

2016-17 MIAC Women's Basketball Preview and Preseason Coaches' Poll

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

BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – The 2016-17 Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) women's basketball season is about to tip off, and with star players back all around the league, excitement is at an all-time high for the new campaign.

A year ago, the University of St. Thomas separated itself from a very crowded, very talented crop of contenders at the top of the standings, as the Tommies claimed their second-straight MIAC regular-season title and then added a fifth-straight MIAC Playoff title and an NCAA Sweet 16 appearance to their impressive resume. Head Coach Ruth Sinn's team went 26-4 overall and 16-2 in conference play to win the league title by two games.

Lurking just behind UST was Gustavus (20-7, 14-4 MIAC) and Saint Mary's (21-6, 14-4), as that duo shared second place and were in title contention into the final week of the season. Concordia (18-9, 13-5 MIAC) and Bethel (16-10, 12-6 MIAC) also had outstanding seasons to give the MIAC an extremely formidable top five. Saint Benedict (15-11, 10-8 MIAC) also finished above .500 in conference play to grab the sixth and final Playoff spot a year ago.

Though Augsburg (14-11, 9-9 MIAC) and St. Catherine (14-11, 8-10 MIAC) just missed out on trips to the postseason, both finished three games above .500 overall and added to the conference's quality and depth. St. Olaf (12-13, 7-11 MIAC) was just a game under .500 overall, and Macalester (8-17, 3-15 MIAC) continued to show improvement under Head Coach Kelly Roysland. Carleton (4-21, 1-17 MIAC) and Hamline (3-22, 1-17 MIAC) rounded out the 2015-16 standings.

As a whole, the MIAC certainly impressed on the court a year ago, with three 20-win teams and another five that won at least 14 games finished at least three games over .500, with those eight teams representing two-thirds of the conference. The league's top nine teams collectively finished 156-136 (.534), which is remarkable that three-fourths of an entire league can combine to play 20-games better than .500 basketball.

This year, tons of the league's top stars are back, starting with the MIAC's top award-winners from a year ago. 2015-16 MIAC Player-of-the-Year Kaitlin Langer of St. Thomas and Sixth Player-of-the-Year LaShay Holt of St. Catherine are both back for their senior seasons, and only seven members of the 18-player All-Conference team graduated, giving the league plenty of returning star power to fuel its optimism as tipoff approaches.

COACHES CAST THEIR VOTES

After last season's success and the return of Langer and company, it's no surprise St. Thomas was a unanimous pick atop the 2016-17 MIAC Women's Basketball Preseason Coaches' Poll. UST received 11 first-place votes and 121 points in a system that doesn't allow coaches to vote for their own team. Langer is certainly the biggest piece of the puzzle back after earning MIAC Player-of-the-Year and All-America honors as a junior, and the center's 17.9 points and 9.1 rebounds per game are back to lead the Tommies once again. Senior guard Paige Gernes is back after earning All-Defensive Team honors a year ago, and junior forward Lauren Fischer is expected to continue her development alongside Langer to form the MIAC's most feared frontcourt.

After its outstanding 20-7 season, coaches expect another stellar campaign from Gustavus as it received 109 points and the other first-place vote to finish second in the poll. There's a lot to like about the Gusties, starting with the return of junior guard Mikayla Miller who is one of the MIAC's top scorers and a two-time All-Conference pick. Senior forward Hannah Howard and sophomore guard Justine Lee also return to give Gustavus hopes of challenging UST for the top spot in 2016-17.

Saint Mary's and Concordia were neck-and-neck for the third spot in the poll, with the Cardinals receiving 89 points to finish third, just a point ahead of the fourth-place Cobbers (88 points). Saint Mary's has All-Region and Region Rookie-of-the-Year star Brandi Blattner back after her sensational rookie campaign where she averaged a double-double (15.8 ppg/10.6 rpg), and senior guards Emma Schaefer and Brigitte Audette bring back tons of experience and leadership. The Cobbers are heavy on experience with All-MIAC forward Jenna Januschka, Honorable Mention guard Greta Walsh and forward/center Crystal Amundson all back in Moorhead for their senior seasons.

