

# 2016 MIAC Volleyball Preview and Preseason Coaches' Poll

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[Skip to:](#) | [Poll](#) | [Playoffs](#) | [Podcast](#) | [Links](#) | [Team Previews](#) |

## 2016 MIAC Conference Preview

BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – A year ago, volleyball was as strong as ever in the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC), but there were certainly some surprises. With the 2016 season just a week away, another amazing season is the expectation, but whether or not it will match 2015's unpredictability will be a major story line.

A year ago, Gustavus Adolphus College was picked to finish sixth in the league and dropped its first two matches of the new campaign ... and then didn't lose again. After 27-straight victories, the Gusties had a perfect trip through conference play for a MIAC championship and two more postseason wins for a MIAC Playoff crown.

Gustavus was joined by two other MIAC teams – Bethel and Saint Benedict – in the NCAA Tournament, and that's where the two teams that battled in a magnificent MIAC Playoff title match handed off the baton. The Gusties' run came to a sudden halt in the first round, but Bethel rolled two three-straight wins to claim a regional championship and advance to the NCAA Elite Eight. The Royals came up just short for extending their run to the national semis, but combined with Gustavus and the Blazers to admirably carry the MIAC's flag forward.

Those weren't the only big surprises in 2015. The previous season's co-champions and Playoff finalists – St. Thomas and Augsburg – stunningly both failed to qualify for the six-team MIAC Playoffs. Meanwhile, Saint Mary's was another pleasant surprise, as the Cardinals shared third with Saint Ben's and just missed out on joining that trio in the NCAA Tournament. Concordia and Carleton rounded out the 2015 Playoff field, with the Knights pushing the Blazers to five sets in the quarterfinals in a memorable match.

The MIAC's collective strength was once again obvious in 2015. Last season, 75 percent of the MIAC's volleyball teams – 8-of-12 – finished above .500, with one more just a game below even. Six of those teams won at least 18 matches and all but two MIAC squads finished with winning records against nonconference opponents.

So what course with the 2016 season take? Last season certainly shuffled the expectations, as Bethel brings back a ton of talent from its Playoff run and Gustavus not only has numerous key players back, but also a 25-match regular-season winning streak to build on. Saint Ben's and Saint Mary's are looking to join those two in the battle for the MIAC title, hopes are high for continued improvement at Concordia and Carleton, and the Tommies and Auggies certainly want to re-join the party after a year off.

St. Olaf welcomes a new head coach – former two-time MIAC Player-of-the-Year Emily Foster – who succeeds legendary Cindy Book and hopes to trend the Oles upward. St. Catherine finished five matches above .500 and just missed a Playoff spot and both Hamline and Macalester had impressive records against nonconference foes as well in 2015, and now hope to translate that success over into conference play.

In all, there are 12 teams and countless coaches and student-athletes who are ready to build on last year's success, reverse 2015's fortunes, or to write a new chapter in the storied history of MIAC volleyball. And for all involved, Sept. 2 can't get here fast enough.

## COACHES CAST THEIR VOTES

Though it's tight at the top, the MIAC coaches certainly remain impressed with Bethel's strong finish to the 2015 season. That led to the Royals finishing atop the 2016 MIAC Volleyball Preseason Coaches' Poll with 120 points and 10 of the 12 first-place votes. A look at Bethel's returning roster is all the proof needed to figure out why the conference coaches are so high on Head Coach Gretchen Hunt's squad.

The Royals (25-10, 9-2 MIAC) return stars at all the right spots, and the team enters the season ranked No. 12 in the nation in the AVCA Coaches' Poll. Leading the way is senior hitter Carlee Hoppe, who was the Most Outstanding Player at the NCAA Regional and an Honorable Mention All-American. She'll team up with two-time All-MIAC middle Kristin Stern at the net, with setter Katie Lubben also back to run Bethel's high-powered offense.

