

2018 MIAC Volleyball Preview and Preseason Coaches' Poll

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BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – For the second year in a row, Gustavus Adolphus College will enter the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) volleyball season as the team to beat, claiming eight of a possible 11 first-place votes in the annual Preseason Coaches' Poll.

The nation's No. 7-ranked team in the latest American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA) Top 25 returns a trio of MIAC award winners from last year's NCAA Quarterfinal team, including two-time MIAC Player of the Year and 2017 AVCA First Team All-America setter, **Nora Holtan**; 2017 MIAC and Central Region Rookie of the Year and AVCA honorable mention All-America outside hitter **Kate Holtan**; and 2017 MIAC Co-Defensive Player of the Year and AVCA honorable mention All-Region defensive specialist **Brittany Luethmers**. Gustavus has secured a berth in the NCAA Tournament each of the last three seasons.

The College of Saint Benedict volleyball team did not put much stock into last year's Preseason Coaches' Poll, as CSB went from No. 6 in the preseason to No. 1 in the postseason, securing the program's first MIAC Playoff title since 2009. The newly rechristened Bennies will not be overlooked this season, as they received three first-place votes and 109 points in the balloting to earn the No. 2 spot in the 2018 Preseason Coaches' Poll. Despite having to replace the leadership and production of graduated senior Megan Pekarek - who was named an honorable mention All-America selection by the AVCA last fall - the twin tandem of All-MIAC sophomores **Hunter** and **Madison Weiss** should help soften the blow.

Coming in at No. 3 in the 2018 Preseason Coaches' Poll is the University of St. Thomas. The Tommies won the regular season Conference title and made an appearance in the NCAA Tournament for the 12th time in the last 13 seasons last fall. While AVCA Second Team All-American Whitney Lloyd has graduated, 2017 Central Region Coach of the Year **Thanh Pham** does return a pair of All-MIAC picks, including senior middle blocker **Julia Spacek** and junior defensive specialist **Madie Kroehler**, along with All-MIAC Tournament outside hitter **Audrey Erickson** and former MIAC Rookie of the Year **Ellie Meyer**, who missed much of last season with an injury. The Toms will need production from each of them and more as they face another challenging schedule that includes matchups against three programs currently ranked in the AVCA top-15, beginning with a September 1 match at No. 3 Colorado College.

Augsburg University received one first-place vote and 94 points in the balloting to come in at No. 4 in the Preseason Coaches' Poll. The Auggies have grown into a perennial contender in the highly-competitive MIAC under head coach **Jane Becker**'s tutelage, reaching the MIAC Playoffs five times with a pair of MIAC regular season titles in Becker's eight-year tenure at the helm. Augsburg figures to be right back in the thick of things this season, returning two-time MIAC Defensive Player of the Year **Macey Terhell**, along with 2017 All-MIAC honorees **Morgan Malley** and **Corinna Evans**.

Much like Saint Ben's, St. Olaf College saw last year's Preseason Coaches' Poll - which slotted the Oles No. 11 out of 12 MIAC teams - as motivation. Head coach **Emily Foster**'s squad gave little credence to the projections, reaching the semifinal round of the MIAC Playoffs and tallying the program's first winning season since 2010. Expectations are much higher heading into 2018, as the Oles earned 79 points in the preseason MIAC balloting to settle in at No. 5 in this year's Coaches' Poll. St. Olaf returns three All-Conference performers, including sophomores **Summer Reid** and **Lexi Wall**, as well as junior **Lauren Rewers**, who also received honorable mention All-Region honors for her play last year.

Bethel University is No. 6 in the Coaches' Poll. Royals senior **Tina Hoppe** is one of just five active MIAC competitors to be named to multiple All-Conference teams during her career. An All-MIAC pick in 2016 and 2017, Hoppe tied for second in the Conference last season with 19 service aces in league play.

Coming in at No. 7 in the Poll is Saint Mary's University. SMU senior **Brandi Blattner** - a two-sport star in volleyball and basketball - enters the 2018 campaign just 200 kills shy of becoming the 13th Cardinal ever with 1,000 career kills. Blattner tallied double-digit kill totals in 21 of the team's 28 matches last season.