The coaches predict that Bethel and Saint Benedict will again be in the Playoff picture, as the Royals were picked fifth with 81 points, just four points ahead of the sixth-place Blazers and their 77 points. The Royals are led by three-time All-MIAC forward Kalli Zimmermann, and



also have senior forward Shanni Moorse and junior guard Abby Miller back in the lineup. Saint Ben's has a pair of All-MIAC selections back in senior point guard Alison Newton and junior forward Niki Fokken, and senior wing Annie Dittberner also returns for Head Coach Mike Durbin.

St. Catherine took a huge step forward last year and the coaches expect the Wildcats to keep improving in 2016-17, as the Wildcats finished seventh in the poll with 66 points. Holt returns to lead St. Kate's after leading the MIAC in scoring in conference games (18.5 ppg) and earning her second-straight All-MIAC honor, Sixth Player-of-the-Year accolades and All-Region Third Team honors in 2015-16. Two-time All-MIAC HM junior guard Audra Clark is also back, and senior forward Mari Lee will be the team's presence in the paint.

St. Olaf (47 points) and Augsburg (43 points) are also expected to be in the hunt for postseason bids as they finished eighth and ninth in the preseason poll, respectively. The Oles will again be strong in the paint with two-time All-MIAC forward Betsey Daly back alongside All-MIAC HM forward Makenna Ash, and sophomore guard Margaret Anderson returns in the backcourt. Augsburg has a young but experienced nucleus with junior forwards Hannah Steinhaus and Bridget Bednar both back, and sophomore forward Carlee Kobow adds even more depth up front.

Macalester (27 points), Carleton (26 points) and Hamline (18 points) rounded out the final three spots in the coaches' poll, as all three hope for improvement and upward mobility in 2016-17. The Scots have junior center Regan Fruh (two-time All-MIAC HM) back, along with senior Lauren Clamage and Park Masterson. Carleton is another team with plenty of frontcourt talent as the team plans to lean on junior forwards Anne Hamilton and Sarah Waldfogel and sophomore forward Cece Leone. Hamline has two-time All-MIAC HM senior guard Chloe Graves back to run the show, and she'll team up with fellow senior Tia Diggins in the backcourt while hoping for big contributions from rookie forward Reilly Geistfeld.

The 2016-17 season tips off Tuesday, Nov. 15 with 10 of the league's 12 teams playing on opening night. Conference play starts Wednesday, Nov. 30, and will run through Saturday, Feb. 18, when the MIAC champion will be crowned and six Playoff bids will be finalized.

Speaking of the MIAC Playoffs, this marks the first year of a new rotation where men and women will alternate postseason schedules each year. The women have traditionally been on a Tuesday-Thursday-Saturday schedule, but this year they'll flip to Wednesday-Friday-Sunday, with Playoff games on Feb. 22, 24 and 26. The quarterfinal and semifinal games will be at 7 p.m. with a 1 p.m. tipoff for the Sunday championship. The NCAA Tournament will follow after that to conclude what promises to be another exciting year on the courts of the conference.

A CLOSER LOOK

The rest of the 2016-17 MIAC Women's Basketball Preview contains complete results from the 2016-17 Preseason Coaches' Poll, MIAC Playoff details, helpful links and a preview for each team submitted by their sports information director. The MIAC web site - www.miacathletics.com - will be an outstanding source for MIAC women's basketball news, schedules, scores, stats and more throughout the 2016-17 season.

