

# 2010 MIAC Volleyball Preview and Preseason Coaches' Poll

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## 2010 MIAC Volleyball Season Preview

"Transition" will be the preeminent word used early and often during the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference's (MIAC) 2010 volleyball season. While the conference's strength still appears to be in place, exactly one-half of the teams experienced coaching turnover in the offseason, creating a very different landscape heading into the 2010 season.

However, change isn't necessarily a bad thing, and two different kinds of optimism run rampant throughout the MIAC volleyball community. The first centers on returning strength and the hope for continued success. The second comes hand-in-hand with coaching change – the promise of renewed dedication and new direction inspires a different wave of optimism. The two combine to promise one of the most intriguing seasons in recent memory.

In an ironic hiring twist, Co-MIAC Coach-of-the-Year **Michelle Blaeser** stepped down from her post at Saint Benedict, only to be replaced by the other Co-MIAC Coach-of-the-Year **Nicole Hess**, who shared the award for her work at St. Catherine last season. **Corey Phelps** was hired to replace Hess at St. Catherine and the other spokes on the coaching carousel are newcomers – Augsburg's **Jane Gibbs**, Gustavus Adolphus' **Rachelle Dosch**, Hamline's **Audrey Ludwig** and Macalester's **Annie Doman**.

Five of the six new head coaches are no strangers to MIAC volleyball. Hess changed schools within the league, Gibbs and Dosch both played for St. Thomas, Ludwig played at St. Olaf and Phelps previously served as an assistant coach at Saint Mary's.

Though some of the faces have changed, the MIAC's place among the elite Division III conferences hasn't, evidenced by the league's representation in the American Volleyball Coaches' Association (AVCA) preseason Top 25 poll. The MIAC placed three teams in the top 25, with another just a few votes shy of inclusion. A year ago, nine of the league's 12 teams finished .500 or better overall, and a 10th team was just a game below even, proving the conference's depth from top to bottom.

St. Thomas opens 2010 as the No. 8-ranked team in the country, St. Olaf received the No. 19 preseason ranking, Saint Mary's checks in at No. 24 and Saint Benedict appears in the "receiving votes" category.

The Tommies' top-10 national ranking shouldn't come as a surprise to the MIAC coaches, as St. Thomas was a near-unanimous pick with 9-of-12 first-place votes to finish atop the 2010 MIAC Preseason Volleyball Coaches' Poll. A system was used awarding 11 points for a first-place vote, 10 for second, nine for third and so on, and coaches could not vote for their own team.

The Tommies return a ton of talent from their 26-8 team in 2009 that went 10-1 to tie for the MIAC's regular-season title. Leading the way again is setter **Emily Foster**, back for her senior year after earning MIAC Player-of-the-Year and All-Conference honors last season to go along with an All-America First Team selection. Fellow All-MIAC pick **Jill Osborne** and senior **Alesha Nelson** also return for Head Coach **Thanh Pham**.

The other three first-place votes went to St. Olaf, which finished second in the coaches' poll. The Oles return a strong nucleus from last year's 27-5 team that reached the MIAC Playoffs Championship Game. First-Team All-American **Kim Smisek** (Sr., OH) and All-America Honorable Mention pick **Kelly Prunty** (Sr., S) lead a strong nucleus that is expected to challenge the Tommies for conference supremacy.

Rounding out the top five in the coaches' poll were Saint Benedict at No. 3, and Saint Mary's and Concordia finished in a fourth-place tie. The Blazers lost a pair of All-MIAC players and are one of the teams dealing with a coaching change after sharing the conference's regular-season title and winning the Playoff Championship last year, but **Kayli Schumacher** (Sr., RS, All-MIAC) and three other returning starters should make the transition to Hess a smooth one.

Saint Mary's will be led by a pair of All-MIAC seniors - **Sarah Gardner** (Sr., Opp.) and **Jessica Mate** (Sr., OH) – and several other talented returners from last year's team that finished 22-10 overall. Concordia was 14-10 a year ago, and will continue its ascent in the conference behind two talented juniors, All-MIAC selections **Jenna Green** (OH) and **Katie Vohnoutka** (MH).

St. Catherine, which brings back 2009 MIAC Freshman-of-the-Year **Nina Lindquist** (So., S) and a strong core of upperclassmen, was picked to finish sixth in the standings. Augsburg grabbed the No. 7 spot in the poll and will look to senior **Katie Christensen's** (OH) leadership to guide a talented, young team.

