

2011-12 MIAC Women's Basketball Preview and Preseason Coaches' Poll

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ST. PAUL, Minn. -- The 2011-12 Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) women's basketball season is about to begin, and after the way the previous season played out, tip off can't come fast enough. The 2010-11 season again proved the quality and depth in the MIAC, and looking ahead, it appears 2011-12 could showcase those traits once again.

However, last year may have signaled somewhat of a changing of the guard in the MIAC. After winning a share of five-straight conference titles, Saint Benedict was unseated as the league's regular-season champion on the final day of competition by St. Thomas. The league coaches expect the Tommies to again be the team to beat in the 2011-12 MIAC Women's Basketball Preseason Coaches' Poll as head coach **Ruth Sinn's** team received 11 of 12 first-place votes (coaches can't vote for their own team) and 121 points to finish atop the poll.

St. Thomas has plenty of talent back from last year's team that finished 20-7 overall, and 18-4 in conference play to claim the conference title and the No. 1 seed in the conference playoffs. Seniors **Rachel Booth** and **Jazzmin Townsend** both graduated, but sophomore All-MIAC forward **Taylor Young** is quickly becoming one of the MIAC's marquee players, and an expanded role should suit last year's MIAC Sixth Player-of-the-Year, sophomore center **Maggie Weiers**, just fine. Senior center **Sarah Smith** is also in the mix to give UST one of the deepest frontcourts in recent memory, so if they guards can perform, the Tommies will be tough to top.

Though St. Thomas is the clear-cut favorite according to the poll, the next four teams are all grouped together rather closely, and all could give the Tommies fits as well as battle one another for playoff positioning throughout the season. Gustavus was tabbed as the No. 2 team in the MIAC, grabbing the other first-place vote and 103 points to establish itself as St. Thomas' top contender after going 17-10 overall last year and finishing fourth in the MIAC with a 15-7 record. All-MIAC guard **Molly Geske** returns to lead the Gusties along with sophomore forward **Eli Benz** and several other talented returners.

Saint Benedict and Concordia - the latter of which finished second in the MIAC last season before capturing the conference's Playoff title and automatic bid to the NCAA Division III National Tournament - were separated by just four points in third and fourth. The Blazers received 97 points in third place, and **Mike Durbin's** teams will have to replace departed seniors **Heather Gillund** and **Amy Stifter**. Senior captains **Cassie Dorschner** and **Sam Larsen** will try to lead CSB back to the MIAC title, which would give them three titles in four years. Meanwhile, Concordia also lost two standout guards, **Erica Nord** and **Maggie Bauernfield**, as well as other key players from last year's Playoff Championship team, but sophomore center **Alexandra Lippert** is among the young players ready to step up this season to lead the Cobbers back into playoff contention.

Rounding out the top five in the coaches' poll is St. Olaf, which received 86 points. The Oles will again be led by All-MIAC guard **Mackenzie Wolter**, who is back for her junior season after a standout sophomore campaign. Bethel was picked to finish sixth with 65 points in the poll. All-MIAC guard **Taylor Sheley** is the Royals' lone senior this season, and how a few Bethel players bounce back from injuries will have a big effect on the team's MIAC Playoff hopes.

The coaches also predict that Macalester (7th, 56 points) and Saint Mary's (8th, 54 points) will also be in the hunt to make the six-team playoff field. The Scots lose All-MIAC forward **Majra Mucic**, but guard **Jessica Rene** is back for the reigning MIAC Coach-of-the-Year, **Ellen Thompson**. Meanwhile, the Cardinals graduated All-MIAC guard **Jess Miller**, but **Jessica Thone** and **Emily DeWitt** will be back to make SMU dangerous from the outside.

Hamline and St. Catherine both graduated star centers, and both are tied for the No. 9 spot in the poll with 33 points each. The Pipers lost MIAC Player-of-the-Year **Mary Wilkowski**, who set numerous Piper school records, but junior guard **Kara Poirier** and senior forward **Stephanie Rice** will try to lead Hamline back to the Playoffs. St. Catherine also lost star center **Laura Kalbfell** to graduation, but have a young nucleus led by senior **Megan Zillmer** and sophomore **Kristen Lee**.

Carleton (11th, 31 points) and Augsburg (12th, 20 points) rounded out the final two spots in the poll. The Knights will again be led by junior guard **Akemi Arzouman**, an All-MIAC pick last year, and sophomore forward **Emma Purfeerst**, as they look for upward movement in the conference standings. Meanwhile, Augsburg will have a different look under **Bill McKee**, who replaces **Jennifer Britz** as the Auggies' head coach. All-MIAC Honorable Mention guard **Serenae Levine** gives McKee an experienced starter in the backcourt as he looks to guide Augsburg into a new era.

