

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

Posted: Oct 27, 2011

ST. PAUL, Minn. -- The Gustavus women's hockey team reached seventh heaven in the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) in 2010-11 with their seventh-straight conference championship. As the 2011-12 season draws near, the biggest question in the conference is whether any teams are capable of standing between the Gusties and consecutive crown No. 8.

The MIAC coaches don't think so, as Gustavus was a unanimous pick to capture yet another conference title in the 2011-12 MIAC Women's Hockey Preseason Coaches' Poll. The Gusties received nine of 10 first-place votes and 81 points to finish atop the poll, in which coaches couldn't vote for their own team.

The last team other than Gustavus to claim the MIAC title was St. Thomas in 2003-04, and the coaches identified the Tommies as the team most likely to challenge the Gusties this season as they finished as the poll's runner up with 67 points to lead an extremely close race for the 2-4 spots. Bethel was just three points behind the Tommies in third with 64 and Concordia, which received the other first-place vote, had 63 points to land in the fourth spot.

St. Olaf finished with 46 points to finish in the fifth spot, which is also the final spot in the MIAC Playoff field. The Oles edged sixth-place Saint Mary's (38) and seventh-place St. Catherine (36) in the poll, and the race for the final playoff spots could be entertaining throughout the season. Rounding out the final three spots in the poll were Hamline (23), Saint Benedict (17) and Augsburg (15).

It's easy to see why the Gusties are favored again under Head Coach **Mike Carroll**, who claimed his fifth MIAC Coach-of-the-Year honor last season. Gustavus brings back a pair of All-MIAC players in junior forward **Lindsey Hjelm** and sophomore forward **Amanda Cartony** and Honorable Mention selections **Allie Schwab** (F) and **Danielle Justice** (G), who are both seniors.

Gustavus won both the MIAC regular season and Playoff titles last season and advanced all the way to the Division III semifinals, finishing with an overall record of 22-5-3 and a MIAC record of 14-2-2. The Gusties open the 2011-12 season ranked seventh in the [USCHO.com Division III Women's Hockey Poll](#) and have their sights set on more MIAC hardware and another deep run in the National Tournament this season.

St. Thomas is again Gustavus' No. 1 challenger following last season's second-place finish with a 10-4-4 MIAC record and an overall mark of 11-10-5. The Tommies will be led by senior forward **Kaylee Keys** and senior defender **Meghan Parker**, both All-MIAC picks last season, and fellow senior **Taylor Schluter** and sophomore goalie **Alise Riedel** are also back after earning Honorable Mention honors last season.

Bethel was one of the biggest surprises in the conference a year ago, finishing third with a 15-10-2 overall record and a 11-5-2 MIAC mark, and the Royals advanced all the way to the MIAC Playoff championship game. Bethel will try to repeat that success with a talented team back for Head Coach **Brian Carlson** in his second season. All-MIAC selections **Anna Carlson**, **Biz Huss**, **Cristina Masten** and **Jessica Newstrom** are all back to help continue the Royals' improvement along with Honorable Mention pick **Rachael Geng**.

Concordia is another team on the rise that looks to continue its ascension in 2011-12. A trio of All-MIAC honorees return to lead the Cobbers, including senior defender **Allie Bondy**, senior forward **Katelyn Dold** and junior forward **Jenna Westerham**. Concordia featured one of the league's best offensive attacks a year ago, and will try to take another step forward in the conference race this year.

St. Olaf was picked to make a return-trip to the MIAC Playoffs this season after finishing 12-12-2 overall and 11-5-2 in the conference last season. The Oles lost a handful of talented seniors, but also have plenty of firepower back this year. Senior defender **Kristen Latta** and junior forward **Nicole Stumpf** both return after earning All-MIAC honors in 2010-11, and sophomore forward **Margot Fleming** will look to continue her progression after receiving Honorable Mention accolades as a freshman.

