

2009-10 MIAC Women's Basketball Season Preview

Posted: Nov 14, 2009

St. Paul, Minn. – The 2009-10 MIAC Women's Basketball season begins for the 12 conference teams with expectations of a successful year and hopes for a MIAC Playoff berth and a potential conference title. The next three months will separate the field and prove which teams have what it takes to contend with the best in the MIAC. It should be an exciting journey, let's take a glance at how the teams look coming into the season...



St. Thomas claimed the top spot in the 2009-10 MIAC Preseason Coaches' Poll, barely edging last season's league champion's Saint Benedict. The Tommies received eight first place votes while the Blazers got four. Concordia, Gustavus, Macalester, and St. Catherine round out the top six in the poll. Six of the 12 MIAC teams will make the end of the year playoffs.

Non-conference contests begin on Sunday, November 15 and the first conference games will take place on Wednesday, December 2.

2009-10 MIAC Preseason Coaches' Poll

Coaches voted for every team in the conference except their own team. Points were assigned for each vote (1 for first, 2 for second, etc.) Teams are ranked in order of lowest point total to highest with first place votes shown in parentheses.

1. St. Thomas (8)
2. Saint Benedict (4)
3. Concordia
4. Gustavus
5. Macalester
6. St. Catherine
7. Hamline
8. Bethel
9. Carleton
10. Saint Mary's
11. St. Olaf
12. Augsburg

2009-10 MIAC Playoff Dates

Quarterfinals (Monday, February 22), Semifinals (Wednesday, February 24), Finals (Saturday, February 27)

| [2009-10 MIAC Schedule](#) | [2008-09 MIAC Statistics](#) | [MIAC Recordbook](#) | [MIAC Archives](#) |



Augsburg

Coach: Jennifer Britz

Career Record: 24-99 (5 seasons)

2008-09 Finish: 11th (3-19 MIAC, 5-20 overall)

Augsburg Season Preview

A young, up-and-coming team, the Augsburg College women's basketball team will be looking to improve on its 5-20 overall finish (3-19 Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference) from a season ago. This year, with the addition of 13 new faces, the Auggies are excited about their possibilities.

"The coaching staff is looking forward to seeing a general progression with such a young team," stated head coach Jennifer Britz. "Consistency and progression will be two big keys for us this season."

Look for the Auggies to be most experienced at the guard position in 2009-10. Shannon Renne (JR, Nicollet, Minn.) returns to the Augsburg lineup as the team's leading three-point shooter. Renne averaged 28.1 minutes per-game last season and was ranked fifth in the MIAC in three-pointers made per-game (1.76).

Serenae Levine (SO, Eden Prairie, Minn./Eden Prairie HS) returns for the Auggies at the point guard position after being named to the MIAC All-First Year team a year ago. Levine played 33.3 minutes per-game for Augsburg, while leading the team in scoring (10.5 ppg), assists (114) and defensive rebounds (142).

Also returning for the Auggies will be the duo of Lexi Thompson (SO, St. Michael, Minn./St. Michael-Albertville HS) and Ashley Erickson (SO, Bemidji, Minn.). Thompson averaged 25.8 minutes per-game as a guard, posting 4.9 points and 3.4 rebounds per-game in her Auggie debut season. Erickson played just under 15 minutes per-game last season and will look to capitalize on that experience as the new season gets under way.

Despite the loss of All-MIAC honorable mention performer Christa Suedbeck to graduation, the Auggies will be bringing in newcomers Brittany Dyshaw (FY, Eagan, Minn.) and Kylee Persing (FY, Mound, Minn./Mound-Westonka HS) to fill roles at the forward/post positions.

Look for Augsburg to be a defense-minded team this season, with an up-tempo style of offense as they attempt to make it to the MIAC playoffs. "This season will truly be a whole group effort," commented Britz. "We will be looking to get contributions from a large number of players this year."



Coach: Jon Herbrechtsmeyer
Career Record: 77-100 (7 seasons at Bethel)
2008-09 Finish: 5th (13-9 MIAC, 15-12 overall)

Bethel Season Preview

Last season, the Royals made postseason play for the first time since 2005-06, and by defeating Gustavus Adolphus in the first round, secured their first ever MIAC playoff victory. The win was Head Coach Jon Herbrechtsmeyer's first ever against the Gusties, his alma mater. "For the last eight years, we've been trying to build a program that can compete with the best teams in the region," said Coach Herbrechtsmeyer, "and for us to play as well as we did, go on the road to Gustavus, and to win in the playoffs was a huge step for us."