The 2011-12 season tips off tomorrow with several teams in action against nonconference opponents. MIAC play opens Nov. 30 and, with a short break mixed in for the Holidays, will run through Saturday, Feb. 18. The 2012 MIAC Women's Basketball Playoffs will take place the final week of February with quarterfinal games on Feb. 21, semifinal games on Feb. 23 and the championship on Saturday, Feb. 25, with the winner claiming the MIAC's automatic bid to the 2012 NCAA Division III Women's Basketball Tournament.

The 2011-12 MIAC Women's Basketball Preview continues below with complete results from the 2011-12 MIAC Women's Basketball Preseason Coaches' Poll, helpful links, and complete team-by-team previews for each of the conference's 12 teams.



2011-12 MIAC Women's Basketball 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.

2011-12 MIAC Women's Basketball Preseason Coaches' Poll		
Rank	Institution	Total
1	St.. Thomas (11)	121
2	Gustavus (1)	103
3	Saint Benedict	97
4	Concordia	93
5	St. Olaf	86
6	Bethel	65
7	Macalester	56
8	Saint Mary's	54
T9	Hamline	33
T9	St. Catherine	33
11	Carleton	31
12	Augsburg	20

2011-12 MIAC Women's Basketball Playoff Dates

Quarterfinals (Tuesday, Feb. 21), Semifinals (Thursday, Feb. 23), Finals (Saturday, Feb. 25)

[2011-12 MIAC Women's Basketball Playoff Page](#)

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Augsburg

Coach: Bill McKee

Career Record: 0-0 (1st season at Augsburg)

2010-11 Finish: 12th (4-18 MIAC, 5-20 overall)

Augsburg Season Preview

The Augsburg College women's basketball team will have a new coaching staff leading the way in 2011-12. Head Coach Bill McKee, who has led dramatic turnarounds of several basketball programs during his coaching career, will be joined by assistant coaches Katie Alsdurf and Larissa Parr.

Prior to joining the Auggies, McKee served as head coach for the Mounds View (Minn.) High School girls' basketball program for three seasons (2008-11). Prior to coaching at Mounds View, he served as men's basketball head coach at Anoka-Ramsey Community College (2006-08), and as boys' basketball head coach at Blaine (2001-06) and Cretin-Derham Hall (1995-2001) high schools. He also served as an assistant coach for 10 seasons at the University of St. Thomas.

Although there are plenty of new faces on the bench, the Auggies roster will look much the same in 2011-12. The Auggies return 14 letterwinners, while bringing in two new faces and one player returning from the 2009-10 roster. With its top seven scorers and top five rebounders all back in the lineup, Augsburg is excited about moving up the conference standings this season.

Augsburg's depth this season will be at the guard position. Serenae Levine (SR, Eden Prairie, Minn.), an All-MIAC honorable-mention and All-MIAC Rookie Team selection in past seasons, will be looked at to captain the Augsburg offense again this year. Levine led the Auggies in scoring, rebounding and assists last season, averaging 10.4 points, 7.0 rebounds and 3.0 assists per-game, ranking her in the top 25 in scoring, top seven in rebounding and top two in assists in MIAC overall statistics.

Tracee Schrank (JR, Reedsburg, Wis.), Lexi Thompson (SR, St. Michael, Minn./St. Michael-Albertville HS), Nikki Borkhuis (JR, Watertown, S.D.), Katie Ahlstrom (JR, St. Paul, Minn./Henry Sibley HS) and Kandace Bostick (SR, Minneapolis, Minn./Burnsville HS) all return to the guard position to give the Auggies one of their most experienced backcourts in recent years.

Schrank averaged 8.2 points per-game last season, while leading the Auggies in three-pointers made (37). Thompson averaged 5.8 points and 4.1 rebounds, while sparking the Augsburg defense with a team-leading 53 steals, ranking her eighth in the MIAC in steals per-game. Katie Ahlstrom (JR, St. Paul, Minn./Henry Sibley HS) added 4.3 points per-game and was second on the team in three-pointers made with 16.

In their first season in an Auggie uniform, Borkhuis and Bostick made their impact felt. After transferring in from Rochester Community and Technical College, where they won a junior college national championship, Borkhuis played in 24 games, averaging 4.7 points and 4.2 rebounds while Bostick played in 17 games and averaged 2.5 points per-game and collected 15 steals on the season.

