

2011 MIAC Volleyball Preview and Preseason Coaches' Poll

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ST. PAUL , Minn. -- In recent years, the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference has been one of the strongest - and deepest - leagues in all of Division III. With the 2011 season set to begin, it looks like that trend will continue with several teams positioning themselves to make a run at the MIAC title, and several more eyeing the six MIAC playoff spots.

A year ago, St. Olaf College (31-5, 10-1 MIAC) and the University of St. Thomas(31-7, 10-1 MIAC) both went 10-1 in league play to share the conference crown. The Oles added the MIAC Playoff title to their remarkable season under Coach-of-the-Year **Cindy Book**, while St. Thomas advanced all the way to the NCAA Division III quarterfinals to represent the MIAC at the National Championship site in St. Louis.

However, there could be a changing of the guard atop the MIAC standings after looking at the lineup Concordia College (24-7, 9-2) has coming back. The Cobbers went 9-2 in conference play and also qualified for the NCAA playoffs in 2010, and bring back two of the MIAC's top talents to lead their quest for a conference title.



Cobbers claim top spot

Heading into the season, the MIAC coaches agree that Concordia is the team to beat, as the Cobbers' claimed the top spot in the 2011 MIAC Volleyball Preseason Coaches' Poll. Head coach Tim Mosser's team received eight of the 12 first-place votes and racked up 117 total points to earn the role of preseason favorite. Last year's co-champs, St. Thomas and St. Olaf, also both received first-place votes, and were picked to be Concordia's toughest tests in 2011. The Tommies received three first-place votes and 106 points, while the Oles were third with 94 points and one first-place vote.

The coaches predict the final three spots in the 2011 MIAC Playoff field will go to the College of Saint Benedict (18-12, 6-5 MIAC), Saint Mary's University (21-10, 7-4 MIAC) and Bethel University (13-16, 5-6 MIAC), in that order. The Blazers finished fourth, just two points behind St. Olaf, with 92 points. The Cardinals received 81 points to finish in the top five, and Bethel had a total of 75 points to claim the sixth spot - the cutoff for the Playoffs - in the preseason poll.

The next five spots, seven through 11, were decided by just 16 total points, proving the league's depth and parity, and proving that almost every team in the league could factor into the race for the final playoff spots again in 2011. St. Catherine University (9-20, 6-5 MIAC) - a playoff team last year - came in seventh with 49 points. Augsburg College (16-14, 5-6 MIAC) was eighth with 45, Carleton (10-14, 2-9 MIAC) finished ninth with 42 points, Gustavus Adolphus College (7-19, 1-10 MIAC) had 37 points at No. 10 and Hamline University (10-18, 2-9) was picked 11th with 33 points. Macalester College (13-16, 3-8 MIAC) rounded out the coaches' poll with 15 points.

Three in the Top 16

The MIAC's position in the national volleyball landscape was validated once again earlier this month when the American Volleyball Coaches' Association (AVCA) released its [2011 Preseason Division III Top 25 Coaches' Poll](#). The MIAC landed three teams in the top 16, and it was the same three that top the MIAC Coaches' Poll.

The Tommies, fresh off their National Tournament run, enter the season as the MIAC's highest ranked team at No. 10 in the nation. Concordia checks in at No. 14 and St. Olaf is just two spots behind the Cobbers at No. 16. Calvin received 23 of the 24 first-place votes to start the season ranked No. 1 in Division III. The next installment of the poll will be released on the AVCA's Web site on Sept. 6.

What's new?

The level of continuity in the MIAC is much different today than it was a year ago. Last season, the conference welcomed new coaches at six of its 12 volleyball schools, meaning that exactly half of the league entered 2010 with a new coach, system and philosophy. However, there were no coaching changes this offseason, so it will be interesting to see how that continuity affects the league - particularly among the up-and-coming teams.

The other "new" aspect of the 2011 season will be how the two defending co-champions replace some pretty significant losses. St. Thomas said goodbye to MIAC Player-of-the-Year **Emily Foster** along with three other All-Conference seniors. Meanwhile, St. Olaf graduated All-Conference stars **Kim Smisek** and **Kelly Prunty**. Both teams have a history of reloading rather than rebuilding, so it will be fun to see what's in store for St. Thomas and coach **Thanh Pham** and St. Olaf's Book.

Who's back?

While the Tommies and Oles, along with several other teams, are working to replace some of the talented seniors that graduated last year, there are a number of teams grateful for the talented players they have back, starting with the top team in the coaches' poll.

Concordia brings back possibly the top tandem in the league with seniors **Jenna Green** and **Katie Vonhoutka** back for their final season with the Cobbers. Green and Vonhoutka have both earned All-American honors during their three previous seasons as starters up front for the Cobbers, and their returns has fueled much of the optimism in Moorhead this season.

Bethel is another team that welcomes back a pair of All-MIAC selections in senior outside hitter **Nicole Wriedt** and junior middle **Caitie Helle**. Their experience could equal a playoff berth for the Royals. Saint Mary's star **Amy Kujak** is back for her senior season after last year's All-MIAC campaign, St. Olaf has **Ariel Carlson** back on the front line to help ease the loss of Smisek and Prunty, and Saint Benedict sophomore setter **Kathryn Gaydos** earned All-MIAC and Rookie-of-the-Year honors while directing the Blazers' offense as a true freshman.

Must-see matches

The volleyball season starts with a splash on Thursday with many of the MIAC teams hosting or traveling to tournaments. Both St. Olaf (Sept. 1-2) and Saint Mary's (Sept. 2-3) will host numerous matches on their campuses this weekend, with Augsburg (Sept. 9-10), Bethel (Sept. 9-10), St. Catherine (Sept. 9-10), Saint Benedict (Sept. 16-17) and Macalester (Sept. 16-17) all hosting tournaments over the season's first few weeks.

