

2019 MIAC Volleyball Preview and Preseason Coaches' Poll

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BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – For the first time since 2009, the College of Saint Benedict will enter the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) volleyball season as the team to beat, claiming seven of a possible 11 first-place votes in the annual Preseason Coaches' Poll.

Saint Benedict made its way to the Sweet 16 round of the NCAA Tournament last fall after coming up just short to Gustavus in a five-set classic in the 2018 MIAC Playoff title match. The Bennies will hit the ground running with non-conference matchups scheduled against No. 4 Wis.-Eau Claire, No. 15 Mary Hardin-Baylor, and No. 17 Trinity all in the first week of the season. CSB, which opens the season ranked No. 25 in the American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA) Preseason Top 25 Poll, returns several key members of its 2018 rotation, including twin juniors **Hunter Weiss** and **Madison Weiss**, both of whom earned All-American honors as sophomores last season. Hunter finished the 2018 season ranked first in the MIAC and 26th in the nation with 425 total kills, while Madison led all of Division III with 194 total blocks.



Hunter Weiss and the Bennies are picked to win the MIAC in 2019 after making their way to the NCAA Sweet 16 last fall.

Gustavus picked up three first-place votes and 106 points to land at No. 2 in the MIAC Preseason Coaches' Poll. The AVCA's No. 18-ranked team to start the year, Gustavus will look to remedy the success it found in 2018 when the Gusties locked down the MIAC regular season and playoff championships, in addition to clinching a berth in the NCAA Tournament for the third time in four seasons. Before embarking on a repeat bid, the Gusties will have to get through a challenging non-conference schedule that includes contests against No. 4 Wis.-Eau Claire, No. 10 Aurora, No. 14 Washington-St. Louis, and No. 16 Wis.-Whitewater. Gustavus will need to fill the hole left at the setter position by three-time MIAC Player of the Year Nora Holtan, who completed her four-year Gustie career last fall, but sister **Kate Holtan's** play could help soften the blow. The rising junior has earned honorable mention All-America distinction in both of her collegiate seasons thus far and started all 30 matches last season with a team-high 38 service aces and 16 double-doubles - third-most in a single season in program history.

St. Thomas logged 99 points and one first-place vote to seize the No. 3 spot in the MIAC Preseason Coaches' Poll. After finishing 2018 with a 25-9 record overall and a berth in the NCAA Tournament, the Tommies face another strong non-conference schedule again in 2019, with matches scheduled against No. 4 Wis.-Eau Claire, No. 13 Illinois Wesleyan, and No. 16 Wis.-Whitewater. Though St. Thomas graduated four key seniors from last year's squad, 15-plus returners are expected back in 2019, including former MIAC Rookie of the Year and Elite 22 recipient **Ellie Meyer**. Meyer bounced back from an injury that cut short her sophomore season to earn All-Conference honors as a junior last year with 595 digs and 121 assists while playing in all 34 of the Toms' matches.

Augsburg received 90 points and one first-place vote in the preseason balloting, good for fourth in the MIAC Coaches' Poll. The Auggies finished 22-9 overall in 2018, qualifying for the NCAA Tournament for the third time since 2013. Augsburg has won at least 16 matches in each of the last 11 seasons and will aim to continue that streak in 2019. **Corinna Evans** was dominant in the middle last season, earning All-Conference honors after collecting 46 blocks and 14 double-digit kill performances as a sophomore in 2018. Three of the Auggies' first six opponents in 2019 are ranked among the top-16 in the nation to start the year, including No. 4 Wis.-Eau Claire, No. 5 Claremont-Mudd-Scripps, and No. 16 Wis.-Whitewater.

Bethel garnered 83 points in the preseason balloting to come in at No. 5 in the Poll. The Royals went 23-8 overall last season, reaching the MIAC Playoffs for the fifth straight year and seventh time in the last eight seasons. **Hannah Wilhite** burst onto the scene in 2018 as Bethel's primary setter, contributing 1,036 assists while adding 125 kills and 29 service aces. One of just two setters in the conference to average more than 10 assists per set and at least one kill per set in MIAC play last season, Wilhite also became the third Royal in six seasons to receive MIAC Rookie of the Year honors, joining elite company with four-time All-Conference honoree Carlee Hoppe (2013) and three-time All-MIAC selection Kristin Stern (2014). The Royals have a handful of non-conference matches scheduled against three top-25 vote-getters in the first two weeks of the season, including Northwestern-St. Paul, Carthage, and Wis.-Stevens Point.

St. Olaf finished just behind Bethel in the balloting with 82 points, good for No. 6 in the Poll. The Oles went 23-7 overall in 2018 to earn a second consecutive trip to the MIAC Playoffs. Winners of 45 matches over the last two seasons, St. Olaf will be looking to break through to the next level in 2019 with a trio of All-Conference selections returning to the lineup this fall. Leading the way will be senior right-side **Lauren Rewers**, who became the Oles' first All-America honoree in nearly a decade when she picked up honorable mention accolades last season. In her junior campaign, Rewers had at least 10 kills in 23 of St. Olaf's 30 matches and was a key part of an offense that ranked 13th in the nation in kills per set at 13.49. The Oles will open the 2019 campaign in California with four non-conference matches scheduled in the Pacific Coast Classic, headlined by a showdown with No. 5-ranked Claremont-Mudd-Scripps on August 31.