The quartet of Brittany Dyshaw (SO, Eagan, Minn.), Brittany Zins (JR, Bloomington, Minn./Kennedy HS), Maddie Weiske (SO, De Pere, Wis./West De Pere HS) and Carly Wolf (SO, Chaska, Minn.) all return to the front court for the Auggies. Dyshaw, an All-MIAC First-Year selection in 2009-10, averaged 9.6 points and 6.0 rebounds per-game, while Zins made an immediate impact after transferring in at the semester break from Northern State (S.D.), posting 9.6 points and 5.4 rebounds per-game. Weiske will be looking to get back into the swing of things after a knee injury halted her season a year ago and Wolf will be looking to capitalize off a year of college experience.

Newcomers Kendra Ware (SO, Brooklyn Park, Minn./Osseo HS) and Abbey Luger (FY, Oakdale, Minn./North St. Paul HS) are expected to step into significant roles this season. Ware transfers into Augsburg after playing a season at Itasca Community College, while Luger was an honorable-mention all-conference selection at North St. Paul HS.

Augsburg opens its season on the road with a nonconference contest at North Central University on Nov. 22 and its MIAC opener at St. Benedict on Nov. 30. The Auggies, who spend a majority of the first half of the season on the road, open at Si Melby Hall against Concordia-Moorhead on Dec. 3.



Bethel

Coach: Jon Herbrechtsmeyer

Career Record: 103 - 125 (10 seasons at Bethel)

2010-11 Finish: 5th (13-9 MIAC, 15-11 overall)

Bethel Season Preview

After a 13-9 conference record and a fifth place Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) finish in 2010-11, the Bethel University women's basketball team is primed for more in the 2011-12 campaign. Despite the youthfulness of the current program the Royals are eager to show its competitiveness and passion night-in and night-out. BU will look to maintain its advantage from one year ago in scoring, as the Royals outscored its opponents 1,544-1,480. Additionally Bethel was exceptional from the charity strip, outperforming its competition with a .753 free-throw percentage, opposed to a .691 percentage. The squad also did a phenomenal job of limiting its mistakes and winning the turnover battle throughout 2010-11.

BU will be led by its one returning senior Taylor Sheley (Sr., Backus, Minn.). Sheley was second in scoring last season for the Royals with 13.4 points per game. She managed 349 points throughout the season, shooting .372 percent from the floor. The Royals' team captain also swiped 62 steals, blocked 23 shots, while maintaining a 3.7 rebound-per-game and 3.1 assists-per-game average.

Also contributing greatly to the success of the 2011-12 Royals will be juniors Kelly Swenson (Jr., Dawson, Minn.) and Kristi Nye (Jr., Nashville, Tenn.). Kelly Swenson should be in contention for all-defensive player this year, and is looking to be a dual threat in the upcoming campaign both on defense and offense. In 2010-11 Swenson averaged 7.7 points-per-game, alongside 3.0 rebounds- and 1.4 assists-per-game. Nye is returning from an ACL injury in 2010.

Head Coach Jon Herbrechtsmeyer noted junior Alicia Montbriand (Jr., Alexandria, Minn.) will be Bethel's "X-Factor". Montbriand carries the intangibles that carry throughout her entire game, including her ability to score and her decision making skills. Montbriand is fighting her way back from an ACL injury, but still orchestrated 2.4 points-per-game and 2.5 rebounds-per-game in 2010-11.

Two key sophomores Katelyn Thomsen and Nicole Berscheid, who have both made great strides in the offseason, look to be vastly improved players in the year ahead as well.

Key freshmen will play a critical role in the BU gameplan in the year ahead. Kiah Dahlquist (Fr., Foley, Minn.) and Lindy Parker (Fr., Rosemount, Minn.) look to be the front-runner for the post position, but will need to prove themselves in the next few weeks. Kailey Eid (Fr., Big Lake, Minn.) and Leslie Handzus (Fr., Jackson, Minn.) will also see time in the backcourt as well.

The Royals open up its schedule in early November at the Wisconsin-Lutheran tournament. In 2011, Wisconsin-Lutheran achieved a bid for the NCAA Division III tournament and advanced to the next round with an opening round victory. Depending on the outcome of BU's first game, they will then either play Carthage, who is picked to win the CCIW or Nebraska-Weslyn, who participates in the top NAIA conference in the country. Bethel will have a strong indication as to what to expect for the upcoming year after the early tourney.