Bethel occupied the No. 8 spot in the poll after just missing a .500 season a year ago (14-15, 5-6). The Royals return All-MIAC selection **Nicole Wriedt** (Jr., Opp.) and four other starters. Gustavus checked in at No. 9, and the Gusties' return five starters for their new head coach. **Nicki Ainsworth** (Sr., OH) - an All-MIAC selection in 2009 - leads Gustavus' experienced crew.

No. 10 belonged to Carleton, which has a trio of senior starters back from last year's 13-11 team. **Kelly Lovett** (OH), **Kyla Walter** (OH) and **Beth Jarrett** (S) will use their experience to lead the Knights in 2010.

The final two spots in the poll belong to Hamline (No. 11) and Macalester (No. 12). The Pipers are another senior-laden team whose experience could help them finish .500 again after going 14-14 a year ago, and Macalester returns five 2009 starters as they try to turn things around in Doman's first year with the Scots.

The 2010 volleyball season begins with non-conference action on Wednesday, Sept. 1, and the first conference matches are scheduled for Sept. 14-15. The 2010 MIAC Volleyball Playoffs will begin on Nov. 2 with semifinal matches to follow on Nov. 4 and the championship on

Nov. 6. The top six teams in the final regular season conference standings will earn playoff berths, with high seeds hosting throughout the tournament.


Listed below are the complete results from the 2010 MIAC Preseason Volleyball Coaches’ Poll as well as team-by-team previews submitted by each institution’s sports information director.

2010 MIAC Preseason Coaches' Poll

Coaches voted for every team in the conference except their own team. Points were assigned for each vote (11 for first, 10 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.

2010 MIAC Volleyball Coaches Poll		
Rank	Institution	Total
1	St. Thomas (9)	119
2	St. Olaf (3)	109
3	Saint Benedict	96
T4	Concordia	86
T4	Saint Mary's	86
6	St. Catherine	64
7	Augsburg	57
8	Bethel	49
9	Gustavus	47
10	Carleton	43
11	Hamline	21
12	Macalester	15

**2010 MIAC Playoffs Dates** (Top Six Teams): Quarterfinals (Tuesday, November 2), Semifinals (Thursday, November 4), Finals (Saturday, November 6)  
| 2010 MIAC Schedule | [2009 MIAC Statistics](#) | MIAC Recordbook | MIAC Archives |



**Augsburg**  
**Coach:** Jane Gibbs  
**Career Record:** 60-42 (4 seasons overall, 0 seasons at Augsburg)  
**2009 Finish:** Tied 4th (6-5 MIAC, 17-14 overall)

Augsburg Season Preview

Coming off one of the best seasons in recent history, the Augsburg College volleyball team will enter into a new era in 2010, as the program will look to continue its climb towards the top of the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference again this season. Last year's team finished 17-14 overall, and finished in a tie for fourth place in the final MIAC standings.

Guiding the Auggies from the sidelines this season will be the program's new head coach, Jane Gibbs. After leading Luther College (Iowa) to the school's first-ever NCAA Division III national tournament berth in 2009, the Lakeville, Minn., native has returned to her Minnesota roots as the new Auggie head coach.

"I am extremely excited to be back in Minnesota and to be coaching here at Augsburg," said Gibbs. "Augsburg has been one of the up and coming programs in the MIAC over the last few seasons, and I am thrilled to have the opportunity to help continue and build upon that success."

Leading the Auggies on the floor this season will be a trio of returning starters and a number of talented newcomers. A total of nine letterwinners from last season will return to the team this year.

Katie Christensen (SR, North Mankato, Minn./Mankato West HS) will lead a talented Augsburg front line of attackers. Christensen led the Auggie team in kills with 304 (2.69 kills per-set) last season, and currently ranks seventh in school history in career kills per set, with an average of 2.34.

Joining Christensen on the offensive attack this season will be right-side hitter Amanda Unze (SO, Chanhassen, Minn./Chaska HS). Unze finished last season with 249 kills (2.33 kills per-set), and had the highest hitting percentage among MIAC first-years in 2009. Unze also finished second on the team last season in block assists with 55.

Two veterans returning to the Auggies this season are Denielle Johnson (SR, Blaine, Minn./Spring Lake Park HS) and Jessica Hilk (SR, Waconia, Minn./Mayer Lutheran HS). Both players will look to anchor the Augsburg back row again this season. Johnson finished last season second in assists, second in service aces and third in digs for the Auggies.