After such a successful season, the 2009-10 Royals will have to count on an influx of freshman to step up. Almost 75 percent of the team's scoring from a year ago will have to be replaced. The Royals have graduated perennial All-Conference selection, Annegret Nautsch, and after being one of the taller teams in the conference a year ago, the Royals will be looking for a more up-tempo lineup to take charge. "This is a different team," said Coach Herbrechtsmeyer, "we don't have the size we had last year, but we have way more speed. We'll be different, but 'fun' different."

Guard Taylor Shelley (So., Backus, Minn.) scored 281 points, pulled down 103 rebounds, and came up with 56 steals in her first season at Bethel. Shelley, along with All-MIAC Honorable Mention forward Kristen Wolters (Sr., St. Cloud, Minn.), the leading returning rebounder, are going to be counted on to successfully guide a smaller and more inexperienced team to victories. Shelley stepped up her game in the second half of last season and played well in the postseason, contributing 14 and 12 points in Bethel's two playoff games, and leads all returning scorers at 10.4 points per game. Junior guard Shana Grejtak (Jr., Franklin, Minn.) is another returner that will need to provide a steady hand at the helm of the Royal offense and on the glass. She shot 46-percent from the floor last season, leading all Royals, and grabbed 5.3 rebounds per game. Incoming transfer Kristi Nye (So., Nashville, Tenn.) will also be asked to contribute immediately at the guard position.

Freshmen centers Scotti Moats (Fr., Waconia, Minn.), Amy Werner (Fr., Three Lakes, Wis.) and Katie Norlein (Fr. Blaine, Minn.), all over six feet tall, provide much needed size down low for a team replacing 6-3 Nautsch and 6-1 Erica Hormig.

Overall, nine of the 15 rosters spots are freshman, which could lead to growing pains, but hope for a very successful team when all is said and done. "We may get our nose bloodied in November or December by a good team," says Coach Herbrechtsmeyer, "but if we can be consistent in January, February, we'll play really good basketball, on par or better than last season."



Carleton

Coach: Tammy Metcalf-Filzen

Career Record: 221-102 (12 seasons at Carleton)

2008-09 Finish: 8th (10-12 MIAC, 11-14 overall)

Carleton Season Preview

A young roster brings renewed hope for the Carleton College women's basketball team, which will seek to take full advantage of its youthful energy, athleticism, and enthusiasm during the 2009-2010 campaign. The Knights need a number of players to step into the voids in the lineup created when three starters graduated in the spring. Head coach Tammy Metcalf-Filzen is unfazed by the challenge. "It happens every year. You lose seniors, and you have to figure out how to replace them. What it will mean for us is a little different look, and a different style without the dominant post presence."

Overall, Metcalf-Filzen is thrilled by the 2009-10 team's strong work ethic and infectious excitement. The squad's three upperclassmen have already excelled in providing leadership and fostering a palpable sense of connectedness that has carried over to the court in practices.

The group's most experienced returners are Megan Mileusnic (Sr./Orono, Minn./Orono) and Ally Weaver (Jr./Iowa City, Iowa/West), the team's second-leading scorer in 2008-09, averaging 10.9 points per contest. Weaver will be looked upon to shoulder much of the Knights' offensive workload, and the Knights are optimistic that her deadly outside shooting will help create scoring opportunities for other players on the floor.

Annie Eckhoff (Sr./Northfield, Minn./Northfield) will be a critical pieces for the Knights in 2009-10, as she is faced with much of the responsibility of filling the void down low. Eckhoff is no stranger to stardom on the hardwood, as she excels for the Carleton volleyball team in the fall. For her to realize the same degree of success this basketball season, she will need to bring her size and speed into the post.

Megan Erlandson (So./Minneapolis, Minn./Minnehaha Academy) is one of the veterans called upon to step into a more prominent role this season. She will take the reigns of the offense and run the point. As a rookie, she was first guard option off the bench, playing nearly 23 minutes a night. Carleton's more guard-oriented offense should help Erlandson frequent the free throw line, where she shot an astounding 97.3 percent last year, sinking 36 of her 37 attempts.

Another young impact player who Metcalf-Filzen describes as a "really bright spot" is first-year Akemi Arzouman (Irvine, Calif./University), who has already dazzled coaches and teammates alike with her athletic ability and versatility. Arzouman will anchor the lineup mostly at the forward positions, but could also see some minutes at point guard.

The team is also counting on marked improvement from sophomores Kayla Kramer (So./Clearwater, Minn./Monticello) and Georgia Brown (So./Augusta, Ga./Aquinas), who had their first taste of collegiate level play last year.