MIAC coaches expect Saint Benedict and Gustavus to be the Royals' top challengers, but barely separated the two with the Blazers finishing



second in the poll with 105 points and one first-place vote, and the defending-champion Gusties receiving 104 points. Saint Benedict was 18-10 overall and 8-3 in conference play a year ago against a tough schedule to earn its at-large bid to the NCAA tourney, and Gustavus' unforgettable campaign ended with a 27-3 records and a perfect 11-0 mark in conference play.

Each team also returns plenty of star power, as both once again take aim at the MIAC's top spot. Saint Benedict's offense will again flow through Honorable Mention All-American setter Megan Pekarek, with hitters Brianna Schmiesing and Meghan Koop both back to lead the attack. Gustavus graduated MIAC Player-of-the-Year Alyssa Taylor and will certainly miss her presence at the net, but the cupboard is far from bare. Nora Holtan returns at setter following a rookie season that ended with both MIAC and Central Region Rookie-of-the-Year honors. Right-side hitter Taylor Trautman and defensive specialist Brittany Luethmers are also back in St. Peter, Minn., after earning All-MIAC honors in 2015.

Despite a year outside the Playoff field, MIAC coaches expect St. Thomas to make it an aberration and not a trend, as the Tommies finished fourth in the 2016 Preseason Poll with one first-place vote and 84 total points. Head Coach Thanh Pham hopes his experienced team can rebound from its 2015 performance (9-17, 4-7 MIAC) with seniors Taylor Lewis and Whitney Lloyd and junior Brooke Reichart all back to lead UST's formidable front line.

Saint Mary's shared third place a year ago and coaches expect the Cardinals to remain in the top five, as they received 71 points to finish fifth in the coaches' poll. SMU was 20-10 overall and 8-3 in the MIAC in 2015, and should have an explosive offense again this season. All-MIAC middle hitter Molly Urban is back to lead the way and she'll be joined by fellow juniors Sara Lind (MH) and Brittney Hanson (setter), who dished out 518 assists a year ago.

The conference coaches also expect Augsburg to return to Playoff form in 2016, as the Auggies received 67 points to finish sixth in the poll. Augsburg (19-9, 5-6 MIAC) had a great 14-3 nonconference record a year ago, but finished below .500 in conference play and missed out on the postseason on tiebreaker criteria. All-American Ashley Peper graduated, leaving a huge hole in front of the net for the Auggies, but Head Coach Jane Becker has veterans back at each position, led by All-American Honorable Mention setter Courtney Lemke, libero Macey Terhell and hitter Taylor Linn.

Carleton and Concordia each claimed Playoff bids a year ago, and the coaches expect them to be in the hunt once again in 2016 as the Knights were voted seventh (64 points) and Concordia came in eighth (59 points). Carleton (14-10, 5-6 MIAC) welcomes back Honorable Mention All-American hitter Lucy Stevens, as well as outside hitter Trish Hare and the versatile Caroline Duke as it aims for a return trip to the postseason. The Cobbers have high hopes for a talented setting duo, as Jena Klaphake and Mandy Mercil each had more than 400 assists a year ago and will lead the Concordia offense once again.

Hamline and St. Catherine occupied the next two spots with just one point separating the two St. Paul, Minn., rivals. The Pipers received the No. 9 spot with 41 points, and St. Kate's rounded out the top 10 with 40 points in the poll. Hamline was 11-15 a year ago (3-8 MIAC) and will be led by senior All-MIAC hitter Julia Zolonsky. She'll team up with middle hitter Beth Goodman, and both will receive sets from senior Amelia Jensen. The Wildcats welcome back All-MIAC and standout defensive specialist Shanee Herd and will again rely on the versatile Abby Palmer and Mackenzie Peper at the net.