A talented group of newcomers, led by Emily McCourt (FY, Sun Prairie, Wis./Sun Prairie HS), Colleen Ouranda (FY, Omaha, Neb./Mercy HS) and Kateyln Berens (FY, Jordan, Minn./Prior Lake HS), will provide depth to the Auggie squad and should all see significant playing time for the team throughout the year. In addition to the first-year players, sophomore Micha Sater (SO, Fridley, Minn./Centennial HS) will make her debut for the Auggies this season after transferring to Augsburg last winter. Sater was an all-conference performer at Centennial HS and will add depth to the Augsburg front line.

The Auggies open the nonconference portion of the season on Wednesday, Sept. 1 against Northland College (Wis.) at the College of St. Scholastica Quadrangular. The first home match is scheduled for Friday, Sept. 10 against Edgewood (Wis.) as part of the two-day, eight-team Augsburg College Invitational. The Auggies' first conference match is Wednesday, Sept. 15 against St. Mary's University, ranked No. 24 in the American Volleyball Coaches Association Division III preseason national poll.



**Bethel**

**Coch:** Gretchen Hunt

**Career Record:** 159-122 (9 seasons)

**2009 Finish:** 8th (5-6 MIAC, 14-15 overall)

**Bethel Season Preview**

The 2010 volleyball season is beginning very optimistically for a Bethel squad that returns nearly their entire starting line-up from a team that went 14-15 last season; winning seven of their final nine matches. Head Coach Gretchen Hunt and her staff will rely heavily on senior captains Betsy Naatjes (Sioux Falls, S.D.), Brianna Falck (DeForest, Wis.), and Hannah Parks (Plymouth, Minn.). Naatjes has led the Royals at the setter position for two seasons, totaling over 1700 assists in her career. Falck gained valuable experience at the outside hitter position in 2009, after playing in only a handful of matches the year before. Parks has already played in 67 matches in her three-year career and brings possibly the most experience to the floor.

Other returning hitters with varsity experience include Nicole Wriedt (Pewaukee, Wis.), Caitie Helle (Onamia, Minn.), Amy Werner (Three Lakes, Wis.) and Haley Toter (Park Ridge, Ill.). Helle and Werner will be anchoring the middle blocker position. Werner in particular came on strong at the end of the season. She was to the All-Tournament Team at the UW-OshKosh Titan Tussle and finished the season ranked 25th in the nation in blocks per set (1.10 blocks per set). Helle will move back to the middle position after playing both middle and outside last season.

Wriedt was the lone All-MIAC selection for the Royals last season, one of only three sophomores to be selected to the All-Conference team, after tallying 470 kills from the opposite hitter position.

Along with Naatjes, running the court for this group of hitters will be returning setter and hitter, Kate Smith (Arden Hills, Minn.). Smith has appeared in 45 matches in two seasons, and has tallied over 350 assists and 130 kills as a setter-hitter.

Defense has always anchored the most successful teams coached by Hunt at Bethel, and 2010 will be no different. Val Smith (Alexandria, Minn.) returns for a sophomore season at the libero position, after recording 511 digs her freshman season.

"It has been so much fun 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. We have had some practices hit an intensity that I don't think we've ever hit during my time at Bethel. I think we are going to surprise some people with this team."



#### **Carleton**

**Coach:** Heidi Jaynes

**Career Record:** 163-125 (11 seasons)

**2009 Finish:** Tied 9th (3-8 MIAC, 14-10 overall)

#### **Carleton Season Preview**

The 2010 version of the Carleton Knights will rely on a mix of talented veterans and athletic youngsters as they look to return to the post-season for the first time in three seasons.

Graduation created some huge holes, claiming three players from the 2009 lineup, including a pair of four-year starters: All-American Annie Eckhoff and MIAC Defensive Player-of-the-Year Laura Barsness. The Knights will look to combat those losses by leaning on outside hitter Kelly Lovett (Sr./Portland, Ore./Lincoln) and junior Erin Anderson (Bloomington, Minn./Kennedy).

Lovett, an All-American on Carleton's track and field team, is a solid all-around performer at outside hitter and stays on the court throughout the rotation. In 2009, she was fourth among MIAC players in kills (3.43 per set) and service aces (0.41 per set). She was second on the squad in digs and fourth in blocks. Anderson played all 90 sets as a defensive specialist last year and slides into full-time libero duties this season.

Senior setter Beth Jarrett (Mounds View, Minn./Irondale) is back for a third year running the offense. In 2009, she averaged 8.50 assists and 2.04 digs per set.