Carleton welcomes four other rookies to the fold in 2009-10. Cassie Mullen (Seattle, Wash./Bush) and Katharine Walton (Briarcliff, N.Y./The Masters School) will backup the guard spots, while Megan Bakken (Waterville, Minn./Waterville-Elysian-Morristown) and Jessa Youso (Virginia, Minn.)—who played on Carleton's volleyball team—offer added depth in the post.



Concordia

Coach: Jessica Rahman

Career Record: 114-47 (6 seasons)

2008-09 Finish: 2nd (17-5 MIAC, 19-9 overall)

Concordia Season Preview

The Concordia women's basketball team enjoyed a very successful season in 2008-09. The Cobbers went 19-9 finished in second place in the MIAC during the regular season, played in the conference tournament championship game and earned their 16th overall trip to the NCAA Tournament. Concordia seventh-year head coach Jessica Rahman is hoping the experience gained from last year will translate into a coming of age for her deep junior class in 2009-10.

Concordia only lost one player from last year's national tournament team. That's the good news. The bad news is that the player was Jenna Freudenberg – the 2009 MIAC Most Valuable Player. Freudenberg led the team in scoring and assists and was second on the team in rebounding. She was also the emotional leader on and off the court and helped the Cobbers in critical situations throughout the season.

The 2009-10 Cobber team will have to find a new leader in pressure situations and someone that can be counted on to pick up Freudenberg's point production. The leading candidate to fill the leadership role is senior Sara Sorbo (Adams, N.D.). Sorbo has been a three-year starter and is a "lead by example" player. Last year she finished third on the team in scoring with a 9.3 points per game average, led the team in steals and was named to the MIAC All-Conference Honorable mention Team. Her work ethic and non-stop hustle on the court will serve the Cobbers well during the entire season. Sorbo had a difficult off-season as she was diagnosed with cancer in the spring and spent the entire summer going through treatment in Rochester at the Mayo Clinic. Sorbo's ultimate battling attitude helped her through the ordeal and she is ready to take on the challenge of playing her senior season as a cancer survivor.

Sorbo is one of only two seniors on the team. Fellow guard Anna Matetich (Hibbing, Minn.) will be counted on to pick up some of the scoring left by Freudenberg's graduation. Matetich has the outside shooting touch to put up big numbers and has been a constant contributor in her first three seasons. Matetich is no stranger to putting up big point totals. Last year she had 19 points against MIAC top tier team St. Thomas on Dec. 3.

The junior class had a pair of players earn conference postseason honors last year. Guard Maggie Bauernfeind (Rosemount, Minn.) was named the league's Sixth Player of the Year. She led the team in 3-point baskets and averaged 9.1 points last season. Her ability to knock down the long-range jumper at key times will take the pressure off the rest of the CC offense as they look to find their new identity at the beginning of the season. Backcourt teammate Lindsey Schultz (Hitterdal, Minn.) was named to the MIAC All-Defensive Team. She is the team's shut-down defender and her defensive pressure can take any opponent out of their offensive rhythm. Schultz will be asked to put up bigger numbers on the offensive end of the court. She has the ability to be one of the team's top scorers as she averaged 7.1 points per game last year and is coming off an 18-point performance in the team's NCAA Tournament first round game.

Another junior could be next in line as one of the premiere Cobber play making guards. Erica Nord (Wolverton, Minn.) will likely take over Freudenberg's duties as the team's point guard. Her quickness and passing ability make her tough to defend 1 v. 1 in the open court. She was tied for third on the team in 3-point baskets in 2009 and had a career-high 23 points against St. Mary's on Jan. 11. Despite her 5-7 frame, she has the knack for getting inside and grabbing clutch rebounds. Last year she was fourth on the team in rebounds and finished the year by collecting at least six rebounds in four consecutive games.



Gustavus

Coach: Mickey Haller

Career Record: 169-71 (9 seasons at Gustavus)

2008-09 Finish: 4th (14-8 MIAC, 16-10 overall)

Gustavus Season Preview

The Gustavus women's basketball team entered the 2008-09 season with a good mix of talent and depth, but lacked some competitive experience as a result of having only one senior (Emily Nelson) on the squad. This season, however, Head Coach Mickey Haller has the luxury of building around 11 returning letterwinners that gained valuable experience a year ago, while posting a record of 16-10 overall and finishing fourth in the MIAC with a record of 14-8. Haller's squad will be led by its four returning starters, senior point guard Bri Radtke (Winsted, Minn./Lester Prairie), senior post Katie Layman (Hudson, Wis.), senior forward Julia Schultz (Marshall, Minn.), and sophomore wing Molly Geske (Mendota Heights, Minn./Cretin-Derham Hall).

