all-time kills list. Jennifer Thelemann (Le Sueur, Minn.) is the other half of Gustavus' dynamic hitting duo, contributing 391 kills to last year's campaign. Kron and Thelemann combined to give Gustavus its most successful offensive attack since Katie Olstad and Jen Churchich in 1993.

Supporting cast members include veteran setter Bridget Burtzel (Jr., Cold Spring, Minn.), who tallied 1,031 assists last year. She needs 532 assists to earn the distinction of moving into fourth place at Gustavus all-time. Jessi Weber (Osceola, Wis.) saw significant playing time in the back row and will be called upon to help Klein jump start the potent Gustie offense.

A few questions remain for Eckheart's crew this year after the loss of four key players. One question is who will step in as the dominant presence at the net with the graduation of a veteran middle blocker Becca Thompson and the loss of sophomore Danielle Gimmestad. Despite limited playing time last year, Meghan Gehring (Eau Claire, Wis.) has the opportunity to land one of these spots. Eckheart will also be looking to fill the other outside hitter spot vacated by the graduation of Jessica Plemel.

The squad will look to incoming players Nicki Ainsworth, an outside hitter from Eden Prairie, Minn., Samantha Broderuis, a setter from Hector, Minn., Janey Helland, a hitter from Mapleton, Minn., and Beth Butala, a hitter from Bloomington, Minn. to provide depth as the team looks to stay among the MIAC elite.

Hamline

Coach: Lynette Jones

Career Record: 0-0 (1st season)

2006 Finish: 5th/(6-5 MIAC, 17-10 overall)

Hamline Players to Watch

Amanda Booth (Jr., Champlin, Minn., 6-0, MB)

Shelby Hyllengren (Sr., Cannon Falls, Minn., 5-9, OH)

Tasha Simmons (So., Eagan, Minn., 5-8, OH)

Jackie Kelly (Fy., Blaine, Minn., 5-7, Setter/RH)

Heidi Larsen (Fy., Andover, Minn., 5-7, DS)

Amanda Lindeman (Fy., LeSueur, Minn., 5-5, Setter)

Hamline Season Preview

Following a season in which the Pipers made their first playoff appearance since the MIAC went to the six-team format, first-year head coach Lynette Jones looks to help her squad make a quick adjustment to a new coaching staff while building upon the successes of the 2006 season. And she will be doing it with just two seniors on her roster.

"We have a great core of returning juniors and seniors who know what it takes to be successful in the MIAC, and I anticipate they will step up and pick up where the team left off last season," said Jones. "We also have a strong group of incoming new players who will have the chance to contribute immediately."

One of the Pipers' biggest challenges as the team takes to the floor will be finding players to replace graduated middle blockers Dana Luiken (Chatfield, Minn.) and Christina Rossetter (Knife River, Minn.). Luiken, who was named AVCA All-Central Region honorable mention in 2006, was the heart of the Pipers offense last year, providing a great presence – both athletically and vocally – on the floor. "It's tough to lose the player around whom an offense was centered, but this gives our returning players a great chance to make our offense their own," said Jones.

Jones will be looking at junior Amanda Booth (Champlin, Minn.) to take over as the go-to player in the middle for the Pipers. Booth is already sixth on the all-time list at Hamline for blocks after just two years of play. Junior Brittany Roemhild (Barron, Wis.), who had to sit out the 2006 season with an injury and sophomore Aubrey Hendry (Isle, Minn.) will be joining Booth in the middle. Two strong outside hitters will be returning to the team to compliment Booth, Roemhild and Hendry - senior Shelby Hyllengren (Cannon Falls, Minn.), who was second on the team in kills in 2006 with 318 and the 2006 MIAC Rookie of the Year, sophomore Tasha Simmons (Eagan, Minn.). Junior Emily Amici (Whitewater, Wis.) will also be returning to round out the offense and chip in on defense as a utility player, after contributing 40 kills and 1.59 digs per game in 2006.

"The main challenge heading into this season will be to fill the middle position, but we do anticipate a strong, solid front row. Four players (Booth, Roemhild, Simmons and Hyllengren) will be counted upon to lead that charge," according to Jones. Booth, Simmons and Hyllengren all tallied more than 225 kills during the 2006 campaign. To run the offense this year, Jones will have the choice of three talented setters. Junior Jenny Nichols (Rockford, Minn.) had 768 assists in 2006, which placed her as sixth on the single-season assists list. She will be contributing veteran experience and proven success to help guide two newcomers who will be competing for playing time. "Jackie Kelly (Blaine, Minn.) and Amanda Lindeman (LeSueur, Minn.) should both have the opportunity to see some time on the court since they are coming to us from very successful high school programs," said Jones.