Conference play begins on Sept. 14 and wraps up on the final Saturday in October with plenty of intriguing matchups in-between. The top two teams in the coaches' poll, Concordia and St. Thomas, will meet up in Moorhead on Sept. 28, and last year's co-champs, St. Thomas and St. Olaf, will square off on Oct. 12. Saint Benedict and Saint Mary's will meet in Winona on Oct. 7 in a matchup of 2010 playoff teams. Bethel will host St. Catherine on Oct. 21 in an important battle for playoff positioning.

Augsburg and Hamline will renew their rivalry on Oct. 28 on the Auggies' home court. Carleton will host Gustavus on Sept. 28 as both teams look for big improvements this season, and Macalester hosts cross-town rival St. Catherine on the final day of the regular season, Oct. 29.

Ready to serve

With the 2011 season set to start later this week, the rest of the information in the 2011 MIAC Volleyball Preview has everything fans need as they prepare to follow their favorite MIAC team this season. Below are the full results from the 2011 MIAC Volleyball Coaches' Poll, helpful conference links, 2011 playoff dates and team-by-team previews submitted by each school's SID with links to each team's home page, roster and schedule and more.

2011 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.

2011 MIAC Volleyball Coaches' Poll		
Rank	Institution	Total
1	Concordia (8)	117
2	St. Thomas (3)	106
3	St. Olaf (1)	94
4	Saint Benedict	92
5	Saint Mary's	81
6	Bethel	75
7	St. Catherine	49
8	Augsburg	45
9	Carleton	42
10	Gustavus	37
11	Hamline	33
12	Macalester	15

2011 MIAC Playoffs Dates

(Top Six Teams): Quarterfinals (Tuesday, Nov. 1), Semifinals (Thursday, Nov. 3), Finals (Saturday, Nov. 5).

| [2011 MIAC Schedule](#) | [2010 MIAC Statistics](#) | [MIAC Recordbook](#) | [MIAC Archives](#) |



Augsburg

Coach: Jane Becker

Career Record: 16-14 (1 season)

2010 Finish: Tied 7th (16-14, 5-6 MIAC)

Augsburg Season Preview

The Augsburg College volleyball team will enter the 2011 season with high hopes. With eight letterwinners returning to the team, second-year head coach Jane Becker is excited about the potential for this year's group.

"I've been really encouraged with how well the group has performed so far in camp," said Becker. "We obviously lost some quality players from last year, but I think we have some people who are poised to step up and play a larger role for us this season."

Talented sophomore and junior classes

Leading the Auggies on the floor this season will be a talented trio of sophomores led by setter Emily McCourt (SO, Sun Prairie, Wis.). McCourt, who appeared in every set last season, was one of the teams' most indispensable players in her first campaign, as she led the Auggies in assists (877, 7.69 per-set), and ranked first in the conference's overall statistics in service aces (63, 0.55 per-set).

Joining McCourt on the offensive attack this season will be fellow sophomore Colleen Ourada (SO, Omaha, Neb./Mercy HS). Ourada finished last season with the third-highest kill total on the team (212, 2.16 per-set), and recorded a season-high 17 in the Auggies five-set win at Carleton in October.

Rounding out the Auggies talented sophomore class is Katelyn Berens (SO, Jordan, Minn./Prior Lake HS). As one of the top first-year defensive specialist in the conference in 2010, Berens ranked second on the team in digs (229, 2.04 per-set), while appearing in every match.

The Auggies will also be boosted by the return of a strong group of front-line players, including Nikolene Miller (JR, Tomahawk, Wis.), Jamila Lee (JR, Richfield, Minn.) and Micha Sater (JR, Fridley, Minn./Centennial HS). Miller and Lee ranked first and second respectively in blocks per-set in 2010, with Miller recording 107 (16 solo, 1.03 per-set) and Lee recording 77 (9 solo, 0.79 per-set). Sater will be able to return to the floor after missing the better part of the 2010 season due to injury.

Amy Jo Opsal (SR, North Mankato, Minn./St. Clair HS) will also return to the team this season as the lone senior on the roster. A key reserve for the Auggies in 2010, Opsal will serve as a defensive specialist this season.

Another familiar face who returns to the Augsburg lineup this season is outside hitter Tia Schuster (SO, Minot, N.D./Our Redeemer's HS). After sitting out the 2010 season, Schuster will provide the Auggies with another talented player on the front line.

Depth in large newcomer class

A talented group of newcomers, led by Tabby Roh (FY, La Crosse, Wis./Central HS), Maggie Zirk (JR, Dassel, Minn./Dassel-Cokato HS), Mackensie Menke (FY, Prior Lake, Minn./Shakopee HS), Shelby Vogel (FY, Sheldon, Iowa) and Emma Sievers (FY, St. Paul Minn./Cretin-Derham Hall HS) will provide depth to the Auggie squad in 2011.

Roh was an all-conference selection during her senior season at La Crosse (Wis.) Central, while Menke was a member of three state championship teams during her career at Shakopee. Zirk transfers from Ridgewater Community and Technical College, where she was a part of the Warriors' 2010 NJCAA Division III national championship squad. Vogel was an all-conference selection at Sheldon, and Sievers was an all-conference selectee at Cretin-Derham Hall.