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

2016-17 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.

| 2016-17 MIAC Women's Basketball Preseason Coaches' Poll | | |
|---|-----------------|-------|
| Rank | Institution | Total |
| 1. | St. Thomas (11) | 121 |
| 2. | Gustavus (1) | 109 |
| 3. | Saint Mary's | 89 |
| 4. | Concordia | 88 |
| 5. | Bethel | 81 |
| 6. | Saint Benedict | 77 |
| 7. | St. Catherine | 66 |
| 8. | St. Olaf | 47 |
| 9. | Augsburg | 43 |
| 10. | Macalester | 27 |
| 11. | Carleton | 26 |
| 12. | Hamline | 18 |

2017 MIAC Women's Basketball Playoffs

The 2017 MIAC Playoffs will feature the top six teams in the conference standings playing in a high-seed-host, single-elimination postseason tournament. This year, the women's and men's Playoffs will flip days, with the women playing Wednesday-Friday-Sunday, with Sunday's title game tipping off at 1 p.m.

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 Wednesday, Feb. 22. The top remaining seed will play at the No. 2 seed and the lowest remaining seed will play at the No. 1 seed during the semifinals, which are scheduled for Friday, Feb. 24. The championship game is set for Sunday, Feb. 26, with the two semifinal winners meeting on home court of the top remaining seed. The winner will receive the MIAC's automatic bid to the 2017 NCAA Division III Women's Basketball Tournament.

| [2017 MIAC Women's Basketball Playoffs Home Page](#) |

MIAC Women's Basketball Links

| [Website](#) | [Standings](#) | [Schedule](#) | [Statistics](#) | [News](#) | [Athletes-of-the-Week](#) | [Recordbook](#) | [Archives](#) |

MIAC Team-by-Team Previews

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



AUGSBURG | [Auggies' women's basketball home page](#) |

Head coach

- Ted Rivero (2nd season)

A Year Ago

- 9-9 MIAC (7th place) | 14-11 Overall

Players to Watch

- Hannah Steinhaus (F, Jr. | Averaged 7.1 points and 5.3 rebounds per-game)
- Bridget Bednar (F, Jr. | Averaged 7.8 points and 3.1 rebounds per-game)
- Carlee Kobow (F, So. | Averaged 1.4 points and 1.9 rebounds per-game)

Did You Know?

- The Auggies graduated seven seniors from the 2015-16 squad that just missed out on the MIAC playoffs.



BETHEL | [Royals' women's basketball home page](#) |

Head coach

- Jon Herbrechtsmeyer (15th season)

A Year Ago

- 12-6 MIAC (5th place) | 16-10 Overall

Players to Watch

- Kalli Zimmermann (F, Sr. | Three-time All-MIAC, 13.2 PPG, 6.5 RPG, .449 FG%, .672 FT%)
- Shanni Moorse (F, Sr. | 7.3 PPG, 4.4 RPG, 1.6 APG, .410 FG%, .644 FT%)
- Abby Miller (G, Jr. | 6.5 PPG, 1.3 RPG, .385 FG%, .444 3PT%, .821 FT%)

Did You Know?

- The Royals have amassed a 31-5 record at home over the last three years, which equates to a .861 winning percentage in the Robertson Center Gym. This is the best three-year home record in the history of BU women's basketball.



CARLETON | [Knights' women's basketball home page](#) |

Head coach

- Cassie Kosiba (seventh season)

A Year Ago

- 1-17 MIAC (11th place) | 4-21 Overall

Players to Watch

- Anne Hamilton (F, Jr. | Averaged 11.8 points, 7.8 rebounds, and 2.3 assists per game in first 6 games before sustaining season-ending injury on Dec. 2)

- Sarah Waldfogel (F, Jr. | Started 24 of 25 games for the Knights last season, averaging 6.2 points and 3.8 rebounds)
- Cece Leone (F, So. | Averaged 3.9 points and 4.8 rebounds per game last season)

Did You Know?

- Head coach Cassie Kosiba enjoyed a successful basketball career at Carleton, contributing to a 2000-01 team that went 22-5 and won the Knights' first conference championship. That squad also secured the program's initial trip to the NCAA Division III tournament.