The final two teams in the poll were also separated by just one point as St. Olaf (19 points) and Macalester (18 points) rounded out the preseason rankings. The Oles (9-19, 1-10 MIAC) bring back hitters Megan Grimes and Abby Carpentier and senior defensive specialist Abby Slack to lead the way in Foster's first season. Meanwhile, the Scots (14-15, 1-10) are ready to build on their 14-win campaign behind the return of All-MIAC hitter Clara Baumann and fellow hitters Brooke Hunter and India Medaris.

Fortunately for MIAC fans, the long wait from November to September is almost over, as the season begins in a big way on Friday, Sept. 2, with all 12 teams in action and a total of 23 matches that day. Teams will play nonconference matches over the season's first two weeks, with MIAC play starting with a full slate of six matches on Sept. 14. The regular season will conclude on Saturday, Oct. 29, with the [MIAC Playoffs](#) and NCAA Tournament to follow.

## A CLOSER LOOK

The rest of the 2016 MIAC Volleyball Preview contains complete results from the 2016 Preseason Coaches' Poll, a video from MIAC Media, helpful links and a preview for each team submitted by their sports information director. The MIAC web site - [www.miacathletics.com](http://www.miacathletics.com) - will be an outstanding source for MIAC volleyball news, schedules, scores, stats and more throughout the 2016 season.

Visit the [MIAC scoreboard](#) on game days to follow all the action, and download the [MIAC mobile app](#) to have all the information with you anywhere you travel. Also, connect to the conference on its [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#) pages for updates and interaction all season long.

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## 2016 MIAC Volleyball 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.

2016 MIAC Volleyball Preseason Coaches' Poll		
Rank	Institution	Total
1.	Bethel (10)	120

2.	Saint Benedict (1)	105
3.	Gustavus	104
4.	St. Thomas (1)	84
5.	Saint Mary's	71
6.	Augsburg	67
7.	Carleton	64
8.	Concordia	59
9.	Hamline	41
10.	St. Catherine	40
11.	St. Olaf	19
12.	Macalester	18

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## MIAC Weekly Podcast Preview

The MIAC Weekly podcast with Host Mike Gallagher is back with a new format, and an in-depth preview of the 2016 MIAC volleyball season. Gallagher's preview began was part of the "MIAC 3" on the [Aug. 24, 2016, episode](#). For more episodes, visit the [Podcast home page](#), or subscribe for the free downloads on [iTunes](#).

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## 2016 MIAC Volleyball Playoffs

The [2016 MIAC Playoffs](#) will feature the top six teams in the conference standings playing in a high-seed-host, single-elimination postseason tournament. The two top seeds will receive a bye to the semifinal round, while the No. 3 seed will host the No. 6 seed, and the No. 4 seed will host the No. 5 seeds during the quarterfinals, which will be held Tuesday, Nov. 1. The No. 3/6 winner will play at the No. 2 seed and the No. 4/5 winner will play at the No. 1 seed during the semifinals, which are scheduled for Thursday, Nov. 3. The championship match is set for Saturday, Nov. 5, with the two semifinal winners meeting on home court of the top remaining seed. All MIAC Volleyball Playoff matches will start at 7 p.m. The winner will receive the MIAC's automatic bid to the 2016 NCAA Division III Volleyball Tournament.

| [MIAC Volleyball Playoffs Websites](#) | [2016](#) | [2015](#) |

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## MIAC Volleyball Links

| [2016 MIAC Schedule](#) | [2015 MIAC Statistics](#) | [MIAC Recordbook](#) | [MIAC Archives](#) |

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## Team-by-Team Previews

| [AUG](#) | [BU](#) | [CAR](#) | [CON](#) | [GAC](#) | [HU](#) | [MAC](#) | [CSB](#) | [SCU](#) | [SMU](#) | [STO](#) | [UST](#) |



## AUGSBURG | [Auggies' volleyball home page](#) |

### Head Coach

- Jane Becker (7th season)