On the perimeter, the Gusties will need to replace all-conference shooting guard Emily Nelson (10.5 points per game), but return seven players who were all part of the regular playing rotation last season. Anchoring this perimeter group will be All-Conference point guard Bri Radtke, who averaged 9.8 points per game and ranked fourth in the league in assists with an average of 3.5 per game. Radtke is the prototypical point guard who can run the floor, penetrate, pass, and shoot the three. She has started every game for the Gusties for the past four years and is capable of making the big plays in the big games. Complimenting Radtke will be sophomore Molly Geske, who will play the #2 position and senior Julia Schultz, who will play the #3 position. Geske, who was named to the MIAC All-First Year Team last season, averaged 10.3 points per game and finished second in the MIAC in three-point field goal percentage at 41.3 percent. Schultz is a solid all-around player who can play both inside and out. She averaged 7.6 points and 4.8 rebounds per game a year ago. Providing depth behind that trio will be senior Amber Steffenhagen (Lake City, Minn.) and sophomore Ava Perry (Wabasha, Minn.) at the #2 spot, sophomore Megan Gaard (Edina, Minn.) at the #3 position, and sophomore Colleen Ruane (Edina, Minn./Benilde-St. Margaret) at point guard. All four players played significant minutes in reserve roles last season and will move into the regular playing rotation this season. Sophomore Liz Shay (Minneapolis, Minn./Washburn) and first year Steph Comer (Minnetonka, Minn.) are also expected to contribute.

In the post, Coach Haller is fortunate to have three key returners and one talented newcomer. That group includes senior Katie Layman, juniors Molly Mathiowetz and Brittany Holm and first year Abby Rothenbuehler. Layman (6-0) and Rothenbuehler (6-2) will rotate at the #4 position, while Holm (6-1) and Mathiowetz (6-0) give the Gusties a strong duo at the #5 position. Layman, who has started every game for the Gusties for the past three seasons, averaged 7.7 points and 3.9 rebounds per game last year, while Rothenbuehler is an athletic newcomer who earned All-Conference honors at Mankato West last year. Mathiowetz was instant offense off the bench last season scoring 8.1 points per game, while also grabbing 4.4 boards per game. She is an excellent rebounder who can also get out and lead the break when necessary. Holm is a shot blocker, who can also run the floor.

The past two seasons, the Gusties have finished third and fourth, respectively in MIAC regular season play, while also qualifying for the MIAC Playoffs, but the team has just missed contending for the regular season league title or advancing to the MIAC Playoff Championship game. Mickey Haller and her squad are hoping the experienced gained with a young group last season will lead to a title run this season.



Coach: Melissa Young-Kruse
Career Record: 65-66 (4 seasons)
2008-09 Finish: Tied-6th (12-10 MIAC, 15-11 overall)

Hamline Season Preview

Melissa Young-Kruse enters her sixth season as Hamline's head coach and looks to build upon her school-record win total by taking the Pipers to the MIAC playoffs for the third straight year and fourth time in five seasons.

Missing from the 2008-09 campaign that finished with an overall record of 15-11 and a conference mark of 12-10 are a trio of impact players in Gabriella Gustafson, Britta Schwartzhoff, and Jessica Heinen. Gustafson joined Hamline for her senior season last year, averaging 6.8 points per game. Schwartzhoff was an MIAC All-Defensive team and All-MIAC honorable mention honoree last year by posting the sixth-best assist-turnover ratio in the conference (1.26). Heinen concluded her collegiate career as Hamline's eighth leading scorer all-time with 1,073 career points. She averaged 13.2 points per game (12.8 in MIAC play) and 6.0 rebounds per game (5.5 in MIAC play) in 2008-09.

Leading the returners is Rochelle Sather (Andover, Minn.), the lone senior returning to the varsity roster. Sather is a quiet, "stone-cold" player on the court – until she drains a three with a quick release that catches defenders off-guard. She is also a smart defender. Sather averaged 5.9 points per game in her junior season, but Young-Kruse expects to see her average higher this season – like when she averaged 8.9 ppg in 2007-08.

Mary Wilkowski (Savannah, Ga.) returns to lead a talented junior class and was the lone Piper named to the All-MIAC first team last year. She led the Pipers in both scoring with 13.8 points per game (14.0 in MIAC play) and rebounding with 7.1 boards per game (6.8 in MIAC play). Her numbers were strong enough to put her fourth in the MIAC in conference scoring and sixth in rebounding.