The Auggies will open the non-conference portion of their schedule on Friday, Sept. 2 at the Pomona-Pitzer Invitational in Claremont, Calif. The team's first home match is scheduled for Tuesday, Sept. 6 against the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. The Auggies will then host the 30th annual Augsburg Volleyball Invitational Sept. 9 and 10. In honor of the 30th anniversary of the invitational, all Augsburg volleyball alumni are invited to participate in a short ceremony and reception following the conclusion of the invitational championship match.

| [Augsburg volleyball page](#) | [2011 Roster](#) | [2011 Schedule](#) |



Bethel

Coach: Gretchen Hunt

Career Record: 172-138 (10 seasons)

2010 Finish: Tied 7th (13-16, 5-6 MIAC)

Bethel Season Preview

Upperclassmen

The Royals will be led by six returning upperclass athletes with significant playing experience: seniors Nicole Wriedt, Kate Smith, and Haley Toter, and juniors Caitie Helle, Val Smith, and Amy Werner. Each of these players has already played in at least 50 matches in their career.

Wriedt leads the way as a two-time All-MIAC selection, she has played in 82 matches, tallying 767 kills and 154 blocks in her career. As a strong blocker and versatile offensive player from the opposite side, Wriedt causes problems for opposing teams with the variety of sets she can run and block she can put up on outside hitters. "Nicole is a great leader, a

smart player, a hard worker, and she's a talented athlete," says Head Coach Gretchen Hunt. "I just can't ask anymore of her than she already gives, and I'm really looking forward to a successful season for her."

Helle and Werner will anchor the middle blocker position after strong sophomore campaigns. Helle was also an All-MIAC selection in 2010, was twice named MIAC Player of the Week, and finished the season ranked 44th nationally in blocks per set. Werner finished both 2009 and 2010 ranked in the top 40 nationally in blocks per set, and has also racked up 490 kills in her first two seasons. "Caitie and Amy are as formidable at the middle blocker position as anyone we'll face in our conference or regionally this season," says Hunt.

Kate Smith will get her chance to run the offense after sharing duties the past three seasons with Betsy Naatjes, who graduated this spring. Smith has appeared in 73 matches in her career as a setter/hitter, tallying 254 kills and 852 assists. Hunt says, "Kate will get her chance to mentor our freshmen setters this year, and I know she'll be a great teacher. I also look forward to seeing her take control of this team as her own and run the offense with confidence."

Toter has been a sometimes starter at outside hitter, while also playing significant time at defensive specialist, appearing in 67 matches. And finally, Val Smith will enter her third season as the libero for the Royals, closing in on 1,000 digs as the season begins. "Haley and Val are two of our most solid passers in serve receive," says Hunt, "and we need both of them to be very consistent in that area. I also really look forward to seeing Val take some steps to becoming one of the really elite individual defenders in our conference. She has worked hard this offseason, and I really think it will pay off."

Other returners

Three sophomores are hoping to battle for increased playing time as their second season begins. Nicole Ackatz appeared in a handful of matches for the Royals last season, primarily at right side or middle hitter. After moving to outside hitter during spring workouts, Ackatz seems to have found a comfort level at that position and looks to take over one of the spots vacated by the graduation of Hannah Parks and Brianna Falck.

Mallory Rundquist appeared in 24 matches for the Royals as a defensive specialist, and will challenge to become a part of the regular defensive rotation. Rachel Bloom returns to Bethel after spending what would have been her senior year in high school as a PSEO student at Bethel, and after a year of learning the college game and a commitment to her strength and conditioning, will challenge for court time. "These three sophomores have worked hard in the off-season to take their next steps in leadership development, in their strength and conditioning, and in becoming more confident on the court. They are ready to compete for significant playing time with our returners and our talented freshmen," says Hunt.

Newcomers

Setters: Cierra Nickel is a 5'-6" setter who competed for Red Rock Central High School. Nickel was selected to the six-person All-Area First Team of the Worthington Daily Globe, and was a first team All-Conference selection (Red Rock) in 2008, 2009, and 2010. She surpassed 1,000 assists for her career during her senior season. Nickel was also a first team All-Conference basketball athlete, after averaging 10 points and four assists from the guard position as a senior.

Anna Goerlitz is a 5'-8" setter/hitter who was a four-time letterwinner in volleyball, basketball, and track and field. In volleyball she was a first-team All-Conference selection (Cloverbelt) as a sophomore, junior, and senior and team MVP all three years.

Middles: Michelle Bailey is a 6'-0" middle blocker from Kasson-Mantorville High School. A 2009 and 2010 first team All-Conference selection (Hiawatha Valley), and a member of the SMV Volleyball Club out of Rochester, Bailey brings a wealth of experience.

Lauren Olson, who hails from Lynden, Washington, was a starter on the powerhouse Lynden Lions. She is another 6'-0" middle blocker with great athletic potential. Lynden has brought home a consolation or championship trophy from the state tournament in Washington four of the last five years. Olson is a two-sport athlete who competed on the varsity tennis team as well.

Haley Christensen is a 5'-11" middle blocker from Pusch Ridge Christian Academy in Tucson, Arizona. Christensen was an Arizona Daily Star All-Southern Arizona Volleyball Team Honorable Mention Selection in 2010. Another multi-sport athlete in high school, she also garnered Honorable Mention All-City honors from the Daily Star in basketball.

Anna Bernstetter is a 5'-9" middle blocker from Holdingford High School. A 2010 first team All-Conference selection (Central Minnesota), Anna was selected to the North Central Volleyball All-Star Game in 2010. Another multi-sport athlete, Anna was also an All-Conference selection in basketball and softball.

Outsides: Sam Olson is a 5'-9" middle blocker or outside hitter from St. Louis Park High School and the Crossfire Volleyball Club. Another multi-sport athlete, Olson was a first team All-Conference (North Suburban) selection in 2010, and she also competed for the St. Louis Park track and field team. Olson garnered All-Conference honors in the high jump in 2010.

From Sheldon, Iowa, comes Kelly Van Wyk, a 5'-10" middle blocker or outside hitter. Van Wyk was named to the Siouxland All-Conference first team in 2010 and the IGCA Volleyball Academic All State team. In 2009, she was a part of a Sheldon team that made an appearance in the Iowa State Tournament for Class 2A, garnering runner-up honors.