CONCORDIA | [Cobbers' women's basketball home page](#) |

Head coach

- Jessica Rahman (14th season)

A Year Ago

- 13-5 MIAC (4th place) | 18-9 Overall

Players to Watch

- Crystal Amundson (F/C, Sr. | Led the team in shooting percentage in 2015-16; fourth on the team in rebounds)
- Jenna Januschka (F, Sr. | 2015-16 MIAC All-Conference; led the team in scoring in 2015-16 (15.1 ppg); finished in the top 10 in the MIAC in eight different stat categories)
- Greta Walsh (G, Sr. | 2015-16 MIAC All-Conference Honorable Mention; led the team in 3-pointers and was second on the team in scoring (13.0 ppg) in 2015-16)

Did You Know?

- Former Cobber women's basketball player Erica (Hanson) Reid '94 was inducted into the Concordia Hall of Fame in the fall. She was a three-time All-MIAC player and led the Cobbers to four straight NCAA Tournament appearances.



GUSTAVUS | [Gusties' women's basketball home page](#) |

Head coach

- Laurie Kelly (5th season)

A Year Ago

- 14-4 MIAC (2nd place) | 20-7 Overall

In the 2015-16 Postseason

- The Gusties defeated Saint Benedict in the MIAC Quarterfinals for their first playoff win since 2012. They then fell at Saint Mary's in the semifinals, 70-78.

Players to Watch

- Mikayla Miller (Guard, Jr. | Gustie's leading scorer past two seasons, Two-time All-Conference, 2014-15 All-Rookie Team)
- Hannah Howard (Forward, Sr. | Co-captain last season, three-year letterwinner, one of two players on last year's roster to start in all 27 games)
- Justine Lee (Guard, So. | Led Gustie newcomers in scoring last season)

Did You Know?

- In her two-year career, Mikayla Miller sits eighth all-time in Gustavus most three-point field goals with 85.



HAMLIN | [Pipers' women's basketball home page](#) |

Head coach

- Kerri Stockwell (7th season)

A Year Ago

- 1-17 MIAC (T-11th place) | 3-22 Overall

Players to Watch

- Chloe Graves (Sr., G, 14.0 PPG; led MIAC in MPG at 38.4; HM pick last two seasons)
- Tia Diggins (Sr., G, 6.6 PPG, second leading returning scorer)
- Reilly Geistfeld (Fr., F)

Did You Know?

- The Pipers will have nine new faces on its 14 player roster in 2016-17.

MACALESTER | [Scots' women's basketball home page](#) |

Head coach

- Kelly Roysland (3rd season)



A Year Ago

- 3-15 MIAC (10th place) | 8-17 Overall

Players to Watch

- Regan Fruh (C, Jr. | Two-time All-MIAC hon. mention, 12.9 ppg, 7.6 rpg in 2015-16)
- Lauren Clamage (G, Sr. | 10.0 ppg, 45 3PTFG, .395 3PTFG% in 2015-16)
- Park Masterson (F, Sr. | 8.2 ppg, 8.8 rpg in 2015-16, missed final 12 game due to injury)

Did You Know?

- Junior forward Leah Gray broke the school record for blocks in a single season with 60 blocks in 2015-16.

SAINT BENEDICT | [Blazers' women's basketball home page](#) |



Head coach

- Mike Durbin (31st season)

A Year Ago

- 10-8 MIAC (6th place) | 15-11 Overall

Players to Watch

- Alison Newton (PG, Sr | All-MIAC, All-Defensive Team, 8.5 ppg in 2015-16)
- Niki Fokken (Post/Forward, Jr | All-MIAC, 9.8 ppg, 6.9 rpg)
- Annie Dittberner (Wing, Sr | 8.0 ppg)

Did You Know?

- CSB won its 500th MIAC game in 2015-16, becoming the third women's basketball program in the league to reach the milestone.