Defensively, Nichols looks to increase the 179 digs she recorded last year in order to fill in for the loss of Jenna Witt's (Champlin, Minn.) 364 digs on a 2006 team that finished fifth in the MIAC. Simmons should also continue her defensive dominance, as her 338 digs during her freshman season were second on the team in 2006.

Sara Burns (LeSueur, Minn.) joins Hyllengren as the only other senior on the team. The defensive specialist averaged 2.56 digs per game in 2006, and Jones plans to use her leadership on the court to help guide the younger players on the team.

Jones hopes to see newcomer Heidi Larson (Andover, Minn.) step in early and get some playing time, while being mentored by returners Sara Burns, sophomore Jenni Burns (LeSueur, Minn.) and junior Alex Askew (Wadena, Minn.). With five defensive specialists on the roster, Jones is anticipating having a solid back row on the court.

Macalester

Coach: Stephanie Schleuder

Career Record: 131-119 (9 seasons)

2006 Finish: Tied 6th/(5-6 MIAC, 12-11 overall)

Macalester Players to Watch

Kari Tanaka (Sr., S, Bloomington, Minn./Jefferson)

Marie Godwin (So., Lib., Chaska, Minn./Chaska)

Kate Fahje (Sr., MH, Waukesha, Wis./South)

Macalester Season Preview

Macalester lost out on a tie-breaker for the sixth spot in last year's MIAC playoffs and this season is looking for a position in the conference post-season tourney under 10th-year head coach Stephanie Schleuder, who needs 11 wins to reach the 700-victory mark in her 32-year career. The Scots went 12-11 overall and 5-6 in the league in 2006 and this season will feature many new faces, especially at the net as the team's top three hitters must be replaced. Two standouts graduated and All-MIAC outside hitter Sonia Muzikarova (Jr., Bratislava, Slovakia) is studying abroad.

Whoever does the bulk of the spiking will benefit from the setting of four-year starter Kari Tanaka (Sr., Bloomington, Minn. / Jefferson). Tanaka ranked fifth in the MIAC with 11.3 assists per game and was selected the team's co-offensive player of the year. The Mac offense will see some new faces vying for hitting positions. Erin Cusac (So., Pine River, Minn. / Pine River-Backus) is likely to see lots of action, and libero Marie Godwin (So., Chaska, Minn.), who led Mac with 3.9 digs per game, may step into a hitting position. Also providing veteran defensive play will be Marisa Raether (Sr., San Marino, Calif.) and Megan Thompson (Sr., Onalaska, Wis.). Another veteran returning to the front row is Suzy Szumowski (Jr., Northbrook, Ill. / Glenbrook North).

After increasing her role on the team gradually in each of the last three seasons, Kate Fahje (Sr., Waukesha, Wis. / South) takes over as the top threat at the net after spiking at a .290 clip in '06 and providing 1.6 kills and 0.6 blocks per game. Fahje is one of the MIAC's top servers and last year led the Scots with 50 aces. She led the conference in aces and was second in aces served per game.

Schleuder says, "If you focus solely on what we lost in the way of hitters, one might expect this to be a down year for us, yet I have found when you least expect it, the team will step up and have an extraordinary year. This team has plans to be very competitive . . . we will be road warriors."

Complete season outlook at:

http://www.macalester.edu/athletics/volleyball/news/07_0801_season_outlook.html

Saint Benedict

Coach: Michelle Blaeser

Career Record: 111-85 (7 seasons)

2006 Finish: Tied 6th/(5-6 MIAC, 15-13 overall)

Saint Benedict Players to Watch

Theresa Naumann (Sr., Middle Blocker)

Emma Jaynes (So., Outside Hitter)

Beth Hanson (So., Setter)

Laurel Heggernes (Fy., Middle Blocker/Outside Hitter)

Megan Kelly (Fy., Outside Hitter/Defensive Specialist)

Kayli Schumacher (Fy., Middle Blocker/Right Side)

Saint Benedict Season Preview

Six as one is an attitude the College of Saint Benedict volleyball team hopes to show on the court in 2007. To do so they will have to look for guidance of the team's sole senior, captain Theresa Naumann.