Senior Kyla Walter (Aspen, Colo.) played outside hitter last year, averaging 1.86 kills, the fourth-best figure on the team. Improvements in her all-around game could allow Walter to stay on the court throughout the rotation, giving Jaynes further flexibility with the lineup.

Sophomores Jessa Youso (Virginia, Minn.) and Sarah Nielsen (Altoona, Wis.) improved during their first collegiate seasons and now step into the two vacancies along the front row. Youso hit a team-best .286 during MIAC matches at the middle-hitter spot. Nielsen appeared in 19 matches a year ago as a right-side hitter, ranking second on the squad in blocks.

The senior class includes two other versatile players, Maddy Lenhard (Eden Prairie, Minn.) and Sam Baker (Cranford, N.J./Oak Knoll School). Both appeared in more than half the matches last season and will compete for court time on the back row.

Three other Knights—sophomores Hannah Folz (Evanston, Ill./Evanston Township), Morgan Jones (Meno Park, Calif./Castilleja School), and Elissa Walter (Aspen, Colo.)—got their first collegiate experience in 2009.

While Jaynes is excited about the returners, she is equally enthusiastic regarding the five rookies on the squad.

The Knights will be tested early, as their season-opening tournament in Colorado Springs includes matches against a pair of teams listed in the AVCA's pre-season national poll.



### **Concordia**

**Coach:** Tim Mosser

**Career Record:** 322-115 (17 seasons)

**2009 Finish:** Tied 4th (6-5 MIAC, 14-10 overall)

#### **Concordia Season Preview**

It's been almost 10 months since the Cobber volleyball team lost five of their last seven matches of the 2009 season and missed the NCAA Tournament for the first time in seven seasons. Concordia head coach Tim Mosser is hoping that the team that steps on the court on Sept. 3 at the UW-Eau Claire Invite will be cleansed of the tough finish. Mosser has reason to be optimistic after the offseason as CC returns three of their top four offensive players from a year ago and has a nucleus of returners that will be a tonic for bringing the Cobbers back to the top of the conference.

The 2010 campaign will be a mixed bag for Concordia as they have only six returning players from last season. The Cobbers will be a blend of talented veterans and athletic newcomers. Leading the way will be All-American Jenna Green (Jr., Dilworth, Minn./D-G-F HS) who will be a dominant force in the conference as she steps into the role of team leader. Last year Green led the Cobbers in kills per game and finished the season with 269 total kills and has 558 kills in her two-year career. She also led the team in digs and her passing prowess routinely led to critical Cobber points. Green had double-digit kill totals in all but three matches she played in during 2009. In conference play, Green had 113 kills and was third in the MIAC in kills per game.

Concordia will be far from a one-player show in 2010 as Green's front row teammate Katie Vohnoutka (Jr., Eden Prairie, Minn.) will give the Cobbers a formidable 1-2 punch. Vohnoutka finished last season with a team-high 299 kills. She was fifth in the league in kills per game (3.29) and seventh in points (3.81/game). Vohnoutka had double-digit kill totals in all but three conference matches and was also second on the team in blocks in league play. Green and Vohnoutka will be joined at the net by the third of four CC juniors on the team. Ashley Beseman (Raymond, Minn./MACCRAY HS) had over 100 kills in 2009 and led the team in blocks.

The fourth and final junior will be counted on to set up the terrific trio at the net. Amy Sykora (Rapid City, S.D./Stevens HS) returns as the team's setter for a third straight season. Last year she had a team-high 702 assists and has amassed 1,295 helpers in the past two years.

The other two returners for Mosser's crew are both sophomores as Concordia heads into the season without a senior on the roster. Rachel Wiinanen (Maple Grove, Minn./Osseo HS) and Danelle Loomis (Clara City, Minn./MACCRAY HS) used 2009 as a learning experience and both had moments where they showed that the future is optimistic for the Cobbers.

For the second straight season Mosser has brought in a talented crew of freshmen. The opening day roster will feature nine first-year players and six of those are listed at 5-10 and will give the Cobbers depth on the front line as Concordia tries to return to the top three of the MIAC and a run at the national tournament



### **Gustavus**

**Coach:** Rachelle Dosch

**Career Record:** 0-0 (0 seasons at Gustavus)

**2009 Finish:** Tied 9th (3-8 MIAC, 11-17 overall)

#### **Gustavus Season Preview**

The Gustavus volleyball program begins a new era as Rachelle Dosch takes over as head coach for Kari Eckheart who resigned to accept a position as assistant athletics director at the College. Dosch will work with an experienced group of players including five starters and 13 letterwinners from a squad that posted a record of 11-17 overall and finished in a tie for ninth place in the MIAC with mark of 3-8.