Last season, Saint Mary's and St. Catherine finished just outside of the Playoff field with identical 8-7-3 records, and this year both hope they can return to the postseason after a one-year absence. The Cardinals were 11-11-3 overall last season and bring back All-MIAC forward **Nicole Olson** and Honorable Mention selections **Haley Coolsaet**, **Dana Kreuser** and **Erin Stenseth**. Meanwhile the Wildcats, who were 11-10-3 a year ago, said goodbye to two-time MIAC Player-of-the-Year and All-American **Michaela Michaelson** and goalie **Mel Gerten**, who won the Sheila Brown Award last season. Fortunately, SCU returns Honorable Mention defender **Kayla Clifton** and senior forward **Kelsey Abrahamson**, a 2009-10 All-Conference pick.



Hamline (4-17-3, 3-13-2), Saint Benedict (4-16-3, 3-12-3) and Augsburg (3-19-1, 1-16-1) occupied the bottom three spots a year ago, and will strive to climb the conference rankings this season with a combination of experienced returners and some talented new faces. The Pipers have reason for optimism, led by All-MIAC junior forward **Haley Johnson**. The Blazers begin a new era as **Jennifer Kranz** takes over as head coach, and she'll start by building her program around Honorable Mention senior defender **Kerri Graske**. Augsburg is also looking to improve in Head Coach **Michelle McAteer's** second season on the bench, and will be led by captains **Jessica Larkin** and **Jeanna Dudley**.

The 2011-12 season officially starts Friday, with four of the league's 10 teams opening with nonconference action. The first MIAC conference series will be held the weekend of Nov. 11-12, with three weekends of league play prior to the Holiday break. The conference season begins again in earnest in January, with the regular season coming to a close on Feb. 25.

The five-team MIAC Women's Hockey Playoffs will run from Feb. 28 to March 3, with the high seed hosting each game. The fourth and fifth seeds will meet in the quarterfinal round on Tuesday, Feb. 28. The two semifinal games will take place 48 hours later on Thursday, March 1, with the championship taking place Saturday, March 3. The winner of the postseason tournament will claim the MIAC's automatic bid to the NCAA Division III Women's Hockey Tournament.

The rest of the conference preview contains complete results from the 2011-12 MIAC Women's Hockey Preseason Coaches' Poll, helpful links about the upcoming season, and complete previews for all 10 MIAC women's hockey teams.

2011-12 MIAC Preseason Coaches' Poll

Coaches voted for every team in the conference except their own team. Points were assigned for each vote (9 for first, 8 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 Hockey Coaches' Poll		
Rank	Institution	Total
1	Gustavus (9)	81
2	St. Thomas	67
3	Bethel	64
4	Concordia (1)	63
5	St. Olaf	46
6	Saint Mary's	38
7	St. Catherine	36
8	Hamline	23
9	Saint Benedict	17
10	Augsburg	15

2011-12 MIAC Playoff Dates

First Round: (Tuesday, February 28); Semifinals (Thursday, March 1); Finals (Saturday, March 3)

| [2011-12 MIAC Schedule](#) | [2009-10 MIAC Statistics](#) | [MIAC Recordbook](#) | [MIAC Archives](#) |

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Coach: Michelle McAteer

Career Record: 3-19-1 (2nd season)

2010-11 Finish: 10th (1-16-1 MIAC, 3-19-1 overall)

Augsburg Season Preview

Despite graduating eight seniors, head coach Michelle McAteer is optimistic about improvement for the Augsburg College women's hockey team in 2011-12. A nice mix of returners and a solid recruiting class has the Auggies excited about moving up in the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference standings in the year ahead.

"Our team is excited about this year and the opportunity to continue to improve our program," McAteer said. "Our returners committed to the summer and pre-season strength and conditioning program, and overall we are in better shape than last year. Combine that effort with a freshmen class who can immediately help our offense, and are prospects are very encouraging."

Captains Jessica Larkin (JR, Lakeville, Minn./Lakeville South HS) and Jeanna Dudley (SO, Lindenhurst, Ill./Lakes Community HS) will be strong leaders for the Auggies both on and off the ice. Both Larkin and Dudley played in all 23 games last season. Larkin led the Auggies in scoring, tying for the team lead in both goals and assists (three goals, four assists), while Dudley tied Larkin for the team lead in assists with four.