The Blazers, who finished the 2006 season with a 5-6 Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference mark and a 15-13 overall record, enter the season with five returning members from last season's squad.

Naumann, who collected 179 kills and 55 blocks in 2006, hopes to have another productive season leading the Blazer front court.

Flanking Naumann will be sophomore outside-hitter Emma Jaynes, who leads all returning athletes in kills (322) and blocks (59) from last season. Jaynes gained a lot of experience appearing in all 109 of the games the Blazers played last fall and will provide a young Saint Benedict team with a dependable player capable of making an impact on the court.

Sophomore Beth Hanson has stepped up to the starting setter position running the CSB offense with the efficiency of a seasoned veteran. In her first year of collegiate competition, Hanson compiled 1,212 assists and averaged 11.23 set-assists per game, which ranked second overall in the MIAC.

Joining Saint Benedict this fall will be sophomore transfer Lindsey Grauman (Lake Forest College). Grauman, a defensive specialist who was third in team digs with 345 for Lake Forest, brings impressive credentials and will to contribute immediately to the varsity squad.

Sophomore Candace Bartels along with first years Anna Bergstrom, Calleigh Brown, Paige Feichtinger, Laurel Heggernes, Megan Kelly, Kelsey Lehnertz, Kayli Schumacher, Jennifer Uecker, McKinsey Weydert and Amber Wortz will be making their Blazer volleyball debuts in 2007 and hope to contribute to the team as the Blazers aspire to their eighth consecutive trip to the MIAC Playoff Tournament.

St. Catherine

Coach: Nicole Hess

Career Record: 17-90 (4 seasons)

2006 Finish: Tied 11th/(2-9 MIAC, 8-19 overall)

St. Catherine Players to Watch

Whitney Sparby (5-10, Sr., OH, Red Wing Minn./Red Wing HS)

Maria Hoffman (6-0, So, MB, Montgomery, Minn./Montgomery-Lonsdale)

St. Catherine Season Preview

The College of St. Catherine volleyball team enters the 2007 season looking to build on an eight win season in 2006. Head coach Nicole Hess enters her fifth season at the helm with a solid group of returnees and a group of first-years that will make big contributions for the Wildcats in 2007.

Coach Hess will look to Whitney Sparby (Sr., Red Wing, Minn.), Maria Hoffman (So., Montgomery, Minn.) and Erika Kriechbaum (Sr., Faribault, Minn) to lead the Wildcats throughout the 2007 season. Sparby finished the season ninth in assists in the MIAC, averaging 8.74 assists a game in '06. Sparby was a team leader both on and off the court and will once again be looked at to take the same role this season.

Kriechbaum finished the 2006 season with 521 digs. Her 5.92 digs per game was good enough for 4th in the MIAC. Kriechbaum will once again anchor the Wildcats defense in 2007.

Hoffman led the team with 3.03 kills per game in '06. In addition, Hoffman was the Wildcats' leader with .67 blocks per game and second on the team with 3.01 digs per game. Hoffman was also named to the All-Tournament at both the CSC Invitational and the Viterbo Oktoberfest Tournament. Coach Hess will look to the six foot Hoffman to lead the Wildcat's offensive attack.

In addition to Sparby and Hoffman, Hess will look to newcomers Alissa Domeier (Springfield, Minn.), Nicole Neumann (Le Sueur, Minn.), Rebecca Zenefski (Champlin, Minn.) and Megan Ahlbrecht (Gibbon, Minn.). The 6' Domeier and 6' Ahlbrecht will be looked at to add some offensive punch to the Wildcats. Neumann is an outside hitter/defensive specialist and will play a significant role for the Wildcats in '07. Zenefski, a 6' outside hitter will be in her first season as part of the Wildcats after transferring from St. Cloud State University. Zenefski averaged 1.52 kills per game last season for the Wildcats and will be looked at to add some experience to the '07 Wildcats.

"I think we have a great mix of experience and first-year players coming in this season and we are looking to compete at a high level on a nightly basis" stated Wildcat head coach Nicole Hess. "This team has a lot of talented players and we are looking forward to a successful 2007 season," added Hess.