Kirstin Paulson is a 5'-7" outside hitter from Florence, Wisconsin, and Florence High School. An All-Conference (Northern Lakes) first team selection in 2009 and 2010, a Green Bay Press Gazette All-Area second team selection in 2010, and a three-sport athlete with basketball and track, Paulson was part of Florence's 4x400 relay team that finished third at the Wisconsin State Track and Field Championships in 2009, in a school record time.

Christa Bruessel is a sophomore at Bethel who will be trying out for volleyball for the first time. After a strong season as a junior in high school at Owatonna and for the Northern Lights Volleyball Club, Bruessel was sidelined with a knee injury that lingered her entire senior year. After taking a season off, Bruessel is hoping to return to the form she had two years ago.

Defensive specialists: Kristin Wyss is a utility player and defensive specialist from Clear Lake, Wisconsin, for Clear Lake High School. An Honorable Mention All-Conference (Lakeland) selection in 2010, Wyss played club volleyball for the Mahtomedi Area Volleyball Association (MAVA). Wyss was also a four-year varsity track athlete, as a sprinter and a jumper, qualifying for the Wisconsin State Track Meet in 2009.

Hannah Indlecoffer is a 5'-4" defensive specialist from White Bear Lake High School and the White Bear Lake Volleyball Club. Indlecoffer was a three-year varsity player.

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Carleton

Coach: Heidi Jaynes

Career Record: 173-139 (12 seasons)

2010 Finish: Tied 10th (10-14, 2-9 MIAC)

Carleton Season Preview

The Carleton volleyball team hopes that 2011 offers much more stability than last year's campaign. Last fall, the Knights had their season turned upside down when the Cannon River flooded a number of Carleton's athletic facilities. The team played just one match on its home court inside West Gym, moving five other contests to other venues around campus and the Northfield area.

Graduation once again created holes in the rotation, claiming three impact players from the 2010 lineup: All-MIAC performer Kelly Lovett, setter Beth Jarrett and outside hitter Kyla Walter.

This year the Knights will lean upon senior libero Erin Anderson (Bloomington, Minn.) and a trio of juniors: middle hitter Jessa Youso (Virginia, Minn.), right-side Sarah Nielsen (Altoona, Wis.) and setter Hannah Folz (Evanston, Ill.)

In 2010, Carleton once again led the conference in blocks, limiting the statistical accolades for Anderson in her first season as the libero, yet she easily paced the squad at 3.67 digs per set. Youso led the team with a .265 hitting percentage, was second at 2.46 kills per set, and ranked third in blocks. For the second consecutive year, Nielsen finished second on the team in blocks, this time placing sixth in the MIAC. She also ranked second on the roster in attack percentage (.230). Sidelined for the entire 2010 season by illness, Folz was second on the roster in sets during her rookie year.

Then-rookies Sami Kemper (Prior Lake, Minn.), Ellie Schmidt (Denver, Colo.), and Chloe Nelson (Madison, Wis.) handled the uncertainty of last year, seeing plenty of playing time and gaining valuable experience, as the trio appeared in virtually every set.

Kemper's all-around play permitted her to stay on the court throughout the rotation, and she was third on the squad with 1.76 kills while also ranking among team leaders in blocks, digs, and assists. Schmidt spent the majority of the year on the back row, ranking behind Anderson with 2.24 digs per set. Nelson served as a defensive specialist and finished sixth in the MIAC in service aces.

Senior Ailsa McCulloch (Woodside, Calif.), junior Elissa Walter (Aspen, Colo.) and sophomores Rachel Johnson (Woodbury, Minn.) and Haley Woodward (Edina, Minn.) provide added depth along the front row.

Six newcomers join the roster in 2011: sophomore Becca Hobbs (Williams Bay, Wis.) and rookies Alicia Flatt (Walnut Creek, Calif.), Liz Groesbeck (Henderson, Nev.), Karen Halls (Edina, Minn.), Claire Willeck (Eden Prairie, Minn.) and Rachel Womack (St. Paul, Minn.).

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Concordia

Coach: Tim Mosser

Career Record: 346-122 (18 seasons)

2010 Finish: 3rd (24-7, 9-2 MIAC)

Concordia Season Preview

Not much has changed for the Concordia volleyball team since they last left the court in the NCAA Tournament in November. The Cobbers return all six starting players and have everyone back from a team that went 24-7 on the year and was within one game of the MIAC regular season championship.

The two biggest reasons that head coach Tim Mosser has been looking forward to this season come in the forms of returning All-Americans Jenna Green (Sr., Dilworth, Minn./D-G-F HS) and Katie Vohnoutka (Sr., Eden Prairie, Minn.). Both players have been in the CC starting lineup for three years and both have been handfults for any opposing defense to try and stop. Green led the team in kills in 2010 and was seventh in MIAC in both kills and digs. Vohnoutka was second on the team in overall kills but led the team in kills and blocks in conference play. She finished the year second in the MIAC in blocks and third in kills in league play. Green has 949 kills and 1034 digs in her three-year career and will likely become only the second player in the history of the program to surpass the 1000 kill, 1000 dig mark. Vohnoutka has 914 career kills and should become the 11th member of the 1,000-kill club in school history.

While Green and Vohnoutka will draw the most attention from opposing team's defense, the Cobbers have several other front line players that can carry the team for an entire match. Senior Ashley Beseman (Raymond, Minn./MACCRAY HS) and sophomores Allison Bruggeman (Moorhead, Minn.) and Brooke Tastad (Montevideo, Minn.) all had over 100 kills on the year. All three players also showed the versatility that green and Vohnoutka bring to the team. Beseman was second on the team in blocks in 2010 while Bruggeman was third on the team in blocks and fourth in digs.