Wilkowski is a tremendous offensive player who has great touch around the basket and can utilize a lot of different moves to get the job done. She's composed under pressure and has a great understanding of the game.

Wilkowski's fellow classmates Kristin Sczublewski (Pierz, Minn.), Jackie Kelly (Blaine, Minn.), and Nikki Klinck (Hibbing, Minn.) are looking to control the Hamline offense this season. Kelly was the third-leading scorer on the Pipers last year with 9.7 points per game and 21 steals. She is a sharp, confident shooter who sees the floor well and has good feel from outside the arc – she shot 46-for-109 from three-point land last year, .422.

Sczublewski has worked hard in the off-season to improve both her shot and quickness. She is extremely focused when in the game and will use her ability to both drive inside and shoot from the perimeter to to increase her points per game average from last year's 3.0.

Klinck will continue to run the Piper offense from the point. She is a quick, tenacious player who has speed on both ends of the court. She averaged 6.2 points per game in 2008-09 and led the team with 45 steals – 41 in MIAC play.

Joining this deep group of returning players are several talented new names who have seen success in high school, including a player who adds depth to the point guard position – Kara Poirier (Fy., Eau Claire, Wis.). Poirier has control on both sides of the ball and an impressive comprehension of how the game unfolds in front of her as well as great court sense. In her senior season she averaged 11 ppg, 4.2 assists per game, and 3.4 steals per game.

Stephanie Robinson (Fy., Sioux City, Iowa) brings in success on the state tournament stage. Robinson's Sioux City North team won the Iowa state championship in class 4A in 2007 with her at point guard. She brings confidence and the ability to penetrate to the Piper offense. On the other side of the ball, Young-Kruse expects Danielle Bennett-Curry (Fy., Minneapolis, Minn.) to be a strong defensive stopper. She can score, however, and averaged 12.0 ppg and 7.0 rebounds per game while tallying 24 blocked shots in her senior campaign.

Also new to the Piper roster is Heather Byl (Fy., Osceola, Wis.), who was a 1,000-point career scorer in high school. She averaged 13.1 points per game last year as well as 8.7 rebounds per game. Ayana Hicks (Fy., Saint Paul, Minn.) and Steph Rice (So., Staples, Minn.) will add even more depth to a talented group of newcomers.

Overall, Young-Kruse's roster for the 2009-10 season has more depth and athleticism despite losing valuable experience from Gustafson, Heinen, and Schwartzhoff. If the team can blend the numerous new personalities with the strong returning corps quickly, the Pipers will look to return to the MIAC playoffs and play later into March this time.



Macalester

Coach: Ellen Thompson

Career Record: 29-69 (4 seasons)

2008-09 Finish: 9th (9-13 MIAC, 11-14 overall)

Macalester Season Preview

Macalester has improved its overall record four straight seasons under head coach Ellen Thompson and has made remarkable progress after basically rebuilding the program from scratch when she was hired five years ago. During the winter of 2009-10, the Scots will be one of the most veteran teams in the MIAC.

The Scots went 11-14 last winter and 9-13 in the conference, and with the top seven point producers returning, are optimistic about earning an upper division finish and MIAC post-season berth. The Scots out-scored their opponents on the MIAC season, but suffered a string of narrow mid-season defeats to keep them out of the playoffs. This year, the team hopes its added experience will make the difference. Mac should once again be one of the MIAC best and most aggressive teams on the defensive end of the court.

Macalester was fourth in the conference in rebounding margin and blocked shots, and rely heavily on a pair of four-year starters on the front line in Trina PaStarr (Sr., Minneapolis, Minn. / Southwest) and Ann Baltzer (Sr., Bismarck, N.D.).

A two-time All-MIAC pick, PaStarr averaged 13.2 points, 7.4 rebounds, 1.4 blocks and 1.1 steals per game as a junior, and enters her senior campaign with 920 career points. She ranked eighth in the MIAC in scoring, and fifth in both rebounding and blocked shots. Baltzer was Mac's top point producer last season with a 13.2 average and goes into the year with 853 career points and a .527 career shooting percentage. Baltzer and PaStarr ranked seventh and eighth, respectively, in the MIAC in scoring.

Guard Danielle Johnson (Sr., DeForest, Wis. / Madison Edgewood) is another four-year starter and is coming off her best season where she provided 7.6 points a game while ranking sixth in the league with 3.2 assists per contest. Another senior guard, Eartha Bell (Minneapolis, Minn. / Breck School), missed the last two-thirds of the campaign last winter while on a Study Abroad program, but returns for a full season as one of the MIAC's top back court defensive players. Bell led the conference two years ago in steals.