Coach Herbrechtsmeyer noted about the upcoming season, "We will be very young, but our hope is that our youthfulness isn't what defines us as the players we have are incredibly talented. Guard play will be important for us to stay in the mix and compete against the opponents we face. It will be critical for our youth to mature quickly and become leaders at an early stage for us to be a playoff-calibur team.



Carleton

Coach: Cassie Kosiba

Career Record: 6-19 (2nd season at Carleton)

2010-11 Finish: Tied for 10th (5-17 MIAC, 6-19 overall)

Carleton Season Preview

Last year, under new head coach Cassie Kosiba '03, a young Knights squad gained valuable playing experience with two sophomores and two rookies in the starting lineup. The squad improved throughout the campaign, but will once again be leaning heavily on youth in 2011-12. There are no seniors on the roster, and 6 of the 10 Knights are in either their first-year or sophomore seasons.

The Knights' one loss to graduation is a significant one. Ally Weaver '11 finished her career on Carleton's all-time scoring list with 1,104 points. She is also the program's career leader in three-pointers (175) and free-throw percentage (82 percent), and tied the single season record for three-pointers (57).

Among the leading returners for this year's Knight roster is All-MIAC guard **Akemi Arzouman** (Jr./Irvine, Calif./University), who paced the team last season scoring 14.5 points per contest, ranking fifth among conference players. Her name was also among the MIAC leaders in total rebounds (5.6 per game), offensive rebounds (1.91), and three-point field goals (1.27).

Joining Arzouman is sophomore post **Emma Purfeerst** (River Falls, Wisc./River Falls), who was selected to the MIAC First-Year Team last season. She averaged 9.1 points per game and was third in the conference with 7.7 rebounds per game. She posted eight double-doubles and possessed the MIAC's third-best field-goal percentage (.533). Purfeerst also ranked among the top 10 in the MIAC in free-throw percentage (.800) and both offensive and defensive rebounds.

Another key returning starter is sophomore point guard **Jenny Ramey** (Cottage Grove, Minn./New Life Academy), who posted 7.8 points per game last season, and paced the MIAC with 104 assists as a rookie.

Junior **Jessa Youso** (Virginia, Minn.) moved into the starting lineup a year ago and recorded a .429 field-goal percentage and is expected to see key minutes again this season in the post.



Concordia

Coach: Jessica Rahman

Career Record: 153-62 (8 seasons)

2010-11 Finish: 2nd (17-5 MIAC, 21-7 overall)

Concordia Season Preview

Concordia preview coming soon.



Gustavus

Coach: Mickey Haller

Career Record: 206-87 (11 seasons at Gustavus)

2010-11 Finish: 4th (15-7 MIAC, 17-10 overall)

Gustavus Season Preview

Entering the 2011-12 season, the Gustavus women's basketball team will rely on its experienced group of veterans to make a return trip to the MIAC Playoffs. Head coach Mickey Haller returns 15 letterwinners, including four starters, from last year's squad that posted a 17-10 overall record and a fourth place finish in the MIAC with a mark of 15-7. The Gusties will be led by their four senior captains – guards Molly Geske (Mendota Heights, Minn.), Ava Perry (Wabasha, Minn.), Colleen Ruane (Edina, Minn.) and Liz Shay (Minneapolis, Minn.).

"Our four seniors are good leaders," Haller said. "They've been in our program long enough and each one of them brings in a different element to that leadership role. We always look for that out of our seniors and we are very fortunate to have those four back."

In the frontcourt, Coach Haller will need to replace Molly Mathiowetz, an All-Conference forward who led the team in field goal percentage, rebounds and was the second-leading scorer last year. But the Gusties' deep and experienced roster opens the door for other players to step up and make an impact.

"Molly is going to be very hard to replace," Haller acknowledged. "But we feel that Abby Rothenbuehler is ready to take on that role. She has played quite a few minutes for us in the past. And Amanda Iverson is also going to step in. Those are the two that we see filling the five-spot. If we run into foul trouble or we have injuries, which might happen, Eli Benz is a great four. She could certainly slip in at the five-spot in we needed her to."

Junior Abby Rothenbuehler (Mankato, Minn.), the Gusties' tallest player at 6-2, averaged 7.1 points per game last season and saw playing time in all 27 games. The North Mankato, Minn. native was second on the team in rebounding (5.1 rebounds per game) and posted a team-high 34 blocks. Junior Amanda Iverson (Waconia, Minn.), who will back up Rothenbuehler, saw limited action last year playing in eight games. And Eli Benz (Steele, N.D.), a 5-11 sophomore forward, registered 19 blocks and 49 assists – both second best for Gustavus last year – during her first season wearing the black and gold. The Steele, N.D. native also earned a spot on the MIAC All-First Year Team.