ST. CATHERINE | [Wildcats' women's basketball home page](#) |

Head coach

- Sean Pinkerton (5th season)

A Year Ago

- 8-10 MIAC (8th place) | 14-11 Overall

Players to Watch

- LaShay Holt (F/G, Sr. | 2015-16 MIAC 6th Player of the Year, 2x All-MIAC, 3x MIAC Athlete of the Week, D3hoops.com 3rd Team All-Region; led the team and MIAC in points per game (17.1) and scoring (407 points))
- Audra Clark (G, Jr | 2x All-MIAC Honorable Mention, 2014-15 All-Rookie Team; 2nd on the team in scoring, No. 10 in the MIAC; No. 8 in MIAC in assists (75))
- Mari Lee (F, Sr. | led the team in field goal percentage (48.1) and free throw percentage (88.0); second on the team in blocks (23); fourth in points (196), and fourth in rebounds (95))

Did You Know?

- The Wildcats finished the season on a 5-0 run, beating UMAC champ UW-Superior and MIAC playoff team Concordia.



SAINT MARY'S | [Cardinals' women's basketball home page](#) |

Head coach

- Brent Pollari (2nd season)

A Year Ago

- 14-4 MIAC (2nd) | 21-6 Overall

In the 2015-16 Postseason

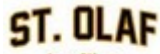
- MIAC Tournament: vs. Gustavus (W, 78-70), at St. Thomas (L, 77-65)

Players to Watch

- Brandi Blattner (Guard, Sophomore | 22 GP, 15.8 ppg, 10.6 rpg, 10 blocks, 32 steals | 2015-16 All-MIAC First Team & All-First-Year Team | 2015-16 D3hoops.com All-West Region & West Region Rookie of the Year)
- Emma Schaefer (Guard, Senior | 27 GP, 8.1 ppg, 3.3 rpg, 39 3FG, 88 assists, 27 steals | 2015-16 H-M All-MIAC | 2014-15 All-MIAC First Team)
- Brigitte Audette (Guard, Senior | 18 GP, 7.5 ppg, 4.6 rpg, .447 FG%)

Did You Know?

- Saint Mary's made its fifth straight MIAC Playoff appearance last season—the Cardinals have reached at least the semifinals each time. Saint Mary's 77-65 loss at St. Thomas marked the Cardinals' second appearance in the MIAC Playoff championship game in the last three seasons. Saint Mary's also fell to the Tommies 71-58 in the 2014 title games.
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ST. OLAF | [Oles' women's basketball home page](#) |

Head coach

- Dave Stromme (10th season)

A Year Ago

- 7-11 MIAC (9th place) | 12-13 Overall

Players to Watch

- Betsey Daly (F, Sr. | Two-time All-MIAC... 12.8 points, 8.4 rebounds per game.)
- Makenna Ash (F, So. | All-MIAC honorable mention... 9.4 points, 6.2 rebounds per game)
- Margaret Anderson (G, So. | Played in 20 games as first year... 3.1 points)

Did You Know?

- St. Olaf has 10 first years on its roster ... Six hail from Minnesota, two from Wisconsin, one from Colorado and one from Arizona.
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ST. THOMAS | [Tommies' women's basketball home page](#) |

Head coach

- Ruth Sinn (12th season)

A Year Ago

- 16-2 MIAC (1st place) | 26-4 Overall

In the 2015-16 Postseason

- NCAA Tournament: Went 2-1, losing in Sweet 16 game to Wartburg

Players to Watch

- Kaitlin Langer (C, Sr., | WBCA All-America and MIAC Player of Year; averaged 17.9 points, 9.1 rebounds and recorded 17 double doubles last season)
- Lauren Fischer (F, Jr., | Operation Management major with 3.50 gpa; Career: 53 games, 305 points (57 treys), 173 boards, 44 assists; UST is 56-5 in her era.)
- Paige Gernes (G, Sr., | Biology major with team-best 4.00 gpa; named to All-Defensive Team last season; Career: 57 games, 134 points, 126 rebounds, 108 assists, 51 steals)

Did You Know?

- Langer became the first Tommie to surpass 500 points since the 1999-2000 season, and in UST's 4-1 postseason run, she averaged 22 points and 10 rebounds.
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[MIAC Women's Basketball Home Page](#)