Forward Majra Mucic (Jr., Zenica, Bosnia / St. Louis Park - Minn.) sparked the Scots off the bench last year, producing 7.9 points, 5.3 rebounds and 1.6 steals per night, and together with center Holly Schiedermayer (So., Waupaca, Wis.), give the Scots plenty of front court depth together with PaStarr and Baltzer.

The Scots have plenty of depth in the back court. Joining guards Johnson and Bell are veterans Jessica Rene (So., Eau Claire, Wis. / Memorial), Alyssa Lunde (Sr., Rochester, Minn. / Mayo), Maggie Wood (So., Oregon, Wis. / Madison Edgewood) and Shannon Rene (So., Eau Claire, Wis. / Memorial).



Saint Benedict

Coach: Mike Durbin

Career Record: 520-137 (23 seasons)

2008-09 Finish: 1st (20-2 MIAC, 26-4 overall)

Saint Benedict Season Preview

The College of Saint Benedict basketball team will rely on a strong group of returners and a solid collection of first-years to continue last year's success. The Blazers will be in pursuit of an unprecedented fifth straight conference title.

The Blazers finished last season 26-4 overall with a 20-2 MIAC record, earning the #1 spot in the MIAC playoffs. After defeating Concordia-Moorhead to win the MIAC playoff title, they advanced to the first round of the NCAA Tournament, defeating Ripon College and UW-Whitewater along the way to move onto the Sweet 16. CSB's season ended with a loss to Washington University at St. Louis, who finished second in the tournament.

Head coach Mike Durbin, who picked up his 500th win as a head coach last season, enters his 24th year as the Blazers' head coach. Durbin holds a 520-137 (.791) coaching record, making him the winningest women's basketball coach in MIAC history.

Senior Mindy Schmidt, who returns from a season-ending knee injury that concluded her junior season, leads the Blazers this year. In the 17 games she played, Schmidt averaged 11.5 points per game, scoring in double figures in ten contests. She was named All-MIAC Honorable Mention after being named All-MIAC her first two seasons as a Blazer. She begins this season a mere 215 points behind the 1,000 points for her career.

A strong group of juniors return this season, including All-MIAC selection Amy Stifter, who led the Blazers with 11.6 points per game and a .410 shooting percentage. She ranked first in the MIAC with a .436 three-point percentage, on top of scoring in double digits in 19 of 29 games. Devin Bowlin, who was second in the MIAC with a 1.6 assist-to-turnover ratio, takes over the point guard position for graduate Nikki Carter this season, and is expected to make great contributions to the Blazers success. Other returners include Joelle Waytashek, who replaced Schmidt after her injury and averaged 6.6 points per game. Laura Canton also returns to replace graduate Ariel Tauer in the forward position after averaging 4.9 points per game.

The extensive leadership and experience that this year's team returns makes the dream of another MIAC championship and NCAA Division III Tournament berth within reach.



St. Catherine

Coach: Gary Rufsvold

Career Record: 40-36 (3 seasons)

2008-09 Finish: Tied-6th (12-10 MIAC, 15-10 overall)

St. Catherine Season Preview

The St. Catherine University basketball team is eager for the 2009-10 basketball season to start. With six returning letter winners, including the reigning MIAC scoring champion Laura Kalbfell, to go along with nine new faces, the Wildcats basketball team has their sights set on returning to the MIAC playoffs.

After missing the playoffs on a tie-breaker last season, Head Coach Gary Rufsvold is hoping that experience will have his team poised to move to the next level and battle with every team in the conference on a consistent basis.

The Wildcats are led by team captains Kalbfell and Molly Peterson. Along with her league leading 18.0 ppg average last season, Kalbfell became the first-ever MIAC scoring champion in St. Kate's basketball history. Peterson's athleticism on both ends of the floor will again be a pivotal part of the Wildcats success, and she looks to keep improving upon her 9.8 ppg and 5.7 rbg averages from last season.

With last season's starting point guard studying abroad, Jenna Olson and Megan Zillmer will be asked to use the experience they gained last season to maintain consistency in the backcourt. With Olson's experience and shooting touch, and Zillmer's speed and athleticism, that is a task Coach Rufsvold feels they are well prepared to handle.

Amy Battey and Cassandra Hubler both return as players who are capable of doing all the little things that help a team win. Their athleticism will help fill the void left with the graduation of all-around player Brooke Hakanson.