On the perimeter, Gustavus will lean on the consistent production of returning starting guards Molly Geske and Colleen Ruane. Geske, a two-time MIAC All-Conference member and the team's Most Valuable Player last year, played in and started all 27 games last season, led the team in points per game (14.3) and led all of Division III in free throw percentage (.902, 83-92). The Cretin-Derham Hall product also posted a .426 field goal percentage (133-312), .385 three-point percentage (37-96), 111 rebounds, 48 steals and 39 assists. Ruane, a member of the MIAC All-Defensive Team and Gustavus Defensive Player of the Year last season, led the team in assists with 72 and topped the conference with 70 steals a year ago. The 5-7 guard also ranked third on the team in scoring (7.8 points per game) and shot .761 (54-71) from the charity stripe on a team that led the league in free throw shooting percentage. The Gusties .776 conversion rate from the free throw line also set the program record.

"The free throws we work on everyday and we also had the luxury of Molly Geske who led the nation in free throw percentage. So that helps a lot," Haller stated. "But we had Colleen Ruane, who her sophomore year was shooting about 40 percent from the free throw line and ended up shooting nearly 80 percent her junior year. So again, that's one thing that we all know if you don't make that shot, it's just a giveaway. I plan on seeing us increase our free throw percentage."

Joining Geske and Ruane as returning starters includes senior Ava Perry and junior Kelsey Florian (Roseville, Minn). Perry looks to remain a threat from behind the arc and at the line after posting a .891 (41-46) free throw percentage and converting 30-of-89 (.337) three-pointers last year. Florian, a Roseville, Minn. native, collected 93 rebounds, 42 assists and averaged 6.5 point per game during her second season for the Gusties.

The Gusties typically play a fast-paced style of game and generate turnovers to beat their opponents. Last season, Gustavus led the conference in turnover margin (+3.85), a direct result of their league-leading 294 steals (10.89 per game).

"We constantly beat into our heads that we need to take care of the ball and I think they did a good job of that last year," Haller said. "The steals, those tend to come and go. The type of defense that we play you'll also notice that we were at the bottom of the conference in rebounding, that's because of the way we play our defense. Our defense tends to lend more towards the steal, fast break kind of thing, and we'll probably continue to do things like that."

Gustavus has made the MIAC Playoffs the previous three seasons, yet failed to make the NCAA Tournament. The Gusties' last NCAA Tournament berth came in the 2007-08 campaign and after a three-year hiatus, the Black and Gold are determined to reach the conference tourney again and beyond.

Said Haller, "Our number one goal is to be in playoffs again this year and see where we can go from there."

The Gusties open the 2011-12 campaign on Tuesday, Nov. 15 at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. Tip off is slated for 7:00 p.m.



Coach: Kerri Stockwell

Career Record: 11-14 (2nd season at Hamline)

2010-11 Finish: Tied 6th (10-12 MIAC, 11-14 overall)

Hamline Season Preview

It's one thing where having a month of practice before your first game is a very good thing. HU head women's basketball coach Kerri Stockwell knows the 2011-12 version of the Pipers will look radically different than last year's contingent that made a late run at the MIAC playoffs.

Exactly how different ... and who will end up the scoring and rebounding leaders ... is something that won't be determined until the team has played a few games.

Mary Wilkowski, last year's Player Of The Year who was also on the D3hoops.com All-West region team and was an Honorable Mention All-American, has graduated and taken her league-leading scoring average with her. She was also second in the league in rebounding. It's a force that simply cannot be replaced.

With only two players returning who were regular starters last year, Stockwell said there are great opportunities for players to step into leadership roles.

"What will make us successful is if we can get on the same page as to decision making about things like tempo," she said. "We'll definitely run if we can."

Fortunately for Stockwell, one of those two returning regulars is junior guard Kara Poirier. She connected on 47 three-pointers a year ago and is the top returning assist player with 70. "Her versatility is her strength," Stockwell notes. "On top of that, she's a real competitor, a natural on-court leader."

The other returnee is senior forward Stephanie Rice. At 5-10, she offers size inside (59 defensive rebounds last year) and game day experience. More importantly, she's healthy. Last year, a back injury sidelined her for the first month of the season. "We're looking for her to handle the opposing team's post player," Stockwell said.