The Cobbers will also return their offensive quarterback and defensive specialist. Three-year starter Amy Sykora (Rapid City, S.D./Stevens HS) has posted 700-assist seasons the past two years and has 2,075 helpers in her career. She is third on the school's all-time assist list and should jump into the second spot during the season. Sophomore Rachel Wiinanen (Maple Grove, Minn.) stepped into the libero role last year and had over 325 digs in her first season.

Mosser has also started the task of restocking the cupboards for next year as he brought in five freshmen that will all learn from their experience of playing with a group that has remain intact for two straight years.

Concordia will start the season with another target on its back. The Cobbers are one of only two teams in the MIAC to be ranked in the top 15 in the AVCA preseason poll. CC will have plenty of opportunity to show they belong among the nation's elite. Concordia will travel to four top-tier tournaments during the regular season and will face four teams ranked in the top of the 13 of the nation. The pinnacle of tough competition will come at the Colorado College Invitational where they will face two-time national champion Juniata (Pa.) as well as Washington University (Mo.) who is ranked third in the preseason poll and advanced to last year's NCAA semifinals as well as host Colorado College who starts the season ranked No.13.

If Concordia can be successful during their tough non-conference schedule then by the end of October they should be able to set their sights on a MIAC championship and a deep run in the NCAA Tournament.

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Gustavus

Coach: Rachelle Dosch

Career Record: 7-19 (1 season)

2010 Finish: 12th (7-19, 1-10 MIAC)

Gustavus Season Preview

The Gustavus volleyball team enters the 2011 season with a chip on its shoulder after finishing 12th in the MIAC last season with an overall record of 7-19 and a MIAC mark of 1-10. Head Coach Rachelle Dosch, in her second season at the head of the volleyball program, already sees a fresh attitude and a new focus in the gym.

"Everyone is more comfortable with each other and with the coaching staff the second year around. Everybody has really worked hard to be on the same page," said Dosch.

The 2011 Gusties will be led by senior captains Angela Ahrendt (St. Paul, Minn.), Malea Noennig (Norwood Young America, Minn.), Olivia Warren (Goodhue, Minn.), and Katie Ness (Excelsior, Minn.). Angela Ahrendt, a proven force at the net in her first three seasons, led the team in kills last season with 292, averaging 2.95 kills per set. Ahrendt finished second in the MIAC in blocks per set (1.13) and fifth in hitting percentage (.297). She enters the year knocking on the door of the Gustavus 1000 kill club with 823 in her career. Noennig returns as the squad's go-to setter, as she led the team in assists with 589, averaging 7.10 assists per set. Olivia Warren will look to reprise her role as an outside hitter after missing the majority of last season due to illness, while Ness will add depth to the back row. Coach Dosch says that the intensity in practice stems from the four senior captains.

"They have wowed me in the way that they have stepped up into this leadership role and it began as soon as they found out they were captains," commented Dosch on the leadership of her senior captains. "They have really bought into our system and have done a lot of work to learn how to be leaders in this program."

Juniors Kelsey Florian (Roseville, Minn.), Emily Phillips (Cleveland, Minn.), Erin Sherman (Golden Valley, Minn.), and Lisa Beacher (Roseville, Minn.) can all be expected to play larger roles this season. Florian will compliment Noennig at setter, recording 74 sets played and 344 assists last season. Phillips played in 91 sets, notching 148 kills (1.63 k/set). Sherman finished third on the team in digs last season with 171 (2.14 d/set) and will add depth to the back row, while Beacher will compliment the front row as an outside hitter.

"The juniors again are a big part of this program. On a level on and off the court, all of them have important leadership qualities that help move our team in the right direction," said Dosch.

Sophomore Dana Boerboom (Cottonwood, Minn.) put her versatility on display in her rookie season, finishing second on the team in kills with 240 (2.55 k/set) and digs with 179 (1.90 d/set). Jenna Lagatt (Sartell, Minn.) will also be asked to provide depth on defense in her second year.

First year players Emily Gilman (Maple Grove, Minn.), Jessica Grill (Elk River, Minn.), and Shelby Nosan (Baudette, Minn.) have all made an impact in training camp and will be expected to contribute in the front row.

"Our freshman class has really impressed me so far. They are really pushing both the upperclasses and themselves. They have all come in here and taken the initiative to be ready to go at the college level," stated Dosch.

Gustavus will open the 2011 season at the Pike's Peak Challenge hosted by Colorado College in Colorado Springs, Colo. on Sept. 2-3. The Gusties will play four matches while in Colorado Springs starting with Howard Payne University and Westminster College on Friday, and finishing with Colorado College and SUNY New Paltz on Saturday.

"We are really going to focus on the things that we have been working on this pre-season and brining that to game situations," remarked Dosch on her expectations for the team at the Pike's Peak Challenge. "It's the first tournament and the lineup isn't set yet, so it will be a good opportunity to see who is working the best together on the court. We will face a good mix of teams that we don't know very well, so its up to us to go in prepared and play our best."

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Hamline

Coach: Audrey Ludwig

Career Record: 10-18 (1 season)

2010 Finish: Tied 10th (10-18, 2-9 MIAC)

Hamline Season Preview

12 new names join a pair of returning players on the 2011 Hamline University volleyball roster as second year head coach Audrey Ludwig brings in one of the largest recruiting classes the Pipers have ever seen.

There's not a senior on Ludwig's roster but that doesn't mean that the young team will lack leadership. Outside Hitter Aisha Baker (Jr., Minnetonka, Minn.) and Middle Blocker Sam Greeney-Hamlin (So., St. Cloud, Minn.) return to the court to help the Pipers establish a strong team identity. Both players saw considerable action for the Pipers last season.