Newcomers looking to contribute in various capacities include Faith Burg, Sonja Ellingson, Andrea Gould, Quinn Halverson, Jasmin Hardin, Nichole Kesgard, Allison Marson, Niambi Mitchell, and Adelle Simerson-Wallfred.

Now in his fourth season as the head coach, Rufsvold is encouraged by the leadership his team captains have demonstrated during the first few weeks of practice. He also added that he expects everyone to continue their steady improvement, and strive to maintain the level of success that the teams have been developing in his previous three seasons.



Saint Mary's

Coach: Mandy Pearson

Career Record: 8-42 (2 seasons)

2008-09 Finish: 10th (4-18 MIAC, 4-21 overall)

Saint Mary's Season Preview

The first year was a learning experience for Mandy Pearson and the Saint Mary's University women's basketball team.

So was the second year.

The third year is when Pearson and the Cardinals get to show how much they've learned.

And the SMU head coach expects this to be one test she and her Cardinals will ace with flying colors.

"Year One was a learning experience for everyone," said Pearson. "For me as a first-year head coach and for the players just getting a handle on playing under a new coach — adjusting to a new style of coaching."

"And Year Two was a learning experience of a different nature," Pearson added. "We were very young — we had a starting lineup that was all freshmen and sophomores — and it took everyone a while to learn what it takes to play in the MIAC."

"It was quite a rollercoaster ride, through battling some injuries and playing through our inexperience. Towards the middle of last season, we started to really compete in this league."

Now, Pearson hopes, the Cardinals can take that next step and move from competing in the MIAC, to winning in the MIAC.

"We've got virtually our entire roster back, and while we'll still be pretty young in terms of class year, our senior, juniors and sophomores have that year or two of experience under their belts," said Pearson, whose team is looking to improve on back-to-back four-win seasons when they kick off the 2009-10 season at NCAA Division II Winona State on Nov. 16. "We have a lot of potential and talent, and everyone's excited to get the season underway."

Leading the Cardinals' charge this season will be returning honorable-mention All-MIAC selections Jess Miller (Carver, Minn. / 11.2 ppg, 4.3 rpg) and Cherie Kulig (Independence, Wis. / 10.7 ppg, 4.6 rpg), who, along with senior Kim Kaminski (Milwaukee, Wis. / 2.5 ppg, 2.2 rpg), were voted the team's captains.

And the trio has taken that duty to heart.

"Those three might be the best combination of leaders I've seen — they all just feed off of and complement each other, and the rest of the team feeds off of them," said Pearson. "The work ethic of this group is unbelievable, so much better than we've had in the past — they want to be better, and they're willing to put in the time to make themselves and this team better."

"Last year we competed hard, but usually for only 20 minutes of a 40-minute game," Pearson added. "This year, I expect us to compete from start-to-finish, all 40 minutes, which I believe will really give us an opportunity to win at the end of each game."



St. Olaf

Coach: Dave Stromme

Career Record: 12-38 (2 seasons)

2008-09 Finish: 12th (2-20 MIAC, 4-21 overall)

St. Olaf Season Preview

The 2009-10 season couldn't come fast enough for the St. Olaf College women's basketball team and third-year head coach Dave Stromme.

Last winter, St. Olaf started the season a modest 3-5 with hopes of moving up the standings behind All-MIAC post player Elise Erickson.

What transpired after the team's first eight games was anything but modest. Erickson finished as the second-leading scorer in the league on the way to second team D3hoops.com All-West Region honors, but the Oles couldn't manage to provide enough support. The team dropped all but one of their remaining 17 games, including five games by five points or less.

Fast forward to November, 2009. The team has new uniforms and, at home, will sit on the opposite bench. Practices look, feel and sound like the Oles' future is bright. The team has a revamped, talented roster filled with at least seven first years that figure to contribute to the equation. The Oles also return a handful of players who have quality experience and could move into more prominent roles.

GUARDS

First year Mackenzie Wolter will run the show at the point. Wolter was an all-state honorable mention pick and two-time all-region selection at Norwood-Young America's Central High School, where she scored over 1,200 career points. Wolter, Central's all-time leader in assists and steals, averaged 20.8 points and 3.5 assists ..

Senior Tasha Mrosak returns with the most experience in the back court. Mrosak, a four-year player, has logged 75 career games.

Sam Zopfi, an athletic slasher, comes to St. Olaf after finishing her high school career with 1,772 career points and three all-conference honors at Providence Academy.

Becca Neuger, who is joining the team after completing the season with the Oles' women's soccer team, will provide depth at both guard spots.