Saint Mary's went 13-14 overall with a 4-7 mark against MIAC opponents in 2018. The Cardinals will attempt to get back above the .500 mark in 2019 with a handful of experienced contributors set to return this season, including rising junior **Rachel Kedl**. Kedl posted 235 kills from her middle hitter position last fall before transitioning over to the basketball court where she saw action in 23 games as a forward, scoring in double figures in six contests last winter. In addition to hosting the annual Ground Round Sugar Loaf Classic on opening weekend, the Cardinals will take on several strong non-conference opponents in 2019, the most formidable of which being No. 4-ranked Wis.-Eau Claire in mid-September.

Concordia went 9-18 last season and return nine letter-winners from last year's squad, including two-time All-MIAC selection **Brianna Carney**. The lone senior in the Concordia lineup, Carney totaled 224 kills with an attack percentage of .216 as a junior last year. Carney - who has 647 kills and 193 total blocks to her name - has hit at least .200 in each of her first three seasons in Moorhead. The Cobbers will challenge a handful of local non-conference foes in their early September schedule, headlined by perennial NCAA Tournament contender Northwestern-St. Paul.

St. Catherine got back above the .500 mark for the first time since 2015 last season, going 14-12 overall. Defensive specialist **Grace Amacher** played a key role in the turnaround, earning All-MIAC honors after leading the conference in digs per set at 5.61 on the year. One of just two rookies to be named to the All-Conference squad last season, Amacher finished the year with 505 digs and 23 service aces. St. Kate's will get a taste of unfamiliar competition with four non-conference tournament matches scheduled at Birmingham-Southern College in Alabama on opening weekend.

Hamline returns 11 players from its 2018 roster that racked up the program's longest winning streak since 2014 and finished the year 12-13 overall. Eight of those 11 returners saw action in at least 60 sets last year, including the team's lone senior, **Morgen Coleman**, who has logged 1,000 assists, 661 digs, 381 kills, and 91 service aces over the last three seasons. The North Branch, Minn. native stayed on the Hutton Arena court through February, starting 20 games at guard for the Pipers' hoops team. Coleman and her volleyball teammates will begin the 2019 campaign in the Pacific Northwest for the Oregon Trail Classic on opening weekend.

Carleton went 12-10 overall in Jacki Smith's first season as head coach, suffering only one loss in eleven non-conference matches. Rising junior **Abby Loe** was a consistent bright spot at outside hitter for the Knights, starting every match last season while setting career highs with 205 kills and 38 service aces in 85 sets. Loe and the Knights will be challenged early as Carleton is set to take on No. 16 Wis.-Whitewater on the Warhawks' home court on opening weekend.

Macalester finished 9-8 in non-conference action last season and will look to stay above the .500 mark against uncommon foes again in 2019. Rising junior **Abrielle Dillon** will be back at defensive specialist for Mac after playing in all 28 of the team's matches as a sophomore last season. Dillon led the team defensively with 449 digs - eighth-most among all MIAC competitors - in addition to a team-high 37 service aces on the year. Macalester will compete in a pair of local tournaments to open the season, first at Saint Mary's University in Winona, Minn. on opening weekend before returning home to host the Macalester Invitational in St. Paul on the first full weekend of September.

Complete 2019 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.

2019 MIAC Volleyball Preseason Coaches' Poll

Rank	Institution (First-Place Votes)	Total
1.	Saint Benedict (7)	114
2.	Gustavus (3)	106
3.	St. Thomas (1)	99
4.	Augsburg (1)	90
5.	Bethel	83
6.	St. Olaf	82
7.	Saint Mary's	53
8.	Concordia	50
9.	St. Catherine	46
10.	Hamline	28
11.	Carleton	25
12.	Macalester	16

2019 MIAC Volleyball Playoffs

The **2019 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, November 5. 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, November 7. The championship match is set for Saturday, November 9, 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 2019 NCAA Division III Volleyball Tournament.

Odds and Ends

-Only 49 women on record have received All-MIAC honors at least three times. That number could grow by 10 in 2019, as 2018 honorees **Corrina Evans** (Augsburg), **Brianna Carney** (Concordia), **Kate Holtan** (Gustavus), **Hunter Weiss** (Saint Benedict), **Madison Weiss** (Saint Benedict), **Summer Reid** (St. Olaf), **Lauren Rewers** (St. Olaf), **Lexi Wall** (St. Olaf), **Madie Kroehler** (St. Thomas), and **Ellie Meyer** (St. Thomas) are all expected back on the court in 2019.

-Five of the MIAC's 12 head volleyball coaches played collegiately in the conference. Augsburg's **Jane (Gibbs) Becker**, Gustavus' **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.

-Concordia announced **Faith Dooley** as the sixth head coach in program history in April, marking the only volleyball coaching change in the MIAC this season. Dooley takes over for longtime Cobber coach Tim Mosser, who resigned last December after presiding over the program for 26 seasons. Dooley was an All-America selection at the University of North Dakota, helping the Fighting Hawks to a pair of NCAA Tournament appearances. She was named the Big Sky Tournament Most Valuable Player in her junior and senior seasons and became the first UND player in history to earn all-conference honors in four seasons. She finished her career as the all-time blocks leader in both UND and Big Sky Conference history.

For the Record

The MIAC continues to overhaul 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 47-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 2019 Record Book is based on available data. Research for additional historical documents is ongoing. The 2019 MIAC Volleyball Record Book is now available for download [here](#).

Celebrating a Century

The MIAC will celebrate its 100-year anniversary throughout the 2019-20 season. The conference's Centennial celebration will highlight the many outstanding moments, memories, and individuals who helped build the MIAC over the last century. Initiatives will include student-athlete, coach, and administrator spotlights, historical photos showcasing the evolution of MIAC sports and teams through the years, recognition of former MIAC student-athletes who continued their time in the conference as coaches and administrators, and more. The official #MIAC100 webpage will be housed at <https://www.miacathletics.com/miac100>.