### A Year Ago

- 5-6 MIAC (t-6th place) | 19-9 Overall

### Players to Watch

- Courtney Lemke (S, SR | All-MIAC, AVCA All-American and AVCA All-America Honorable Mention in 2014; 760 assists, 8.54 assists per-set (3rd among MIAC setters), 223 digs, 2.51 digs per-set in 2015; Stands 6th in school history with 1,920 career assists and 3rd in school history with 9.10 career assists per-set.)
- Taylor Linn (MH/OH, JR | 157 kills (1.64 kills per-set), 147 digs (1.53 per-set) and 43 blocks (0.45 per-set) in 2015; 278 kills, 176 digs and 126 blocks in career.)
- Macey Terhell (DS/Libero, SO | 528 digs in 2015 (5th among MIAC players), 4.98 digs per-set average was 6th among MIAC players, 31 aces were t-9th among MIAC players.)

### Did You Know?

- Right-side hitter Ashley Peper finished her career in 2015 by earning her third straight American Volleyball Coaches Association Division III All-America honor, becoming the first Auggie in school history to earn the honor three times. She also was the first Auggie volleyball player ever to earn three AVCA All-Region honors and four All-MIAC honors in her career. She set Augsburg school records for career kills (1,735) and kills per-set (4.03).
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**Head Coach**

- Gretchen Hunt (15th season)

**A Year Ago**

- 9-2 MIAC (2nd place) | 25-10 Overall

**In the 2015 Postseason**

- MIAC Playoffs: 3-1 semifinal win over Saint Benedict; 3-1 loss to Gustavus in championship.
- NCAA Tournament: 3-0 Win vs. #10 Hope College (First Round); 3-1 Win vs. UW-Eau Claire (Second Round); 3-2 Win vs. University of Northwestern (Region Championship); 2-3 Loss vs. Hendrix College (NCAA Quarterfinal)

**Players to Watch**

- Carlee Hoppe (OH, Sr. | 2015 NCAA UW-Whitewater Region Most Outstanding Player, 2015 AVCA All-American Honorable Mention, 2015 AVCA All-Region, Three-time MIAC All-Conference)
- Kristin Stern (MB, Jr. | Two-time MIAC All-Conference)
- Katie Lubben (S, Sr. | 2014 MIAC All-Conference)

**Did You Know?**

- Bethel's NCAA Tournament appearance last season marked the fifth postseason trip since 1999. As a result, only two recruiting classes for BU volleyball have yet to compete in an NCAA tournament match since the 1996 season.



**CARLETON** | [Knights' volleyball home page](#) |

**Head Coach**

- Heidi Jaynes (18th season)

**A Year Ago**

- 5-6 MIAC (6th place) | 14-10 Overall

**In the 2015 Postseason**

- Lost 2-3 to Saint Benedict in MIAC Playoffs – Quarterfinals

**Players to Watch**

- Lucy Stevens (MH, Jr. | AVCA All-America Honorable Mention; AVCA All-Region; led MIAC and ranked 11th in Division III with team single-season record of 4.39 kills per set; in 2015, ranked among MIAC top-five in hitting percentage [.323] and kills [391]; In 2014, paced the MIAC in hitting percentage [.358], becoming the first rookie to do so in 22 years)
- Trish Hare (OH, Sr. | Second on last year's squad at 2.06 digs/set and fourth with 1.94 kills/set; also competed in the javelin at the 2016 NCAA Outdoor Track and Field Championships)
- Caroline Duke (RS/S, Sr. | Injury limited her to only 10 matches last season, averaging 5.09 assists and 2.24 digs; ranked among Knights' top-three in kills for 2013 and 2014 and tied for team lead in assists in 2014)

**Did You Know?**

- The Knights have earned the AVCA Team Academic Award for the 14th time in the last 16 seasons, most among MIAC squads over that time.