Greeney-Hamlin is a good example for her teammates of the impact that a first-year player can have on the court. In her inaugural campaign last season, she led the Piper attack with 2.37 kills/set and 242 total kills. She also tied for the team lead in total blocks with 34.

Baker was second on the team in kills/set last year at 1.95, and tallied 154 total for the season. She is also a strong leader off the court and will be a good mentor for the newcomers competing at the outside hitter position. She was also Hamline's representative on the All-MIAC Sportsmanship team in 2010.

First-year players Frankie Miller (Grand Island, Neb.) and Paige Walters (Nevis, Minn.) will join Baker in competition for the OH role. Ludwig is also looking for Mackenzie Remick (Prior Lake, Minn.), a 6-2 right side hitter who was the MVP of the South Suburban Conference last year, to bring a strong blocking presence to the floor for the Pipers. "We have a lot of players coming in who are from excellent club and high school programs," Ludwig said. "They will be expected to fill major roles for us this season from day one."

Their classmates Karley Kilian (St. Michael, Minn.), Hanna Arns (Waverly, Iowa), Dani Schultz (Eden Prairie, Minn.), and Stephanie Kaup (Chandler, Ariz.) bring in a versatility as hitters, all having played a lot of different attacking roles and therefore allowing Ludwig numerous lineup possibilities. Schultz is 5-11 while Kilian and Kaup stand 6-0, offering excellent size to the Pipers' front wall.

Assisting the Piper attack will be a pair of first-year setters looking to make an immediate impression. Sammie Miller (Grand Island, Neb.) – Frankie's twin sister – will be joined by Becka Mozes (Eden Prairie, Minn.) and at the position. Ludwig, a three-time All-MIAC setter for St. Olaf, believes that all three are capable and talented setters who each bring something different to the court.

As with the other positions, the battle for libero and defensive specialist roles are wide open between Lynsey Reimer (Peosta, Iowa), Lacy Koss (Dodge Center, Minn.), and Brittney Bredemus (Andover, Minn.).

The young Pipers will play nine matches (including a pair of weekend tournaments on the road) before starting MIAC play September 13 at Concordia. Another weekend tournament follows. So, by the time the Pipers are ready for the meat of the conference slate, Ludwig may have a good feel for where her players stand.

"With this many new players, establishing the intensity and work ethic of our gym culture and developing team chemistry early on will be important to our success. The incoming players will need to learn our systems and style of play quickly before our opening match (against Bethany Lutheran on September 1)," she said. "What I do know at this point is that we have a lot of players who are passionate about playing volleyball for Hamline. That's a great base to start from. It will be exciting to move forward from there."

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Macalester



Coach: Annie Doman

Career Record: 13-16 (1 season)

2010 Finish: 9th (13-16, 3-8 MIAC)

Macalester Season Preview

After going winless in MIAC play three seasons in a row, Macalester made outstanding progress last fall under new coach Annie Doman, and is looking to continue improving in 2011. The Scots went 13-16 last fall, matching their victory total from their previous three campaigns, and return most key players.

One player who will be difficult to replace will be All-MIAC pick Majra Mucic, who ranked fifth in the conference with 3.6 kills per set. She hit .297 on the season and led the team with 4.1 points a set. Expecting to take over much of the responsibilities at the net will be Laura Avena (So., Cesis, Latvia / Riga Gymnasium #1), one of the MIAC's top newcomers a year ago. Avena hit .245 with 2.42 kills and 3.1 points per set, and with her hard-moving jump serve, ranked fifth in the league with 0.49 aces per set. She will be joined on the front line by Taylor Tinkham (Sr., St. Louis Park, Minn.), who hit 2.2 kills per set with a .250 hitting percentage and team-best 68 blocks.

Danielle Dweck (Sr., Sea Cliff, N.Y. / North Shore) returns to her setter role after ranking eighth in the conference with 7.3 assists a set. Anna Trier (Jr., Sun Prairie, Wis.) was among the league-leaders in serving aces.

Several other key returners are back for Coach Doman, including Bailey Rehnberg (So., York, Pa. / York Suburban), Mattie Hill (Jr., Liberty, Mo.) and back row standout Glasha Marcon (Jr., Richmond, Calif. / Albany).

Coach Doman has brought in several new first-years who will challenge the returners.

"I am very excited for the season," said Coach Doman. "It will be great to have back so many returners with a lot of experience, combined with our incoming first-years."

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Saint Benedict



Coach: Nicole Hess

Career Record: 18-12 (1 season)

2010 Finish: Tied 5th (18-12, 6-5 MIAC)

Saint Benedict Season Preview

In her first year at CSB, Chelsie Sobieck played in the elite eight round of the NCAA Tournament. Now in her final collegiate season, senior captain Sobieck will try to lead the Blazers to similar heights.

The College of Saint Benedict Blazer volleyball team enters the 2011 season looking to build off of last year's trip to the MIAC Semifinals, where they lost to eventual conference champion St. Olaf 2-3. CSB finished 18-12 overall and 6-5 in the MIAC.

Head Coach Nicole Hess begins her second season at Saint Benedict with a career coaching record of 82-144. After picking up her first postseason victory against Saint Mary's 3-1 last year, Hess hopes to enjoy more playoff success with a team that ranked nationally in assists (32nd, 11.70 assists per set), blocks (41st, 2.14 blocks per set) and kills (47th, 12.37 kills per set).

Sobieck, an outside hitter, is the last active member of the 2008 squad that advanced to the national quarterfinals. After ranking second and third for the Blazers in kills and digs respectively, she averaged 2.52 kills and 2.12 digs in 111 sets in 2010. Sobieck now has 897 kills and 867 digs in her career.