Neuger played in all 25 games last season and was sixth on the team in minutes.

First year Katie Barnes could spell Wolter and get some minutes at the point. Barnes, out of Culver, Indiana, is a dependable ball handler who can manage the offense.

The team also has junior Angie Volkert, senior Ashley Cooper and first year Kylie Hanzlik as guards on the roster. Volkert and Cooper saw action, in 14 and 11 games, last season.

FORWARDS

The team will have a number of options in the front court.

Junior Terin Euerle gave the team solid minutes in 2008-09 as a rebounder and defender and is expected to do so again. She averaged

4.4 points and 3.4 rebounds in just under 20 minutes a night last year.

First years Eileen O'Donoghue and Katie Lauer should also see a considerable amount of time. O'Donoghue, a three-time all-conference pick at St. Ignatius High School in Chicago, will give the Oles a true small forward. Lauer was an all-state honorable mention pick as a senior at Mankato West and gives the team a legitimate post up forward who can also play on the perimeter.

Kathryn Thompson, who played for the Oles in 2006-07, has returned to the team and will also compete for time.

CENTERS

First years Erin Haglund and Ashley Menzel have been added to the roster and are expected to compete for time. Haglund was an all-conference pick as a senior at Hastings. Menzel was a three-time letterwinner at De La Salle. The Oles also have Kristin Berg as an option in the post. Berg appeared in six games last season.



St. Thomas

Coach: Ruth Sinn

Career Record: 64-41 (4 seasons)

2008-09 Finish: 3rd (16-6 MIAC, 19-8 overall)

St. Thomas Season Preview

Take three consecutive productive recruiting classes, add in a veteran coach with a proven system, and you have the ingredients for a successful season. Such is the 2009-2010 outlook for St. Thomas women's basketball.

Since January 2007, the Toms are 44-14 in conference play. The UST women went 30-8 at home over the last three seasons. A big part of that success came on the defensive end, which has become the program's identity under fifth-year head coach Ruth Sinn. Opponents averaged just 56.8 ppg last season and shot only 33.5% from the field.

Sinn added some strong guards in her 2007 recruiting classes, brought in a point guard and two front-line players in 2008, and has added some promising front-line players in her 2009 group. Two Division II scholarship players have transferred to UST and will give the Tommies more inside scoring.

It will be the tallest team in the history of the program with six players who stand 6-foot or better.

St. Thomas won 10 of its last 12 games last season en route to a 19-8 record and posted a third-place MIAC finish. They recorded two double-digit victories over automatic qualifiers for the NCAA playoffs (Simpson and St. Ben's).

But Sinn graduated five seniors from that group, led by Jessica Katch, who was among the nation's most versatile players in defense, scoring, passing and rebounding. Katch was the first conference women's player to reach 1,250 points, 700 rebounds, 350 assists, 275 steals and 90 blocked shots. Katch, who helped UST post a 54-27 record over the last three seasons, won MIAC Player of the Week honors four times in her career.

The Tommies return four starters and two other players who logged 18 or more minutes a game last winter. Junior guard Becky Theisen made the 15-player All-MIAC first team, one of just six sophomores or freshmen honored. The Tommies went 9-1 last season when Theisen scored in double figures, and she shot 78% at the foul line and averaged 8.3 points and 4.4 rebounds.

Sophomore point guard Jordyn Sears sparked the Tommies down the stretch. St. Thomas went 10-2 after Sears joined the starting lineup in late January, and in her last 13 games she averaged 12.1 ppg and 3.1 apg with 22 treys.

Junior guard Jazmin Townsend is an athletic, versatile player who has appeared in all 55 games over the last two seasons. She scored six or more point eight times last season.

Senior Andi Olson and sophomores Kassie Robinson and Sarah Smith are back to add depth on the front line. Olson has played in all 80 games on her career. Last winter, she joined the starting lineup in the late-season surge and scored eight or more points in seven games. Robinson started 25 games and scored in double digits in 10 games while averaging 7.6 ppg and 3.8 rpg. Smith started 14 games, had two double-doubles and averaged 4.7 ppg and 4.4 rpg.

Two Division II basketball players have transferred to St. Thomas -- 6-0 sophomore Maggie Bryant of Sartell has three seasons to play after playing one year at Northern State, and 6-2 junior Rachel Booth has two seasons of eligibility left. Booth averaged 11.6 ppg and 6.4 rpg last winter at St. Cloud State and has 688 points and 337 rebounds in 57 games with the Huskies. She was a 1,000-point scorer and two-time all-stater at Minneapolis DeLaSalle.