**CONCORDIA** | [Cobblers' volleyball home page](#) |

**Head Coach**

- Tim Mosser (24th season)

**A Year Ago**

- 7-4 MIAC (5th place) | 15-11 Overall

**In the 2015 Postseason**

- 3-0 loss to Saint Mary's in MIAC Playoff quarterfinals

**Players to Watch**

- Jena Klaphake (S, Sr. | 2nd on the team in assists last season; over 420 assists in each of the past 3 years; third on the team in digs in 2015)
- Mandy Mercil (S, Sr. | Led the team in assists in 2015; 1657 career assists)

**Did You Know?**

- Concordia has made the MIAC playoffs in 14 of the past 15 seasons



## **GUSTAVUS** | [Gusties' volleyball home page](#) |

### **Head Coach**

- Rachelle Sherden (Sixth season)

### **A Year Ago**

- 11-0 MIAC (MIAC Champs) | 27-3 Overall

### **In the 2015 Postseason**

- After a first round bye in the MIAC Playoffs, the Gusties shut out Saint Mary's 3-0 in the semifinals, followed by a 3-1 victory over Bethel in the MIAC Championship.
- Gustavus then faced UW-Eau Claire in the NCAA Championships and fell 3-1, snapping a 27-match win streak.

### **Players to Watch**

- Taylor Trautman (Right side, Sr. | 2015 All-Conference ... posted 257 kills last season with an average of 2.47 per set ... 212 digs (.962) ... 27 blocks)
- Nora Holtan (Setter, So. | 2015 AVCA Central Region Freshman of the Year, MIAC All-Conference and Rookie-of-the-Year ... 944 assists (8.91 per set) ranked second in the league ... team-leading 31 service aces ... 28 blocks)
- Brittany Luethmers (Defensive specialist, So. | 2015 All-Conference ... led team with 538 digs (.950) for an average of 2.64 per set ... 28 service aces)

### **Did You Know?**

- Gustavus set a program record 27-match win streak last season en route to its first conference championship since 1986. The improvement from an 11-15 overall record in 2014 to a 27-3 mark last season is the greatest turnaround on the 47-year history of the program.



## **HAMLIN** | [Pipers' volleyball home page](#) |

### **Head Coach**

- Becky Egan (4th season)

### **A Year Ago**

- 3-8 MIAC (10th place) | 11-15 Overall

### **Players to Watch**

- Julia Zolnosky (Sr., OH, MIAC AC last year, third in MIAC in Kills Per Set at 4.24)
- Amelia Jensen (Sr., DS/S, Led HU with 749 assists; fourth in MIAC at 8.23 per set)
- Beth Goodman (Jr., MH, averaged 2,02 Kills Per Set last year)

### **Did You Know?**

- For the second year in a row, Hamline had four volleyballers named to the MIAC Academic All-Conference team.

## **MACALESTER** | [Scots' volleyball home page](#) |



### **Head Coach**

- Annie Doman (7th season)

### **A Year Ago**

- 1-10 MIAC (t-11th place) | 14-15 Overall

### **Players to Watch**

- Clara Baumann (OH, Jr. | All-MIAC in 2015, 3.14 kills/set, 3.02 digs/set)
- Brooke Hunter (OH, Sr. | 2.72 kills/set, 0.45 blocks/set)
- India Medaris (OH, Jr. | 2.31 kills/set)

### **Did You Know?**

- The Scots started the 2015 season with a 10-1 record, including a perfect 4-0 mark in the ACM Tournament.

## **SAINT BENEDICT** | [Blazers volleyball home page](#) |



### **Head Coach**

- Nicole Hess (7th season)

### **A Year Ago**

- 8-3 MIAC (3rd place) | 18-10 Overall

### **In the 2015 Postseason**



- MIAC Playoffs: 3-2 win over Carleton in quarterfinals, 3-1 loss to Bethel in semifinals
- NCAA First Round: 3-2 loss to Wartburg

#### Players to Watch

- Megan Pekarek (S, Jr. | All-American Honorable Mention, All-Region, All-MIAC, led MIAC in assists)
- Briana Schmiesing (OH, Jr. | Second on team in kills as a sophomore)
- Meghan Koop (OH, Sr. | Second on team in digs, fourth in kills as a junior)

#### Did You Know?

- Since 2012, CSB volleyball has had eight athletes earn All-American honors.