Goalie Alex Hall (SO, Burnsville, Minn.) returns to the Auggie lineup after playing in 13 games in her debut season. Hall recorded 432 saves last year with a .902 save percentage. She will be joined by a talented pair of newcomers -- Crystal Amunrud (FY, Coon Rapids, Minn.) and Brianna Schulz (FY, Prior Lake, Minn.) -- who were both all-conference goalies at their respective high schools and will make the Auggies very deep in the net.

Forwards Jenna Marquardt (SR, New Prague, Minn.), Erica Berthold (JR, Issaquah, Wash.), Carissa Miller (JR, Woodbury, Minn.), Jess Geisinger (JR, Lakeville, Minn./Lakeville South HS), Amy Wenzel (JR, Sun Prairie, Wis.) and Nicole Gorr (SO, Crystal Lake, Ill./Crystal Lake South HS) all return with a year of experience working under coach McAteer. They will be joined by talented newcomers Rachel Hennessy (FY, Williston, N.D.), Kendall Christian (FY, Moorhead) Casey Miller (FY, Bemidji, Minn.) and Sara Rajewsky (FY, Murdock, Minn.).

"We are hoping to build on the improvements we made last year," McAteer said. "In 2010-11, we improved all of our defensive categories and our offensive doubled in the second half of the season. As we continue to stress healthy competition in practice,

Defensively, the Auggies return Dudley, Katie Lamirande (JR, Cloquet, Minn.), Diana Bocklund (JR, Pine Springs, Minn./Mahtomedi HS), Sandra Hinz (JR, Stockholm, Sweden/Solna Gymnasium HS) and Emilie Ball (SO, Duluth, Minn./Duluth East HS).

The Auggies open the season Oct. 29-30 with a road series at Finlandia University in Hancock, Mich. Augsburg opens the conference portion of its season on Nov. 11 as it makes the short trip to Ridder Arena to take on St. Catherine University.



Bethel

Coach: Brian Carlson

Career Record: 15-10-2 (2nd season)

2010-2011 Finish: 3rd (11-5-2 MIAC, 15-10-2 overall)

Bethel Season Preview

In the 2010-11 season, the Bethel Royals women's hockey team reached new heights by advancing to the MIAC Playoff championship game for the first time in program history. Head Coach Brian Carlson has hopes and expectations that the team will build on last year's momentum entering the 2011-12 campaign.

Coach Carlson is optimistic that his strong core of sophomores and juniors from a year ago will continue to play well together and fill the holes left by Allison Papko and Kassy Sullivan. Papko was Bethel's top point scorer last season with 14 goals, 17 assists and four game-winning goals, including three in conference play. Sullivan was a solid performer all four of her seasons and forced opposing teams to make adjustments because of her speed.

However, the Royals return five players who earned conference awards last season. Defender Anna Carlson (Sr., Roseville, Minn.), forwards Biz Huss (Jr., Beaver Bay, Minn.) and Cristina Masten (Fergus Falls, Minn.), and goaltender Jess Newstrom (Jr., Cambridge, Minn.) each received All-MIAC recognition, while Rachael Geng (Sr., South St. Paul, Minn.) earned an honorable mention. Masten was also named to the six-player All-Rookie team.

Carlson has racked up 48 career points in three years as a defender. Last season, she contributed three goals and 16 assists to Bethel's offense. Huss was Bethel's second-leading scorer with 30 points on 15 goals and 15 assists, while Masten was close behind with 24 points on 14 goals and 10 assists. Newstrom was as solid as they come in the net, recording more than 700 saves, while only allowing 48 goals in 27 games for a 1.76 goals against average.

Haley Toter (Sr., Park Ridge, Ill.) will join the team after the conclusion of the volleyball season to provide additional depth and senior leadership, while several other juniors have significant playing time under their belts to help guide the younger players.

Bethel welcomes a number of first year players to the fold that could potentially make an immediate impact. Forwards Kaylen Erchul (Fr., Gilbert, Minn.), Kalie Johnson (Fr., Richfield, Minn.), Michelle Munsterman (Fr., Brookings, S.D.), and Callie Halvorson (Fr., Cloquet, Minn.) all have strong hockey backgrounds and help make up a promising freshman class.

