

# 2017-18 MIAC Women's Basketball Preview and Preseason Coaches' Poll

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[Jump to:](#) | [Poll](#) | [Storylines](#) | [Marquee](#)  
[Matchups](#) | [Playoffs](#) | [Notes](#) |

**BLOOMINGTON, Minn.** – Coming off the best single-season winning percentage in the history of the program, the University of St. Thomas women's basketball team is once again projected to win the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC), as the Tommies received eight first-place votes in the annual MIAC Women's Basketball Preseason Coaches' Poll.

The Tommies open the 2017-18 campaign ranked No. 3 in the nation by the Women's Basketball Coaches' Association (WBCA) and No. 4 by D3hoops.com. While the team will no longer have the services of MIAC and National Player of the Year, Kaitlin Langer, Ruth Sinn's squad does return eight players from last year's 31-1 Final Four team. Among those returners is two-time All-MIAC forward **Lauren Fischer**, with whom UST is 34-0 in games where she scores nine points or more.

Despite the Tommies' 34-game winning streak over Conference opponents, St. Thomas did not run away with the Coaches' Poll vote. Gustavus snagged four first-place votes, landing just three points behind the Toms in the Preseason Coaches' Poll. The Gusties are ranked in the top-20 of both primary national polls and figure to be title contenders once again after going 25-3 a season ago. Preseason All-American **Mikayla Miller** is back for her senior season and with the program's career steals record already in her name, the three-time All-MIAC guard will look to carve out some more history for herself this year.

Bethel is not far off from the top of the pack entering the season either, as the Royals are receiving votes in both national polls and ranked as a clear-cut third in the MIAC Preseason Coaches' Poll. Center **Hannah Johnson** was the lone underclassman on last year's MIAC All-Defensive Team and is back in the lineup for her junior season, along with All-First-Year selection **Taite Anderson**. In fact, the Royals will return roughly 80 percent of the team's 2016-17 scoring efforts and minutes played.

Coming in at No. 4 in this year's Coaches' Poll is Saint Benedict. CSB got off to its best start in more than a decade last year and finished the campaign with its first MIAC Playoff win since 2012-13. Three-time All-MIAC pick **Niki Fokken** is back for her senior year after finishing last season with 50 blocks (second in the MIAC) and a trio of double-double performances.

Augsburg is fifth in this year's Preseason Coaches' Poll. The Auggies secured a spot in last year's MIAC Playoffs with eight first-year players, led by All-Conference guard **Tamira McLemore**. McLemore was one of two first-year players to start all 26 games for Augsburg last season, leading the Auggies in points, minutes and steals in her debut season.

## Complete 2017 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.



### 2017-18 MIAC Women's Basketball Preseason Coaches' Poll

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Institution</u>	<u>Total</u>
1.	St. Thomas (8)	117
2.	Gustavus (4)	114
3.	Bethel	102
4.	Saint Benedict	88
5.	Augsburg	80

6.	Saint Mary's	66
7.	St. Catherine	61
8.	Carleton	51
9.	Macalester	35
10.	Concordia	34
11.	St. Olaf	33
12.	Hamline	11

### **Around the MIAC**

-Saint Mary's forward **Brandi Blattner** has already seen plenty of time on the court this fall. The two-sport junior was named an All-Conference selection as an outside hitter on the Cardinals' volleyball team last week and will look to make it three straight All-MIAC honors on the basketball court come February.

-In 2016-17, Carleton forward **Samantha Cooke** was the first rookie to lead the Knights in scoring since Megan Vig – the program's career leader in three-pointers – during the 2002-03 campaign.

-A two-time honorable mention All-Conference selection, **Makenna Ash** tied a St. Olaf modern-day record with 31 points against rival Carleton last February. Ash tallied 20-plus points in four games last season and double-digit point totals in all but one Conference matchup all year.

### **Can't-Miss #MIACtion**

-*Nov. 15, 2017: Minnesota-Morris at Concordia.* The Cobbers have the privilege of being the first MIAC program to officially tip off the 2017-18 season when they host Minnesota-Morris at 5:30 p.m. on Wednesday. Concordia will look for new playmakers to fill the void left by graduated All-MIAC players Greta Walsh and Jenna Januschka, who led the team in numerous statistical categories last season, including points, assists, steals and rebounds.

-*Nov. 25, 2017: George Fox at Bethel.* Five of Bethel's 25 regular season games come against teams currently ranked among the nation's top-25 teams, including the Royals' home opener versus No. 22-ranked George Fox. GFU (Newberg, Oregon) will make a weekend of it in Minnesota, challenging Bethel on Saturday and St. Thomas on Sunday.

-*Dec. 13, 2017: Gustavus at St. Thomas.* MIAC Basketball fans will get an early Christmas present with this matchup between top-25 teams in mid-December. The Gusties have not defeated the Tommies since the 2009-10 season but with Gustavus projected to challenge for the Conference crown again, this could be the season that breaks the streak.

### **2018 MIAC Women's Basketball Playoffs**

The 2018 MIAC Women's Basketball Playoffs will feature the top six teams in the Conference standings playing in a high-seed-host, single-elimination postseason tournament. The two top seeds will receive a bye to the semifinal round, while the No. 3 seed will host the No. 6 seed, and the No. 4 seed will host the No. 5 seeds during the quarterfinals, which will be held Tuesday, Feb. 20, 2018. 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 Thursday, Feb. 22. The Championship game is set for Saturday, Feb. 24, with the two semifinal winners meeting on the home court of the top remaining seed. The winner will receive the MIAC's automatic bid to the 2018 NCAA Division III Women's Basketball Tournament.

### **Odds and Ends**

-Hamline University named Alex Focke its new women's basketball head coach in March. Focke had served as the top men's assistant for the Pipers over the last four seasons, helping Hamline earn its first MIAC Playoff berth in six seasons last year.

-Macalester returns 12 letter-winners from last year's squad, including four 16-plus-game starters. The Scots won 11 games last year, the most since the program's 12-win season in 2011-12.

-St. Catherine University enjoyed its first back-to-back winning seasons since the late 1970s in 2015-16 and 2016-17. The Wildcats will have a new head coach in 2017-18, as Don Mulhern – the winningest coach in the history of Wisconsin-Superior women's basketball – enters his first year at St. Kate's.