As for the open positions, the names may change often. "It's going to depend on who we play," Stockwell said. "We're going to have to be flexible because half the team is new this year."

There are many options at guard. Steph Pilgrim, a junior who was a main cog for Anoka-Ramsey, last year's national JC champions, offers a three-point presence and a winning pedigree. Her last-minute long range shot provided the winning points for the Rams last March. "She has had a lot of success on the court," noted Stockwell. Carly Cathey, a freshman, is another guard possibility. She, too, was a long range bomber in high school in Arizona. Je'Naya Brown played in 24 games last season. Allison Ruter, a terrific athlete from New-London Spicer, Danielle Daniels, a transfer from Des Moines Area CC, Jordan Sammons, who joined the team after a successful soccer season at Hamline and Jasmine Clemons, a sophomore who was on last year's team, are all in the mix as well.

"It will depend on the situation as to who plays when," Stockwell said.

Up front, 6-3 soph Veronika Jakubovic saw action in just nine games last year. But she was able to practice every day against Wilkowski. "She learned a lot from that experience," Stockwell observed. Cassidy Vogt, a 6-0 junior, can play guard as well as forward. Rachel Usgaard, a 5-8 first-year guard-forward who was the top scorer for West Lutheran last year, is expected to see action as well.

The 22-game MIAC schedule means the Pipers will simply have to dive headfirst into conference competition and do some learning on the fly. "We're looking for consistency and that can only come from practice and playing games," Stockwell said.

A year ago, the Pipers rebounded from a slow start and nearly made the conference playoffs, losing out on a tie breaker to Macalester. Stockwell hopes the lesson from that experience – that every MIAC game matters greatly – sticks with the returnees and is quickly imprinted into the heads of the newcomers. "This is a very tough league," she said. "Each team is unique in style and that makes it harder to prepare for them. A key for us this season will be to improve defensively and cut down on second chance shots. On offense, we need to get into the right position and establish the temp we want."



Macalester

Coach: Ellen Thompson

Career Record: 56-95 (6 seasons)

2010-11 Finish: Tie for 6th (10-12 MIAC, 10-16 overall)

Macalester Season Preview

Macalester looks to make the MIAC post-season for the third time in a row this season under seventh-year head coach Ellen Thompson, last season's MIAC Coach of the Year, and the team has looked good during pre-season practices.



Saint Benedict

Coach: Mike Durbin

Career Record: 561-150 (25 seasons)

2010-11 Finish: 3rd (16-6 MIAC, 20-7 overall)

Saint Benedict Season Preview

After graduating six seniors from last year's roster, the College of Saint Benedict Blazer basketball team will field a talented and young team prepared to contend at the top of the MIAC during the 2011-12 season.

The Blazers ended their run of five straight conference championships in 2010-11, going 20-7 with a 16-6 conference record. CSB finished third in the conference and defeated Macalester in the first round of the postseason, but fell to eventual MIAC Tournament champion Concordia-Moorhead in the semifinals.

Mike Durbin enters his 26th season as head basketball coach at CSB. He has a career record of 561-151 (.788) in 27 years as a head basketball coach. Durbin inherits a team that was ranked nationally in turnovers per game (eighth, 14.6), 3 point field goal percentage (21st, 36.2%), 3 point field goals per game (23rd, 7.2) and free throw percentage (29th, 74.5%).

Senior captains Cassie Dorschner and Sam Larsen return for their last seasons with the players. Dorschner, entering her fourth year on the team, played in 19 games last year after returning from studying abroad in January. She averaged 1.7 points per game, nabbed 18 rebounds and tallied 16 assists. Larsen, a second year player, posted a .405 field goal percentage a year ago and averaged 2.3 points per game in 19 games. She also contributed 30 rebounds.

Saint Benedict will also look to its class of 2013 to provide leadership on and off the court. Junior forwards Morgan Dale and Hannah Hylla will return to the team midseason as they are study abroad during the fall semester. Dale started 14 games for the Blazers last season and averaged 6.9 points and 4.3 rebounds per game and totaled a .481 field goal percentage. She also led the MIAC with a .472 3-point field goal percentage. Hylla appeared in all 27 games in 2010-11 and added 3.6 points per game.

Also returning who will play important roles for the Blazers include junior guards Whitney Canton and Jamie Wollin and junior forward Kailyn Wilcox. Canton found her way in the starting lineup eight times last year and posted 3.9 points per game and 31 assists. Wollin and Wilcox both played significant minutes off the bench, averaging 3.1 and 1.8 points per game, respectively.