### ST. CATHERINE | [Wildcats' volleyball home page](#) |

#### Head Coach

- Corey Phelps (7th season)

#### A Year Ago

- 4-7 MIAC (T8th place) | 18-13 Overall

#### Players to Watch

- Shanee Herd (L/DS, Sr. | 2015 All-MIAC; led the MIAC in digs (675) and was second in digs/set (6.19); Ranks No. 2 all-time at St. Kate's in career digs (1530))
- Abby Palmer (OH, Sr. | Ranked in the top-25 in the MIAC for digs (278) and digs per set (2.90) in 2015)
- Mackenzie Peper (RS, So. | Recorded 104 kills, averaged 1.65 kills/set as a freshman; ranked 14th in the MIAC in hitting percentage (.233) in 2015)

#### Did You Know?

- The St. Catherine volleyball team earned the AVCA Team Academic award for the eighth consecutive year in 2015 for academic excellence.



### SAINT MARY'S | [Cardinals' volleyball home page](#) |

#### Head Coach

- Mike Lester (19th season)

#### A Year Ago

- 8-3 MIAC (4th place) | 20-10 Overall

#### In The 2015 Postseason

- MIAC Playoffs: Concordia (W, 3-0, Quarterfinals), at Gustavus (L, 3-0, Semifinals)

#### Players To Watch

- Molly Urban (Middle Hitter, Jr. | 30 MP, 187 Kills, .309 Attack %, 16 Aces, 62 Blocks, 61 Digs ... First-Team All-MIAC in 2015)
- Brittney Hanson (Setter, Jr. | 518 Assists, 29 Aces, 132 Digs. ... Led team in assists with career-high 518)
- Sara Lind (Middle Hitter, Jr. | 133 Kills, .214 Attack %, 25 Digs, 55 Blocks)

#### Did You Know?

- Saint Mary's made its third straight appearance in the MIAC Playoffs last season, falling to regular-season champion Gustavus 3-0 in the semifinals. It was the third consecutive semifinal showing for the Cardinals.



### ST. OLAF | [Oles' volleyball home page](#) |

#### Head Coach

- Emily Foster (1st season)

#### A Year Ago

- 1-10 MIAC (T11th place) | 9-19 Overall

#### Players to Watch

- Megan Grimes (OH, So. | 2.34 kills/set... Hit .148 in rookie season.)
- Abby Slack (DS, Sr. | Led team with 476 digs... Had 16 aces.)
- Abby Carpentier (OH, Jr. | Was third on team in kills (172)... Added 117 digs.)

#### Did You Know?

- The Oles were 4-3 in four-set matches in 2015, but 0-5 in five-set contests... Five of the Oles' nine wins were in straight sets.



**ST. THOMAS** | [Tommies' volleyball home page](#) |

**Head Coach**

- Thanh Pham (14th season)

**A Year Ago**

- 4-7 MIAC (T8th place) | 9-17 Overall

**Players to Watch**

- Taylor Lewis (OH, Sr., | All-MIAC; Career: 59 matches, 517 kills, 552 digs, 45 blocks)
- Whitney Lloyd (MB, Sr., | Career: 52 matches, 104 blocks, 311 kills, 93 digs)
- Brooke Reichart (OH, Jr., | Career: 32 matches, 203 kills, 79 digs, 34 blocks)

**Did You Know?**

- With just one senior, the 2015 Tommies had an uncharacteristic 9-17 finish. UST's 2016 roster will have more experience with 11 juniors and seniors, four sophomores, one sophomore transfer and 10 freshmen

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[MIAC Volleyball Home Page](#)