

2018-19 MIAC Women's Basketball Preview and Preseason Coaches' Poll

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BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – For the second year in a row and fourth in the last five, Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) women's basketball coaches have selected the University of St. Thomas as the favorite to win the league. The Tommies earned the maximum 11 first-place votes for a total of 121 points in the annual MIAC Women's Basketball Preseason Coaches' Poll, released on Thursday.

UST is ranked No. 4 in the nation in both the [D3hoops.com Preseason Top 25](#) and [Women's Basketball Coaches Association \(WBCA\) Top 25](#), and the Tommies are set up well for another run at not just a MIAC championship, but a potential national title as well. The team returns nine of its top 11 contributors from a season ago, including All-America center **Hannah Spaulding** (Sr. | Annandale, Minn.), who led all of NCAA Division III in shooting last season with a clip of .700. Her 67 percent career field-goal clip is on pace to break Laurie Trow's 26-year-old record of 63.3 percent. The Tommies do face a challenging schedule, with multiple ranked non-conference opponents on the docket in the first two months of play, including No. 10 George Fox in the season opener on Nov. 16, and No. 18 Wash. U. in late December, with the potential to face No. 15 Wartburg at the same tournament later that weekend, before moving on to the heart of the Conference schedule in January and February.



Gustavus picked up one first-place vote for a total of 106 points in the preseason balloting to rank No. 2 in the Coaches' Poll. The Gusties reached the Sweet 16 last season after locking up an at-large bid to the NCAA Tournament and figure to be in the mix again, despite having to replace the production of graduated All-Region selections Mikayla Miller and Miranda Rice. Sophomore guard and 2017-18 MIAC Rookie of the Year **Ava Gonsorowski** (Esko, Minn.) will be looked at to elevate her game even further this season after starting 20 regular season contests for the Gusties in her collegiate debut last year. Gustavus is ranked No. 20 in the WBCA Top 25 and received 29 votes in the D3hoops.com Preseason Poll.

Bethel earned 100 points in the balloting to come in No. 3 in the Coaches' Poll. The Royals look to be a tough out in the MIAC once again this season, as two-time All-MIAC center **Hannah Johnson** (Duluth, Minn. | East) returns for her senior season. A five-time MIAC Athlete of the Week pick last year, Johnson ended her junior campaign with All-Region honors after totaling 401 points, 270 rebounds, and 91 blocks. Fellow All-Conference pick **Taite Anderson** (White Bear Lake, Minn.) is also back in the lineup. The junior forward finished 12th in the nation with a shooting percentage of .572 from the floor last season.

Saint Benedict picked up 89 points in the balloting to come in No. 4 in the Coaches' Poll. The Bennies also received six votes in the D3hoops.com Preseason Poll after registering the program's best season in a decade, finishing with a 22-5 overall record and their first NCAA Tournament berth since 2009. Last season was head coach Mike Durbin's 25th 20-win campaign, making him one of just five Division III women's basketball coaches to have 25 or more 20-win seasons. CSB will miss the play of Chelsey Guetter and Niki Fokken this year, but the exciting point guard tandem of **Sidney Schiffler** (Jr. | Albany, Minn.) and **Megan Thompson** (So. | Inver Grove Heights, Minn. | Academy of Holy Angels) should help soften the blow. Both players received honorable mention All-MIAC honors last season and complement each other well - Schiffler finished second on the team with 32 steals and third with 39 assists a season ago, while Thompson led the squad with a free throw shooting percentage of .865 and 26 three-point conversions in her first year of college ball.

Augsburg landed at No. 5 in the Coaches' Poll with 78 points in the balloting. The Auggies are led once again by two-time All-MIAC guard **Tamira McLemore** (Jr. | Eagan, Minn.), who averaged a team-high 13.7 points per game while pulling down 4.5 rebounds per contest as a sophomore last season. She also connected on 36 three-pointers and recorded double-digit scoring totals in 17 of her 23 games played.

Saint Mary's garnered 76 points in the balloting to come in at No. 6 in the Coaches' Poll. The Cards will look to cash in during their final season with the services of All-America forward **Brandi Blattner** (Eyota, Minn. | Dover-Eyota). An All-Conference pick in both volleyball and basketball, Blattner started all 27 contests in leading the Cardinals to their sixth MIAC postseason appearance in the last seven years last season. She posted team highs in points (474), rebounds (270), steals (36), and blocked shots (19), while registering 12 double-doubles and scoring 10 or more points in 26 of the team's 27 games — eclipsing the 20-point barrier on 12 different occasions — while also recording 10 or more rebounds in a game 12 times.