With players prepared to step up with more playing time, the Blazers will still be a formidable competitor in the MIAC with young and experienced talent.



St. Catherine

Coach: Gary Rufsvold

Career Record: 58-70 (5 seasons)

2010-11 Finish: Tied-10th (5-17 MIAC, 6-19 overall)

St. Catherine Season Preview

St. Kate's returns one senior, one junior and two sophomores to their roster in 2011-12. The Wildcats have 13 freshmen and one sophomore transfer, new to the team. Only four of the 13 freshmen are from Minnesota. It is a young, exciting and dynamic group that will struggle with inexperience but in the future will prove to be a winning class and the foundation of the team for four years. Head coach, Gary Rufsvold sees a lot of potential in this group and is excited about their future with the program.

The four returners give us a strong base. Senior Captain Megan Zillmer is a very quick and athletic guard with three years of experience and a team leader. Sophomore Kristen Lee was a starter her freshmen year that averaged 8 points a game.

Junior Adele Simerson-Walford brings a lot of experience at the forward position. Madison Pertler, a sophomore who was the most improved player last year and the team's hardest worker will not be able to play this year because of an early season ACL injury.

Madison will be missed in both practices and games this season.

The new group is very athletic and lead by a pair of guards from California. Jule Muegge a high scoring guard from Carmel, California averaged 20 points her senior year in high school and spent the summer playing for the German National 20 and younger team. Tiffani Pak is a small quick point guard from San Francisco who will give the team a high energy quick point guard. Another freshmen that will see action with the varsity team is Sarina Baker. A forward from Minnehaha Academy who also averaged 20 points a game her senior year. The rest of the freshman class includes players who will see action on both the varsity and junior varsity team. Kerrick Sarbacker, a 6-2 Center is our lone transfer. She comes to St. Kate's from Minneapolis Community College.



Saint Mary's

Coach: Mandy Pearson

Career Record: 24-76 (4 seasons)

2010-11 Finish: 9th (9-13 MIAC, 11-14 overall)

Saint Mary's Season Preview

With so many new guards on this year's roster, Saint Mary's University women's basketball coach Mandy Pearson's approach to the 2011-2012 season can be summed up in one word — guarded.

"We've got a lot of new guards, so we've have spent a ton of time working with them this preseason," said Pearson, whose team kicks off its season on Nov. 22, traveling to Elmhurst for a nonconference showdown with the Bluejays. "Last year, we were young in the post, and more experience around the perimeter, and this year's it's almost the exact opposite.

"We've been doing a lot of teaching already this season, and everyone seems to be picking things up quickly."

Pearson needs her backcourt to be quick studies, since the Cardinal head coach is without her two floor leaders of the last three seasons — Jess Miller and Cherie Kulig, who closed out their illustrious collegiate careers a year ago.

"We are going to miss those two, no question about that," said Pearson. "They both knew the system and always knew what to do in certain game situations — who would have the ball at the end of the shot clock, at the end of a half, and the end of the game.

"With those two gone, someone else is going to have to step into that role."

And Pearson has plenty of individuals qualified for the position.

Like Jessica Thone (Woodbury, Minn.), Emily DeWitt (Lino Lakes, Minn.), Jamie Stefely (Lisle, Ill.) or Brittany Begrowicz (Des Plaines, Ill.).

Thone is back after averaging 8.4 points-per-game and knocking down a team-hihg 27 3-pointers during her junior season, while Begrowicz after 4.9 ppg and DeWitt proved to be a serious outside threat, draining 12 3-pointers off the bench. Stefely was enjoying a stellar sophomore campaign a year ago, averaging 7.8 points and 6.6 rebounds before a knee injury sidelined her for SMU's final eight games.

"We've got individuals who have proven they can put the ball in the hoop," said Pearson. "Our perimeter play seems solid and our post play is stronger than it has been in the past.

"The biggest key offensively, is going to be — who's going to distribute the ball?" Pearson added. Top-to-bottom, this is probably one of the most talented teams I've had.

"But the biggest key for us is consistency — we can't afford to ride the rollercoaster this year. We need to play up to our ability each and every game."



St. Olaf

Coach: Dave Stromme

Career Record: 30-70 (4 seasons)

2010-11 Finish: Tied 6th (10-12 MIAC, 13-12 overall)

St. Olaf Season Preview

The St. Olaf women's basketball program will look to take another step forward in 2011-12. Last year, the Oles collected their first winning season since 1998-99 and doubled their league wins from the previous season.