Saint Mary's

Coach: Mike Lester

Career Record: 159-126 (9 seasons)

2006 Finish: 10th/(3-8 MIAC, 10-19 overall)

Saint Mary's Players to Watch
Theresa Perrini (Jr, 5-5, Libero, Fairway, Kan.)
Pam Stanton (So, 5-7, OH, Mundelein, Ill.)

Saint Mary's Season Preview

It doesn't take any investigative skills to understand how the Saint Mary's University volleyball team felt about last season's 10-19 overall record, not to mention their 10th-place finish in the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference standings.

It's two simple words and it's etched across the backs of their practice shirts: "Expect More."

"We're coming into the season with high expectations, last season left a bad taste in everyone's mouth and it's something no one wants to go through again," said Lester. "Last year was a bit of a struggle, we just never seemed to be able to put all the pieces together.

"Hopefully, this year will be a different story."

And it should be, considering the fact that all but one of the pieces of that Cardinal puzzle is back. That one piece, graduated senior Molli Dant, however, did leave a gaping hole.

The Cardinals' lone All-MIAC representative a year ago, Dant was the team's kill leader with 381 (3.85 kills/game), while also posting a single-season record with 1,246 attack attempts. A four-year letterwinner, Dant ranked seventh in the MIAC in kills-per-game, totaling a team-best 4.14.

"Losing Molli is tough, she had a great career here and her presence on the court will be missed," said Lester. "But as good as her stats were, part of the reason she had such great numbers was because she and Pam (Stanton) were the only offensive options we had. They got a lot more balls, a lot more (attack) attempts, than they should have had.

"Teams were able to key on those two and we didn't have that third option, which really hurt us."

With a solid group of returners, not to mention a fabulous freshman class, Lester figures his Cardinals' offensive arsenal will be much more than just a 1-2 punch.

"We are going to be much deeper this season," said Lester, whose returning corps is led by Stanton (258 kills), Theresa Perrini (Fairway, Kan. / 563 digs), and Carolyn Kiefer (New London, Wis. / 214 assists).

"I'm excited about the incoming (freshman) class, they have a ton of talent and several could make an immediate impact for us. But we are also going to be very young. We don't have a senior on our roster, so we are still going to be relying on sophomores and juniors to be the leaders."

St. Olaf

Co-Coaches: Cindy Book/Traci Cook

Career Record: Book: 586-279 (25 seasons), Cook: 71-78 (4 seasons)

2006 Finish: 9th/(4-7 MIAC, 10-16 overall)

St. Olaf Players to Watch

Jess Levin (Jr., Cedar Rapids, Iowa/Xaiver)

Abby Fournier (Jr., Chanhassen, Minn./Southwest Christian)

St. Olaf Season Preview

There is no mistaking that the St. Olaf volleyball team will have a new look this season. St. Olaf graduated its only two seniors last fall - All-MIAC honorees Audrey Volstad and Andrea Otteman - and the 2007 roster is packed with seven talented first years.

Despite the inexperience, head coaches Cindy Book and Traci Cook each agree that the Oles are off to a great start in preseason workouts.

"They are a great group," said Book, in her 15th season as head coach at St. Olaf. "They all work hard and have excellent potential."

Cook, too, has been impressed with the early progress. "They have blended very well in a short period of time - we're excited to see what they can do."

To go with the seven first years, the Oles have a combined six sophomores and juniors who will compete with the youngsters for floor time. Jess Levin (Cedar Rapids, Iowa/Xaiver), one of two juniors on the 2007 squad, returns after a solid sophomore campaign. Levin led St. Olaf in total blocks last year and has two collegiate seasons under her belt.

The other junior is Abby Fournier (Chanhassen, Minn./Southwest Christian). Fournier played in all 26 matches in 2006 and had 196 digs (1.96/game).

Sophomores Paige Olson (Brainerd, Minn.), Alyssa Williams (Northfield, Minn.) and Janet Sully (New Brighton, Minn./Irondale) each played significant roles last fall and, again, will see significant playing time.

Olson had moments of excellence last season splitting time between middle and outside. Her 55 blocks were second and her 256 kills were third best on the team.

Williams, one of four players (with Volstad, Otteman and Sully) to play in every match and game a year ago, moved between outside and defensive specialist in her first season but it is likely she will play back row only this season. Williams led the team in digs (419) and service aces (39) last year.