Overall, the Royals look to continue doing the things that made them successful in 2010-11, which includes playing strong defense and killing off penalties, while capitalizing on opponent miscues and other scoring opportunities.



Concordia

Coach: Brett Bruininks

Career Record: 15-8-4 (2nd season)

2010-11 Finish: 5th (8-6-4 MIAC, 15-8-4 overall)

Concordia Season Preview

Concordia preview coming soon!



Gustavus

Coach: Mike Carroll

Career Record: 263-65-19 (15 seasons)

2010-11 Finish: 1st (14-2-1 MIAC, 22-6-2 overall)

Gustavus Season Preview

The Gustavus women's hockey team kicks off its 2011-12 campaign Friday, Nov. 4, playing host to Concordia University of Mequon, Wis. The match-up will begin the long road in the Gusties' pursuit of reaching a ninth-consecutive trip to the NCAA Championships. Five-time MIAC Coach of the Year Mike Carroll, now in his 13th season at the helm, returns 18 letterwinners from a team that posted a 22-5-3 overall record and 14-2-2 MIAC mark, which led to a seventh-straight conference title.

All-Conference selections Amanda Cartony (So., Stillwater, Minn.) and Lindsey Hjelm (Jr., North Oaks, Minn.) along with Danielle Justice (Sr., Alexandria, Minn.) and Allie Schwab (Sr., Stillwater, Minn.), who both earned honorable mention recognition, will anchor an experienced group of upperclassmen and show the ropes to nine new first-years. Senior captain Mollie Carroll (Eagan, Minn.) and fellow forwards Cartony, Hjelm and Schwab led the Gusties as the top four point-scorers last season – accounting for 46 goals and 50 assists – and will lead the charge up front once again.

"We have our top four point-scorers back this season, so that's an area we feel we will build upon," Head Coach Mike Carroll acknowledged. "Over the offseason, we wanted to improve our size and strength, and that improvement is starting to show during practice. After the first week of practice we are fairly optimistic that the goals we set in the spring are moving forward."

Defensively, the Gusties will need to replace three seniors from last season, including three-time All-American Kirstin Peterson, who now serves as the team's assistant coach. Assistant captain Jess Harren (Jr., Woodbury, Minn.), Maddie Bergh (So., Eden Prairie, Minn.), Gina DeNucci (Sr., Chanhassen, Minn.) and Kelsey Kennedy (Jr., Eagan, Minn.) will look to fill the void left at the blue line. Bergh made the MIAC All-Rookie Team last year as a part of a defense that allowed an average of 1.00 goals per game during the league season.

In the nets, Coach Carroll will rely on Danielle Justice who led the MIAC last year with a goals against average of 1.34. In 26 starts, the senior goalie recorded 434 saves with a save percentage of .925 en route to a 17-5-3 record, including seven shutouts. Justice currently holds the highest save percentage (.936) in program history among goalies with at least 200 career minutes and will extend the program's record for most minutes in goal (3668:56).

Areas of improvement that Coach Carroll said have been a focus leading up to the season include special teams skills, the penalty kill and finishing scores. Some may view the Gustavus Head Coach as a perfectionist since the Gusties led the MIAC in special teams net last season with a +21 advantage over their opponents (33 power play goals for, one short-handed goal against; 11 power play goals against, zero short-handed goals for).

The Gustie women enter the 2011-12 season ranked No. 7 on the USCHO.com preseason poll.



Hamline

Coach: Steve DeBus

Career Record: 4-17-3 (2nd season)

2010-11 Finish: 9th (3-13-2 MIAC, 4-17-3 overall)

Hamline Season Preview

Second-year head coach Steve DeBus doesn't need to look at last year's stats to know what his team needs to do better in 2011-12. He's been thinking about it ever since the end of last season. "We have to get more offense this year," he said. "To do that, we simply have to get better at finishing plays off. We missed too many good scoring opportunities last year."