Dosch spent the summer making preparations for her first season as a head coach and she is pleased with how the team has responded to her direction in preseason workouts. She stated, "The entire program is going through a transition from the freshmen to the upperclassmen to the coaches and everyone is responding very well by working extremely hard in the gym. As a result, this group has already developed a strong team chemistry."

All-Conference outside hitter Nicki Ainsworth (Sr., Eden Prairie, Minn.) leads the six returning starters. The other returning starters include defensive specialist Jenny Ewert (Sr., St. James, Minn.), middle hitter Angela Ahrendt (Jr., St. Paul, Minn.), setter Malea Noennig (Jr., Norwood-Young America, Minn.), outside hitter Olivia Warren (Jr., Goodhue, Minn.), outside hitter Janey Helland (Sr., Mapleton, Minn.), and libero Erin Sherman (So, Golden Valley, Minn.). Other top returners include defensive specialist Katie Ness (So., Excelsior, Minn.), outside hitter Lisa Beacher (Roseville, Minn.), setter Kelsey Florian (Roseville, Minn.), and middle hitter Emily Phillips (So., Cleveland, Minn.).

The Gusties also welcome four newcomers to the squad this season and that group includes middle hitter Kaytlin Remold (Fy., Byron, Minn.), middle hitter Dana Boerboom (Fy., Cottonwood, Minn.), setter McKinze Bunne (Fy., Ostrander, Minn.), and defensive specialist Jenna Legatt (Fy., Sartell, Minn.).

Coach Dosch is excited about the energy, enthusiasm, and passion that this group has exhibited during preseason practices and she looks forward to watching them grow together in the next couple of months. She stated, "The team has high goals for this season including working towards finishing at the top of the conference and becoming a team that is "watchable" and "feared". With the way things have been going so far...they are on their way to achieving those goals and making this a very special year."



#### **Hamline**

**Coach:** Audrey Ludwig

**Career Record:** 0-0 (0 seasons at Hamline)

**2009 Finish:** 11th (2-9 MIAC, 14-14 overall)

#### **Hamline Season Preview**

Audrey Ludwig enters her inaugural campaign at the helm of the Hamline University volleyball program looking to raise the level of competition each time her young team enters the gym.

The Pipers come into the 2010 season after the graduation of a pair of outside hitters. Those hitters included a two-time All-MIAC honoree in Tasha Simmons and Anita Rojas, who led the team last year in attack percentage. However, a trio of seniors who are embracing a new direction and providing great support for the new players on the roster return to provide leadership in a new system.

Libero Heidi Larsen (Andover, Minn.), outside hitter Anna Murie (Grand Forks, N.D.), and defensive specialist Molly Schroeder (Buffalo, Minn.) return for their final season as Pipers. Larsen brings strong skill in the serve receive to the court and has been a solid back row presence for the Pipers over the last three years. Energetic and vocal on the court, Larsen led the team with 539 digs (5.73 per set) last year.

Murie brings a strong work ethic and competitiveness to the team and Ludwig will look to use her on the right side this season. Last season she posted a .271 attack percentage, and with the graduation of Simmons and Rojas, Ludwig will look for her to step up into a bigger role on the court this fall.

Rounding out the seniors is Schroeder, who can read the ball well and is tenacious on defense. She has good ball control all the way around the court, and will look to contribute more on the court in her senior season.

Ludwig brings in three new faces to the court who will look to make an immediate impact for the Pipers. Leading the charge from the newcomers will be Hamline's new setter – Sammy Redman (Fy., Rochester, Minn.). Redman is a disciplined athlete with great ball control, footwork, and athleticism on the court. Ludwig expects her to raise the talent level in the gym right away.

Looking to be the recipient of Redman's sets is 5-11 junior transfer Shannon Schmidt (Bismark, N.D.). Schmidt is a versatile, athletic player who can fill several different roles on the front row for the Pipers. She is a high-energy and passionate player with invaluable junior college experience that will let her take a leadership role on the court at the start of the season.

Joining Schmidt on the front row will be Sam Greeney-Hamlin (Fy., St. Cloud, Minn.), who also brings a high level of energy and excitement to the court. Greeney-Hamlin has great arm swing and can attack first temp ball really well.

Overall, Ludwig will look for the Pipers to raise their level of competition and play each time the take to the floor. Her team is one that focuses on, and takes pride in, a strong work ethic and doing the little things right. The team will also focus on ball control this season as they look to build a strong foundation for Piper volleyball.