Joining Sobieck as co-captain is junior middle blocker Shannon Bassett. Last season she compiled 207 kills and 87 blocks while leading the team with 28 service aces.

Despite having only a few veteran players, the team is rich in talent. Sophomore setter Kathryn Gaydos was a sensation for the Blazers in 2010, ranking third in the MIAC with 10.53 digs per set. In addition to being ranked 22nd in Division III in assists per set, Gaydos was named to the all-conference team and was chosen as the MIAC Rookie of the Year.

Other sophomores that made significant contributions last season include outside hitters Lexi Alm and Chelsea Rachel. In 89 sets, Alm averaged 3.25 digs, 2.33 kills and 0.42 blocks. She missed the last four matches of 2010 due to injury. Rachel was selected as the team's most improved player after recording 179 digs in 58 sets. She tallied double-digit digs in 16 of the 18 matches she played in, including a 24-dig effort in the regular season finale against Concordia-Moorhead.

With the addition of an impressive class of 2015, the young but experienced Blazers are prepared to make a deep run in the MIAC Playoffs and vie for an NCAA Tournament bid.

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St. Catherine

Coach: Corey Phelps

Career Record: 9-20 (1 season)

2010 Finish: Tied 5th (9-20, 6-5 MIAC)

St. Catherine Season Preview

Fresh off their first playoff berth in several seasons, this year's Wildcat squad has plenty of reasons to be optimistic about making another playoff run in 2011. With half a dozen athletes that can play multiple positions, the Wildcats boast unparalleled versatility and improved depth from last season. While the loss of MIAC Defensive Player of the Year Nicole Neumann will be felt, the Wildcats return four starters and will use their depth to implement a variety of lineups.

Seniors Kayla Sis and Callie Teigen, along with junior Brittnei Wangerin, will be key players for the Wildcats again this season. Wangerin led the team last year in kills and kills per set. Sis was second to Wangerin in both categories, in addition to leading the team in attack percentage. Teigen led the team in aces and was second in set assists while moving among several positions. Both Sis and Wangerin will anchor the front line attack, while Teigen has the versatility to play almost anywhere on the floor.

A talented group of incomers will help push the upperclassmen and raise the overall team level of play. First-year setter Jordyn Wentland was the North Suburban Conference player of the year in 2010 and should see significant playing time. First-year Karsee Kuntson and transfer Kelsey Wirtanen both have the ability to start at several different positions and will enhance the Wildcat's versatility. Overall, the athleticism and volleyball knowledge of every player will make this a well-rounded Wildcat team.

Head Coach Corey Phelps says the coaching staff is "cautiously optimistic about our chances. If we can stay healthy, the potential is there for this program to take some big strides forward this season. With our improved versatility and depth, we'll have the opportunity to figure out who we are as a program both offensively and defensively and what the strengths of this team will be in years to come."

The Wildcats open up the season on September 2nd and 3rd at the UW Stevens Point Tournament. They will host the St. Kate's Tournament on September 9th and 10th before heading to Northfield on September 14th to open conference play with a match against Carleton.

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Saint Mary's

Coach: Mike Lester

Career Record: 234-171 (14 seasons)

2010 Finish: 4th (21-10, 7-4 MIAC)

Saint Mary's Season Preview

ABC's Wide World of Sports may have coined the phrase, "The thrill of victory and the agony of defeat," but the Saint Mary's University volleyball team lived it in 2010.

And it was that "agony of defeat" — failing to earn an invitation to the NCAA national tournament — that has helped fuel the Cardinals' drive entering 2011.

"The season has officially just begun, but the ladies have been anxious and ready to go for a while," said SMU coach Mike Lester, whose team finished 21-10 a year ago — claiming their third straight Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference Tournament appearance, and eclipsing the 20-win barrier for the second straight year.

"There's no question the returners felt they played well enough to earn the right to play in the NCAA Tournament and not being selected hurt a little bit. I'm sure it lit a fire in some of our returners.

"We haven't really talked a lot about last year, mainly because we are trying to change the focus to this season.

And this year's squad will have a far different look when they kick off the season at the Sugar Loaf Classic on Sept. 2.

Gone is two-time honorable-mention All-American Sarah Gardner, who closed out her senior year with a single-season career-best 429 kills. She was just the sixth player in SMU volleyball history to record 400 or more kills in a season — while also finishing her illustrious four years at SMU with 1,419 career kills, 62 kills shy of Diane Wood for second all time.

Gone is three-time All-MIAC first-teamer Jessica Mate, who also completed a stellar senior season in 2010, recording a single-season career-best 354 kills, while finishing No. 5 all-time in career kills with 1,306.

Gone is setter Brittany Cherwinka, just one of two SMU setters to leave SMU with 3,000 or more assists in a career — finishing 2010 with 870 assists and closing out her four-year SMU career with 3,164. Gone are four-year regulars Sarah Harstad, Emily Welhaven, Lindsey Legett and Rachel Monterastelli.

Gone, but not forgotten.

"When you lose seven players who played significant roles, it's sure to have an impact," said Lester. "We lost some very talented individuals, but everyone here also knows that it's about the team — the players returning know there are some roles and opportunities for them to step in and do some good things.

"The nice thing is, they are experienced players to go along with our new incoming freshmen."

Despite the loss of those seven graduated seniors, Lester's cupboard is far from bare.

All-MIAC First Team selection Amy Kujak (River Falls, Wis.) is back — and more healthy than ever following off-season shoulder surgery — while Erika Hurley (Chatfield, Minn.), Carissa Hahn (Hutchinson, Minn.) Cathy Rennie (Pine Island, Minn.), Tara Rasmussen (Kasson, Minn.), Megan Leisen (Kellogg, Minn.), Kaylee Bunne (LeRoy, Minn.), Sabrina Bushlack (Mapleton, Minn.) and Lexi Assimos (Northbrook, Ill.) are all back to fuel SMU's quest for a fourth straight MIAC Tournament appearance — not to mention another run at a national tournament invitation.