The Cobbers of Concordia College finished at No. 8 in the 2018 preseason balloting. While the team struggled to find consistency throughout a 7-15 season last year, Concordia did notch a signature win by sweeping then-No. 11-ranked Gustavus in Moorhead late last October. The Cobbers graduated just two players from their 2017 roster, a squad that finished the year by sweeping three of its final five Conference foes.



Nora Holtan has won back-to-back MIAC Player of the Year honors heading into her senior season at Gustavus.

St. Catherine University is No. 9 in the Coaches' Poll. SCU will look for junior **Larissa Kisch** to take on a leadership role in 2018. As a sophomore last season, Kisch played in 25 matches and appeared in all 89 sets for the Wildcats, leading the team in digs (324).

No. 10 in the Coaches' Poll is Carleton College. The Knights named **Jacki Smith** the program's ninth head coach in April. The Minnesota native and 2014 graduate of Northwestern-St. Paul takes over for Heidi Jaynes, who accumulated a 272-212 mark in 19 seasons at Carleton before transitioning into a full-time administrative role in March.

Hamline University is slotted at No. 11 in the Preseason Coaches' Poll. HU junior **Morgen Coleman** has been a constant on the court for the Pipers during her two seasons in St. Paul. Not only did she appear in 100 of the 105 sets while leading the team with 39 service aces last season, Coleman also started all 25 women's basketball games for the Pipers and was named to the MIAC All-Sportsmanship Team in both sports.

Finishing out the field is Macalester College. Mac will look to turn the corner in the second year of head coach **Sarah Graves'** tenure, as the Scots have totaled two Conference wins in the last five seasons. An All-Conference setter, Graves was part of the 2000 Macalester team that finished 22-8, reaching the semifinal round of the MIAC tournament.

Complete 2018 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.

2018 MIAC Volleyball Preseason Coaches' Poll

Rank	Institution (First-Place Votes)	Total
1.	Gustavus (8)	117
2.	Saint Benedict (3)	109
3.	St. Thomas	99
4.	Augsburg (1)	94
5.	St. Olaf	79
6.	Bethel	77
7.	Saint Mary's	53
8.	Concordia	50
9.	St. Catherine	45
10.	Carleton	28
11.	Hamline	24
12.	Macalester	17

2018 MIAC Volleyball Playoffs

The 2018 MIAC Volleyball 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, Oct. 30. 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. 1. The championship match is set for Saturday, Nov. 3, with the two semifinal winners meeting on the 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 2018 NCAA Division III Volleyball Tournament.

Odds and Ends

-Gustavus seniors **Nora Holtan** and **Brittany Luethmers** have a chance to become just the 15th and 16th players on record to become four-time All-MIAC selections in 2018. Holtan also has the opportunity to join former St. Thomas middle blocker Kelly Foley as the only three-time Conference Players of the Year in MIAC history.

-Entering his 16th season at St. Thomas, **Thanh Pham** is two wins shy of 400 for his career. Pham has guided the Tommies to 398 wins, one NCAA national championship, 11 conference titles and 12 NCAA Tournament berths.

-Five of the MIAC's 12 head volleyball coaches played collegiately in the Conference. Augsburg's **Jane (Gibbs) Becker**, Gustavus's **Rachelle (Dosch) Sherden** and St. Olaf's **Emily Foster** each played at St. Thomas, while Saint Benedict's **Nicole (Trnka) Hess** starred at St. Olaf and Macalester's **Sarah Graves** is now coaching at her alma mater.

For the Record

The MIAC is in the process of overhauling its sport record books to provide a better historical perspective of the Conference and the accomplishments of its student-athletes over the last century. The 43-page MIAC Volleyball Record Book contains annual Conference championship information, year-by-year standings, all-time award winners, individual and team records, NCAA Playoff history, and more. The information included in the 2018 Record Book is based on available data and research for additional historical documents is ongoing. The 2018 MIAC Volleyball Record Book is now available for download [here](#).