#### **Macalester**



**Coach:** Annie Glieber

**Career Record:** 63-97 (0 seasons at Macalester)

**2009 Finish:** 12th (0-11 MIAC, 6-17 overall)

## Macalester Season Preview

Macalester's volleyball program starts a new direction as the Scots welcome former Carroll (Wis.) head coach Annie Doman to lead what hopes to be a quick turnaround. The rebuilding project begins with four new recruits joining seven returning letter-winners. Doman rebuilt the team at Carroll, being named Midwest Conference Coach of the Year in 2006 and '07 and leading the squad to the conference title in '07, and hopes to lead a similar turnaround at Macalester.

The Scots are led by middle hitter Majra Mucic (Sr., Zenica, Bosnia / St. Louis Park - Minn.), who spiked at a .203 clip and averaged 2.6 kills, 0.70 blocks and a team-best 3.1 points per set. Taylor Tinkham (Jr., St. Louis Park, Minn.) joins Mucic at the net after providing the team with 1.7 kills and a squad-leading 0.84 blocks a set.

Last year's setting duties were split between Danielle Dweck (Jr., Sea Cliff, N.Y. / North Shore) (6.5 assists per set) and Steffanie Fischer (so., Lindenhurst, Ill. / Lakes Community) (4.9 a/s) and both players return. The Scots feature a couple back row standouts in Kiera Coulter (Sr., Davis, Calif.) (2.3 digs/set) and Glasha Marcon (So., Richmond, Calif. / Albany) (2.5 digs/set). Also returning to the starting lineup is outside hitter Anna Trier (So., Sun Prairie, Wis.) and coming off a back injury is outside hitter Mattie Hill (So., Liberty, Mo.).

### Saint Benedict



**Coach:** Nicole Hess

**Career Record:** 57-146 (0 seasons at Sasint Benedict)

**2009 Finish:** Tied 1st (10-1 MIAC, 26-6 overall)

## Saint Benedict Season Preview

After a storybook season in 2009, the College of Saint Benedict volleyball team finds itself in position for another successful campaign, but headed in a new direction as a program. Proven conference winner Nicole Hess takes over as the Blazers head coach in 2010, and despite the change CSB will fiercely defend its MIAC regular season and playoff titles.

After capturing a share of the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) regular season title and the Playoff Championship, Blazers' head coach Michelle Blaeser stepped down as coach despite receiving Co-MIAC Coach-of-the-Year honors. Blaeser's final squad was 26-6 overall, 10-1 in the MIAC and it reached the NCAA Division III Regional Quarterfinals. However, she shared her conference coach-of-the-Year honor with her eventual replacement, as Hess led conference rival St. Catherine University to an 18-12 overall record.

Though AVCA All-Americans Beth Hanson (S) and Emma Jaynes (OH) graduated, the cupboard at Saint Benedict certainly isn't bare for Hess. Senior Kayli Schumacher (RS), who was All-MIAC and an All-Region Honorable Mention pick in 2009, leads another deep Blazers squad. Fellow seniors Calleigh Brown (MB) and Amber Wortz (DS/S) and junior Chelsie Sobieck (OH) also return to join Schumacher in the starting lineup and return plenty of championship experience as CSB starts its title defense.

During the offseason, Hess did an admirable job recruiting and retaining commitments, resulting in another strong recruiting class to fortify the team's depth. Five freshmen – Lexi Alm (OH), Brianna Barrett (OH/S), Kendra Coleman (MB), Kathryn Gaydos (S) and Chelsea Rachel (OH) – all open their collegiate careers with plenty of potential to ensure winning continues despite the coaching transition.

The Blazers open the Hess era and their 2010 campaign Sept. 1 with a nonconference home match against Northwestern College. That weekend, they'll cross the border into Wisconsin to participate in the UW-Eau Claire Tournament. Saint Benedict opens MIAC play on Sept. 15 when it hosts Hamline University in St. Joseph.



### St. Catherine

**Coach:** Corey Phelps

**Career Record:** (0 seasons at St Catherine)

**2009 Finish:** Tied 4th (6-5 MIAC, 18-12 overall)

## St. Catherine Season Preview

Head Coach Corey Phelps enters his first season with the Wildcat’s volleyball program with high expectations for the squad. After the Wildcats finished tenth in the MIAC in 2008, they vaulted to a tie for fourth place during the 2009 campaign. The 18 wins compiled by the Wildcats was the team’s highest win total in over a decade. With only three seniors graduating from that squad, the Wildcats will field a roster full of MIAC-tested players.