"It's going to be an interesting year," said Lester. "I've tried to tell everyone who will listen that we can have a very, very good season — everybody talks about what we lost, but we're talking about the players that are returning.

"And with the returners we have, and a very good crop of incoming freshmen, our expectations are the same as every year — to compete for a conference championship. Whether we get there or not, who's to say, sometimes you can't control that.

"Our plan is to be in position to win every conference match and put ourselves in position to make the conference tournament or win a conference title, wherever the chips may fall — but I think we are going to be in that mix somewhere."

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St. Olaf

Coach: Cindy Book

Career Record: 678-311 (29 seasons)

2010 Finish: Tied 1st (31-5, 10-1 MIAC)

St. Olaf Season Preview

The St. Olaf volleyball team, ranked 16th in the AVCA's preseason poll and off its second straight NCAA appearance and 31-5, will look to an experienced group in 2011 in its quest for another solid season.

The Oles return all but two from last year's team, albeit an important two. St. Olaf graduated two-time All-America outside Kim Smisek and setter Kelly Prunty and will look to its returners to pick up the slack.

OUTSIDE HITTERS

On the outside, Katie Wolfram (Jr., Woodinville, Wash./Bear Creek) will anchor one of the spots, where she has for each of the last two seasons. Wolfram accumulated 301 kills (2.30/set). The other spot will likely go to Kelly Heissel (Soph., Depere, Wis.). Heissel, a two-time all-conference pick in high school, appeared in one match last season.

St. Olaf also added first year outside Molly Nelson (Eagan, Minn. / Eastview) to the team.

MIDDLES

All-MIAC middle Ari Carlson returns for her junior campaign. Carlson was outstanding in her first season with the Oles -- after transferring from Division I Texas A&M Corpus Christi -- with 2.43 kills/set. She hit .274 and was second on the team in kills with 323.

The other middle spot will likely belong to first year Maggie Prunty (Welcome, Minn. / Martin County West), a three-time all-area pick and younger sister of the graduated setter, Kelly. Prunty led her Martin County West High School team to state, where she was an all-tournament selection.

Junior Katie Henning (Wheaton, Ill. / Warrenville So.) could see time in the middle or right. Henning was third on the team in blocks last season, and collected 104 kills while playing in 31 of the team's 36 matches.

RIGHT

Junior Melissa Burch (Lawrence, Kan. / Free State) will hold down the Oles' right side attack. Burch played in every set and match in 2010 and has 527 career kills to her credit. Burch was the Oles' top attacker, hitting percentage-wise, at a .287 clip last season. The Oles also have Alex Repperger (Soph., Cedarburg, Wis.) back for her second season.

SETTER

Sophomore Justine Dammermann (Spicer, Minn. / New London-Spicer) and Meghan Olsen (Fy., Stillwater, Minn.) will compete for the setter spot.

DEFENSIVE SPECIALISTS

The trio of Kirstee Rotty (Jr., Farmington, Minn.), Katie McDonald (Sr., Northfield, Minn.) and Kristin Boyum (Sr., Wanamingo, Minn. / Kenyon-Wanamingo) will anchor the backcourt. Boyum operated as the team's libero in 2010, collecting a team-high 534 digs while Rotty had 392. McDonald was the team's patroller, and had 223 digs last fall.

SCHEDULE

St. Olaf opens with the its invitational event Sept. 1-2 with matches against St. Scholastica, Crown, Bethany Lutheran and Martin Luther. After a tournament at Wartburg, the Oles open MIAC play with a home match against Bethel on Sept. 14.

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St. Thomas

Coach: Thanh Pham

Career Record: 216-57 (7 seasons)

2010 Finish: Tied 1st (31-7, 10-1 MIAC)

St. Thomas Season Preview

The Tommie volleyball team is ranked 10th in the 2011 Division III preseason poll by the American Volleyball Coaches' Association (AVCA). St. Thomas has been ranked in the top 25 for 71 of the last 72 consecutive polls.

Last season, St. Thomas shared the MIAC championship, won the NCAA region playoff championship and tied for fifth in the nation with the program's first appearance in the national finals and a 31-7 overall record. It was the Tommies' seventh MIUAC title or co-title in the last nine seasons.

UST graduated seven seniors, including setter Emily Foster, a three-time All-America and two-time conference Player of the Year. Foster surpassed 5,500 career assists to rank No. 2 in MIAC history.

Junior libero Kaitlin Wachler, sophomore hitters Nicole Potts and KariAnne Nass, a soph middle blocker Mackenzie Piechowski lead the group of 13 returners. UST has 15 freshmen, and among those expected to push for playing time include 5-8 OH Jill Greenfield of Hopkins; 6-0 MB Kelly Foley of Cretin-Derham Hall; 6-1 OH Sara Atkinson of Mounds View; and 5-6 setter Elizabeth Hawkins of Blaine.

St. Thomas will open its 2011 season with the Sugar Loaf Invite at St. Mary's on September 2-3, then seven days later will take on Augsburg, Northwestern, and UW-Stevens Point in pool A of the Augsburg Tournament. UST later will travel to San Antonio and twice to Iowa for weekend competitions.

UST has made its mark on the national and conference scene in Coach Thanh Pham's first eight seasons. Pham's .787 win percentage (216-57) ranks fifth nationally among active Division III coaches. Over the last six seasons, St. Thomas has the eighth best won-loss record out of 350-plus teams in Division III. The Toms' 172-37 record since 2005 includes a 76-9 record vs. MIAC opponents.

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