The combination of eight of the team's top 10 scorers from last year's team returning plus a bevy of new faces causes DeBus to believe his team will improve from last year's final mark of 4-16-3.

"We have several players who have a year under their belts now," DeBus said. "That will make a difference. Last year, we had good spurts but we seemed to be unable to make them last. Having a roster of 23 players creates competition and gives us more options this year."

Haley Johnson (Jr., Bemidji, Minn.) led the team in scoring last year with 16 points (seven goals, nine assists) and was the Pipers' lone All-MIAC pick. She will be complimented by seniors Jessica Kraus (South St. Paul, Minn.) and Erin Kastner (Faribault, Minn.). The deeper roster will allow DeBus to rest his key players a bit more. Better rested players may lead to maximizing opportunities. "You simply have to score on good opportunities when you get them," DeBus, a former NCAA Division I goalie said. "The players understand this. If you do that, you build confidence. If you're confident, you win games. This goes hand in hand."

DeBus is hopeful sophomore Jessica Hunt (Bemidji, Minn.) will be joined by newcomers like Corinne Henning (So., Saint Paul, Minn.) in the scoring parade. Henning was a top scorer at Culver Academy and will join the team when the soccer season ends.

Four returnees are back on defense. Billye Nelson (Sr., Warroad, Minn.) is a steady presence on the blue line. Sophomore Megan Campbell (Grand Forks, N.D.) made strides last year and will be counted on to shoulder more responsibility. New face Ashley Maskel (Jr., Apple Valley, Minn.) may step in and see action right away. "Like the offense, we're improved there this year," DeBus said.

In goal, Nicole Jones (Sr., Mora, Minn.), who had an excellent 2.24 goals-against average in 13 starts last year, returns. She may get pushed for the job by Caitlin Nisanov (So., Detroit, Mich.), who played five games last season and newcomers Sarah Schneekloth (Jr., Marshall, Minn.) and Sam Stark (Fy., Northfield, Minn.). "Nicole was very good last year," DeBus said. "But we are deep there. I'm very happy with our goaltending situation."

The Pipers are hoping to get a fast start to the 2011-12 season. After opening at UW-Superior, they take a week off before heading into MIAC play. "We need to be ready right away," DeBus said. "We can't be playing catchup in February. But the players understand this. They have worked very hard in practice and this team has a good feel to it. I think we're ready to move up in the league."



Saint Benedict

Coach: Jennifer Kranz

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

2010-11 Finish: 8th (3-12-3 MIAC, 4-16-3 overall)

Saint Benedict Season Preview

The College of Saint Benedict ice hockey team brings in a new head coach in Jennifer Kranz to lead the Blazers to a successful season in 2011-12.

Kranz comes to CSB from St. Cloud State University, where she served as an assistant coach for five years. She replaces Pat Michaud, who went 21-75-18 in five seasons with the Blazers.

Saint Benedict finished eighth in the MIAC a year ago with a 4-16-3 overall record and 3-12-3 conference mark. After losing three seniors, the Blazers will look for a fresh start and be competitive against talented conference opponents.

The Blazers return many experienced and talented players. MIAC All-Conference Honorable Mention selection and senior forward Kerri Grasse tied for the team last season with 10 points. Fellow senior forward Amie Ernst notched seven points in 2010-11, including five goals. Other returners expected to make significant contributions include sophomore forward Allyson Nielsen, junior defender Linnea Chruscielski, junior forward/defender Ashley Olson and senior forward Kelly Fladebo.

With a new head coach, many key returners and a new crop of first-year players, the Blazers will try to take the first step in the right direction of being a successful and competitive team in the MIAC.



St. Catherine

Coach: Brad Marshall

Career Record: 49-80-13 (6 seasons)

2010-11 Finish: 7th (8-7-3 MIAC, 11-10-3 overall)

St. Catherine Season Preview

Now in his seventh season, Coach Brad Marshall welcomes nine new faces and eleven returners from the 2010-2011 squad that missed the Play-offs by one win. An early February struggle is all it took for the Wildcats to be out of the competitive MIAC post season. The new look Wildcats will have to rely on playing more consistent, productive hockey down the stretch in 2012. But first, it will be all about teaching and all about learning.