Senior tri-captains Megan Ahlbrecht, Nicole Neumann, and Racquel Reker will lead the way for the Wildcats. Neumann, a MIAC sportsmanship honoree from 2009, anchors the defense from the libero position. Ahlbrecht brings explosiveness to the offensive attack from the middle blocker position, as she holds the second highest single season kill total in team history. Reker adds valuable experience to the front line as a right side hitter.

Adding their veteran presence to the right side of the court are juniors Callie Teigen and Mallory Fultz. Junior Kayla Sis adds to the talent on the front line and will split time as an outside hitter and middle blocker. A large sophomore class gained valuable playing experience in the first season, and will provide depth at all areas of the court. Stephanie Meschke and Brittnei Wangerin will contribute at outside hitter, while Marie O’Neill adds her talents to middle blocker. Nina Lindquist returns as the setter after establishing a St. Kate’s record for most assists in a season and being named MIAC rookie of the year. Ashley Crapser will join Neumann as a defensive specialist for the Wildcats.

With such a strong core of returning players, the Wildcats enter the 2010 season confident they can compete with the best in the MIAC. With playoff caliber talent, the Wildcats plan to be competing deep into the post-season.



**Saint Mary's**  
**Coach:** Mike Lester  
**Career Record:** 213-161 (13 seasons)  
**2009 Finish:** Tied 4th (6-5 MIAC, 22-10 overall)

**Saint Mary's Season Preview**

The 2009 season was one to remember for the Saint Mary's University volleyball team.

The Cardinals, fueled by the dynamic duo of Sarah Gardner (Rochester, Minn.) and Jessica Mate (St. Charles, Ill.), made their first NCAA Tournament appearance since 2000 — falling to eventual NCAA national champion Washington University in St. Louis 3-1 in the regional semifinal.

As memorable as last season was, however, coach Mike Lester is taking a page from the Las Vegas ad campaign — “what happened in 2009, stays in 2009.”

“Last year was great, and everyone should be proud of what we accomplished,” said Lester, who is entering his 13th season as the Cardinals’ head coach. “But by the time the school year ended last year, nobody was talking about what we had accomplished, they were all talking about what needs to be done for us to be better this year.”

In other words, the Cardinals’ focus is on the present — and only the present.

“As a coach, your greatest fear is for players to rest on past successes — to forget about all the hard work they put in to achieve those successes,” Lester said. “I don’t have that concern with this group — they are an extremely motivated group that feels like they have some unfinished business.”

What helps keep Lester’s 2010 focus crystal clear is the return of virtually his entire starting lineup — including honorable-mention All-American Gardner and fellow All-MIAC first-teamer Mate.

The two are coming off banner junior seasons a year ago. Gardner closed out the season as SMU’s kill leader with 386 (3.16 kills per set). She appeared in all 122 sets, boasting a .272 attack percentage, 55 service aces, 197 digs, 58 blocks and 75 assists en route to earning First-Team All-MIAC, Central Region All-Tournament and AVCA Honorable-Mention All-American honors. Mate, meanwhile, was second to Gardner in kills (344 / 2.87 kps), while hitting .254. She also notched 11 aces, 140 digs and 35 blocks and was named First-Team All-MIAC and honorable-mention All-Central Region.

“Sarah and Jess had outstanding seasons a year ago,” said Lester, who expects both Gardner and Mate to eclipse 1,000 career kills before the first week of the regular season is completed — Gardner is 10 kills shy, while Mate needs just 48. “And there’s no reason to expect anything less this year. They are both hard-working individuals who are determined to make their senior seasons their best yet.”

And, Lester quickly pointed out, the Cardinals’ success won’t rest solely on the shoulders of Gardner and Mate.

Add to the mix setter Brittany Cherwinka (Faribault, Minn.), who has compiled 2,327 assists during her three-year career at SMU — including 1,187 a year ago — middle hitter Amy Kujak (River Falls, Wis. / 128 blocks), and defensive specialist Tara Rasmussen (Kasson, Minn. / 492 digs) — and the Cardinals appear to have all the ingredients for another NCAA run.

“Obviously losing Jess (Larson) and Courtney (Runge) (to graduation) hurts,” said Lester, whose team’s 22 wins in 2009 were the most wins in a season since SMU won 28 en route to their first-ever NCAA national tournament appearance in 2000. “But on the flip side, we return most of our offense, our starting setter and our starting libero, so we definitely come into the season as an experienced group.”