With 60 points in the preseason voting, St. Catherine is No. 7 in the MIAC Coaches' Poll. The Wildcats made the MIAC Playoffs for the second consecutive season last year and will try for three in a row in 2018-19. Key to that effort will be junior **Danica Cambrice** (Minneapolis, Minn. | St. Croix Lutheran), who scored in double-digits in 15 of the 16 games she played last season and became the first

player in program history to record three 30-plus point performances in a single season.

Concordia received 48 points in the preseason balloting to come in at No. 8. The Cobbers will look to senior guard **Grace Wolhowe** (Staples, Minn. | Staples-Motley) for leadership again this season after the All-MIAC pick led the team in scoring, assists, steals, and free throw percentage in league play last year. Wolhowe scored at least 10 points in eight games in conference play and had a career-high 24 points in the Cobbers' win over Carleton on Feb. 10.

Hamline picked up 34 points in the balloting, good for No. 9 in the Poll. **Alaina Quaranta** (Sr. | Eau Claire, Wis. | North) led the Pipers in scoring last season with an average of 11.8 points per game. The senior guard had four 20 point games, including a career-high 27-point performance against Carleton last January. She also stole the ball 63 times, second-most among all MIAC players.

Carleton earned 30 points to come in at No. 10. The Knights will look for sophomore guard **Nia Harris** (Burnsville, Minn. | The Blake School) to play an expanded role this season after appearing in all 25 games - starting four - and averaging 6.2 points per game with a .727 free throw shooting percentage in her rookie season last year.

St. Olaf garnered 29 points in the preseason balloting. The Oles played with a young a lineup last season and that experience should serve them well in 2018-19. Both of the team's 25-game starters return, including junior forward **Samantha Tisa** (Lake Geneva, Wis. | Badger) - who averaged 9.8 points and 5.9 rebounds as a sophomore - and sophomore guard **Keegan Mulvihill** (New Prague, Minn.) - who logged 7.4 points and 35.24 minutes per game in her first year as an Ole.

Macalester received 21 points in the balloting. The Scots will embark on a new era under head coach Pamela Findlay. An honorable mention All-Mountain West Conference selection as a senior at the Air Force Academy during her playing days, Findlay most recently served as head coach of Lewis & Clark College, where she led the Pioneers to back-to-back conference tournament appearances. The Scots will be tasked with replacing the production of a strong 2018 senior class and 25-game starter **Holly Hull** (Overland Park, Kan. | Blue Valley Northwest) figures to step right into a leadership role as a junior this season.

Complete 2018-19 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.

2018-19 MIAC Women's Basketball Preseason Coaches' Poll

Rank	Institution (First-Place Votes)	Total
1.	St. Thomas (11)	121
2.	Gustavus (1)	106
3.	Bethel	100
4.	Saint Benedict	89
5.	Augsburg	78
6.	Saint Mary's	76
7.	St. Catherine	60
8.	Concordia	48
9.	Hamline	34
10.	Carleton	30
11.	St. Olaf	29
12.	Macalester	21

2019 MIAC Women's Basketball Playoffs

The 2019 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, and will be played in a Tuesday-Thursday-Saturday format moving forward. 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. 19, 2019. 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. 21. The Championship game is set for Saturday, Feb. 23, 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 2019 NCAA Division III Women's Basketball Tournament.

Odds and Ends

-This will be the final year of the MIAC's 18-game conference schedule for women's basketball. Conference membership voted last spring to move to a 20-game conference schedule beginning in the 2019-20 season.

-Concordia's parquet floor in Memorial Auditorium was stripped, painted with a new design, and sealed as part of an update to the arena over the summer. Memorial Auditorium is home to Cobber basketball, volleyball, and wrestling.

-Bethel posted the fourth-highest team grade point average in all of Division III last season with a cumulative GPA of 3.689 during the 2017-18 academic year. The Royals were honored with inclusion in the WBCA Academic Top 25 Honor Roll as a result.