Guards

This year, the Oles return five who started at some point last season. Leading the way is junior point guard Mackenzie Wolter, who was an All-MIAC selection last season after averaging 13.3 points a game. Joining Wolter in the backcourt is another junior, Kirstee Rotty. Rotty started 15 games last season, averaging 6.8 points in her first season at St. Olaf.

Brittany Webber will be the other go-to guard to handle to ball for St. Olaf this winter. Webber started seven of the 14 games she appeared in last season before a season-ending injury.

Forwards

On the wing, St. Olaf will look to another junior, Eileen O'Donoghue. The Chicago native has 22 career starts to her credit and played just under 20 minutes a contest last winter.

Sophomore Addy Bates and first years Rachel Rongstad and Sheridan Blanford will also see time. Bates played in nine games in her first season. Rongstad was a starter for Middleton (Wis.), who was the state runner up. Blanford was an all-conference and all-state game participant from Grandview High School (Colo.).

St. Olaf will be without the services of sophomore Maddie Ehrich for much, if not all of the season, after she suffered an injury late in the summer.

Posts

Junior Erin Haglund, a two-year starter, and sophomore Elise Raney will anchor the middle for the Oles. Haglund averaged 6.6 points last season. Raney burst on the scene as a first year, averaging 8.3 points, 6.7 rebounds and 2.7 blocks a game. She had four double-doubles while breaking the school record for career blocks in her first 18 college games.

Junior Ashley Menzel and first year Nikki Frogner will also play considerable minutes for St. Olaf this winter. Menzel appeared in 16 games last year, missing a few due to injury. Frogner was a two-time all-conference selection at Providence Academy, which finished fourth at the state tournament in her final season.



St. Thomas

Coach: Ruth Sinn

Career Record: 105-56 (6 seasons)

2010-11 Finish: 1st (18-4 MIAC, 20-7 overall)

St. Thomas Season Preview

Coach Ruth Sinn is starting her seventh year as head coach of Tommie women's basketball. Last year's squad won nine of their last 11 games in a 20-7 finish and captured their first outright MIAC title since the 2000-01 season.

The Toms will return 10 players from 2010-11, after losing three players to graduation. Leading scorer (10.6 ppg) and rebounder (6.5 rpg) Rachel Booth, and All-MIAC honoree, and All-MIAC honorable mention and MIAC All-Defensive forward Jazmin Townsend (career 110 games, 511 points, 318 rebounds, 77% FT). Add in her two seasons playing for St. Cloud State, and Booth's four-year college career produced 1,453 points and 771 rebounds in 112 games.

Sinn does return three top scorers in sophomore center Maggie Weiers (8.5 ppg); senior honorable mention All-MIAC center Sarah Smith (8.7 ppg, 6.1 rpg); and sophomore All-MIAC forward Taylor Young (10.6 ppg).

Weiers and Young were also both named to the conference's All-First Year Team last season.

Weiers, who came off the bench in all 27 games, also received the Rookie of the Year award in the West Region by D3Hoops.com and the MIAC Sixth Player of the Year. She averaged 8.5 points and 5.1 rebounds a game while shooting 50% from the floor and 76% from the foul line, and scored 10 or more points in 11 out of 27 games.

Young started only 11 games but played in all 27. She led MIAC freshman with 10.6 points a game and also averaged 3.9 rebounds and over a steal a game, while emerging as an up-and-coming player in the conference.

The Toms' 20-player roster has four seniors, two juniors, four sophomores and 10 freshmen.

Among the newcomers expected to contribute this season are 5-9 guard Laura Margarit of Holy Angels; 6-0 forward Anna Smith of Bloomington Jefferson; and 5-9 guard Jenna Dockter of Eastview.

The Tommies will open their 2011-12 season on the road against UW-Stevens Point, Nov., 15 at UW-Stevens Point. They will travel to Texas over Thanksgiving break and play two games in San Antonio before their home opener against Gustavus on Dec. 3.

The Tommies will look to continue the momentum established in the last 20 months:

--The 2009-10 Tommies won the conference playoffs as the No. 5 seed to take an NCAA playoff appearance.

--In August 2010, St. Thomas opened the \$52 million Anderson Athletic and Recreation Complex, and UST went 9-1 there in MIAC regular-season games.

--The 2010-11 Tommies' 17-player roster compiled an impressive 3.519 grade-point average (4.00 scale) last school year and tied for ninth best in Division III to receive an award from the WBCA.

--St. Thomas' upperclassmen took a team trip to Italy in August 2011.