If the Cardinals are to earn a second straight NCAA tournament berth, they will have to survive not only an MIAC minefield, but also one of their toughest nonconference schedules of Lester’s tenure.

“The MIAC is so tough, top-to-bottom,” said Lester, noting that four teams — including SMU — tied for fourth in the conference race a year ago. “Add to that several key regional matches against teams like Nebraska Wesleyan, Hope — which reached the NCAA Final Eight last year — Calvin and North Central, both teams in the top 20 at the end of the year last year, and we’ve certainly got our work cut out for us.

“Everyone’s excited about the year,” Lester added. “Hopefully all their hard work will pay off again.”



#### **St. Olaf**

**Coach:** Cindy Book

**Career Record:** 647-306 (28 seasons)

**2009 Finish:** 3rd (9-2 MIAC, 27-5 overall)

#### **St. Olaf Season Preview**

The St. Olaf College volleyball team, ranked 21st in the AVCA preseason poll, is primed to make a run at the MIAC title after posting a third place regular season finish and a runner up showing at the MIAC playoffs in 2009.

The Oles return first team All-America outside hitter Kim Smisek and All-America honorable mention setter Kelly Prunty to lead the charge.

Smisek led the nation in kills (4.93/set) while Prunty was led the MIAC and was third in the country in set assists (11.11/set).

Sophomore Katie Wolfram returns at the other outside spot after a solid first year campaign.

The Oles also return each of last season's middle -- sophomores Melissa Burch and Maddy Kreykes -- and defensive specialist juniors Katie McDonald and Kristin Boyum.

To add to the fold St. Olaf picked up three transfers - Ariel Carlson, who played at Division I Texas A & M Corpus Christi in 2009, Katie Henning and Kirstee Rotty.

St. Olaf has a tough schedule as the Oles have non-conference matchups with top-ranked Washington University (Sept. 10), seventh-ranked Carthage (Sept. 11), No. 10 Ohio Northern (Sept. 11), No. 14 UW-Whitewater (Oct. 15), Simpson College, Wartburg College and Luther.



#### **St. Thomas**

**Coach:** Thanh Pham

**Career Record:** 185-50 (7 seasons)

**2009 Finish:** Tied 1st (10-1 MIAC, 26-8 overall)

#### **St. Thomas Season Preview**

St. Thomas is ranked eighth in the 2010 Division III preseason poll by the American Volleyball Coaches' Association (AVCA).

UST has been ranked in the top 15 for a conference-record 52 polls in a row and in the top 25 for 59 consecutive polls.

The 2009 Tommies shared the MIAC championship en route to a 26-8 final record. They reached the NCAA region playoff finals last season for the third time in five years but lost in four sets to UW-Oshkosh.

UST has made its mark on the national and conference scene in Coach Thanh Pham's first seven seasons. His .787 win percentage (185-50 record) ranks fifth nationally among active Division III coaches. Over the last five seasons, St. Thomas has the eighth best won-loss record out of 350-plus teams in Division III. The Toms' 141-30 record since 2005 includes a 63-7 record vs. MIAC opponents.

The Tommies are led by senior setter Emily Foster, who will look to become the conference's first three-time AVCA All-American in the award's 29-year history.

The 2009 MIAC Player of the Year, Foster has led UST volleyball to a 41-2 record vs. conference opponents and 82-16 overall mark in her era. In 100 career matches (357 sets), Foster has 4,132 assists, 990 digs, 55 aces and 331 blocks. She's also been named MIAC Setter/Libero of the Week six times in her career.

All-Region honoree Kylee Crotty, a three-year starter, was the team's lone senior in 2009. Pham returns Foster and senior Molly Staton at setter, plus sophomore starting libero Kaitlin Wachler. Five seniors will boost the front line spots -- Alesha Nelson, Jill Osborne, Katie Bonine, Tori Jones and Lindsay Simmons.

The Tommies also have a strong group of freshmen expected to add depth, led by 5-7 setter Rachel Kosbab of Colorado Springs; 6-0 middle blocker Mackenzie Piechowski of Hutchinson; 5-6 OH KariAnne Nass of Faribault; and 5-10 OH Nicole Potts of Dubuque, Iowa.

With construction complete at UST's Anderson Athletic and Recreation Building, the Tommies regain a home-floor advantage after playing home matches last season off campus at Concordia University's Gangelhoff Center.

UST will look for the same home success it built at the old Schoenecker Arena, where the Tommies compiled a 39-5 record from 2005-2008.