Sully was third on the team in digs and showed brilliance as well. She was one of three Oles to earn the MIAC's Player of the Week honor last year after recording a combined five aces and 28 digs in a pair of wins over Macalester and Bethany Lutheran in September.

The first year crew will be led by Kim Smisek (Northfield, Minn.) and Jane Meyer (Bloomington, Minn./Jefferson) who will help fill the void left by Otteman.

To replace Volstad at setter, the Oles could turn to any of three first years Cori Revsbeck (Lakeville, Minn./North), Kelly Prunty (Welcome, Minn./Martin County West) or Sarah Hedrick (Lake Elmo, Minn./Mahtomedi). Hedrick could also see some reps in the back row as a defensive specialist and sophomore Mali Schneider (Waupaca, Wis.) returns too.

At middle and right, the Oles have added 6-1 first year Alise Carlson (Alexandria, Minn.) and Christina Brink (Dumont, Minn./Wheaton).

St. Olaf opens with a pair of weekend tournaments - Aug. 31-Sept. 1 at the Northwestern/Bethel Invitational and Sept. 6-7 at the Hamline/St. Kate's Invite. The Oles open MIAC play on Sept. 12 with a home match against the University of St. Thomas.

Coach: Thanh Pham

Career Record: 103-34 (4 seasons)

2006 Finish: Tied 4th/(7-4 MIAC, 29-7 overall)

St. Thomas Players to Watch

Kristen Storrs (Sr., OH)

Katie McCaffrey (Jr., MB)

Katie Kremer (Jr., DS)

DeJurnett Prioleau (Jr., MB)

Katie Zazverskey (Sr., OH)

Aly McConnell (Sr., DS)

St. Thomas Season Preview

For the fifth time in six seasons, St. Thomas is ranked in the top-25 preseason ranking in the AVCA Division III poll. St. Thomas is ranked 11th, and defending MIAC champion Concordia-Moorhead is ranked 12th.

The Tommies, who will play another challenging schedule, returned six of their top nine players from a 29-7 squad that made a return trip to the NCAA Division III playoffs. The Toms went 19-1 in regular-season tournament play last season and closed No. 11 in the final Division III poll.

The Tommies graduated All-American Rachelle Dosch, a four-year starter and 3X All-MIAC honoree. Dosch led the Tommies to a 103-35 record in her four-year era, and is the lone player in MIAC history to finish in the top five in the conference in career digs (1,868) and kills (1,713).

UST returnees include seniors Kristin Storrs, a two-time All-MIAC hitter, and Katie Zazverskey; junior hitters Katie McCaffrey and DeJurnett Prioleau; and junior defensive specialist Katie Kremer.

Coach Thanh Pham has 14 freshmen on his 26-player roster. The squad includes players from seven states (Minnesota, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa, Colorado and Michigan) plus an instate player from the Canadian border. The setter job could go to a newcomer, as Sarah Rainey graduated and Molly Conway transferred back to her homestate to attend nursing school. Freshmen Emily Foster from Hopkins and Molly Staton from Anoka will push for the starting setter position. Other top newcomers include hitters Tori Jones of Springfield, Carlie Waibel of Lake of the Woods, and Lindsey Simmons of Eden Prairie; and DS Kristen Millado of Marquette, Mich.

Pham will send his Tommies to face 11 teams that won 24 or more matches in 2006. Eight opponents are either ranked in the AVCA Division III top 25 or were among 17 other teams receiving votes.

St. Thomas opens play Aug. 31 in the Emory (Ga.) Tournament in Atlanta. In that two-day tourney, UST will play Puget Sound (16-7 last season), No. 5-ranked Emory (28-11), and NAIA school Berry (Ga.) (35-9).

The Tommies starts their home season in Schoenecker Arena on Sept. 19 vs. Concordia (25-2). The conference race looks to be wide open, with as many as 10 teams in the running for six conference playoff berths.

Other non-conference or tournament foes include Iowa Conference powers Central (24-10), Simpson (27-11) and Coe (26-8); No. 18-ranked UW-Eau Claire (30-4); UW-LaCrosse (20-9); No. 8-ranked Carthage (29-5); and Illinois Wesleyan (24-12).

St. Thomas has finished in the conference's top three in 16 of the last 19 seasons, with eight MIAC championships. The Tommies are also strong academically -- last year's team cumulative grade-point average was an impressive 3.48.