"We have a new look because there's no Michaela Michaelson, Meghan Lange, Mel Gerten, Katie Lawler, Jess Feltes or Megan Boehmer...along with four others not returning from last year. The other MIAC teams will be happy to see that, but it will take us a while to realize their not here and it's a new year. The first couple weeks will be filled with teaching systems and player meetings." Although All American and two-time MIAC Player of the Year Michaela Michaelson is gone, the Wildcats have seniors Kelsey Abrahamson and Cassie Rooney back to lead the way up front. "Kelsey and Cass have been here a long time and they both have had good years in the past. We'll need them to contribute offensively all year." Marshall says that one way to move up in the MIAC standing is to have better special teams play. "I think our penalty kill was outstanding last year. We were #2 in the country behind RIT. But our power play numbers in league play has to get better. We can't be around 14-15% and expect to win many games. We need to get back to that 18-20% to be successful."

Kayla Clifton and Liz Bauer join Abrahamson and Rooney to round out the senior class. All four know exactly what is expected and are eager to get started. Captain Kayla Clifton said, "We want to see what we can achieve as a group. We don't have a single All-Conference player from last year on this team, so we know it will have to be a team effort this year. The seniors from last year are gone, and we all need to step up and replace them." Junior Kallie Geissler and Sophomore Katie Jirik will join Clifton on the blue line. Rounding out the defensive pairs will be first years Raelyn Smith and Kari Romano. Late departures have left the Wildcats short on defense which will make things even more interesting as the year goes on. "We'll get it done by committee this year. With only 5 D currently, we need to win all those little battles that happen throughout the game. "

Joining Abrahamson and Rooney up front are returning juniors Becky Clifton, Rachael Gasperetti and Ashley Grell. All four juniors have seen extensive playing time in their previous seasons and the Wildcats are relying on their experience for a quick start. Sophomore forward Nicki Mosbeck welcomes first years Megan Killmer, Shelby Salmonsens, Kasey Evans, Kelly Kotowicz and Hallie Paschke. All will be seeing ice time early on as the Wildcats try to find the right combinations for success.

They will help first year goalies Sam Geissler and Haley Morningstar, along with junior Kayla Lange, in holding opponents off the scoreboard.



Saint Mary's

Coach: Terry Mannor

Career Record: 55-78-16 (6 seasons)

2010-11 Finish: 6th (8-7-3 MIAC, 11-11-3 overall)

Saint Mary's Season Preview

Two year's ago, the Saint Mary's University women's hockey team, fueled by a talented group of sophomore, earned their first Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference playoff appearance in three years.

A year ago, a season-ending four-game losing streak left the Cardinals on the outside looking in when the conference's post-season invitations were handed out.

And with one final season remaining in their collegiate careers, this year's senior class is bound and determined to still be playing in early March.

"There's no question it's in the backs of everyone's minds," said SMU coach Terry Mannor of the Cardinals' drive for a return to the post-season. "After about the first 15 minutes of our first practice, I wasn't happy with the way things were going, so I brought everyone in and reminded them all that we have to be mentally prepared to be at our best every day — whether it's a practice or a game — because not making the playoffs is not acceptable."

Mannor and the Cardinals' drive to get back into the playoff picture is made a bit easier with a cupboard full of experienced — not to mention talented — returners.

SMU returns its top three scorers — Nicole Olson (New Brighton, Minn.), Haley Coolsaet (Grosse Island, Mich.) and Erin Stenseth (Eau Claire, Wis.) — and six of its top seven point-getters. On the defensive side, only two-time All-MIAC selection Dy-anna Stewart, who graduated in May, will not be roaming the blue line when the Cardinals open play at Lake Forest on Oct. 28.

Olson is back after a junior year in which she led the team in points for the second straight season, tallying a career-best 23 points en route to earning First-Team All-MIAC honors. Olson also posted team-high 14 assists, while Coolsaet led the team with 11 goals in her freshman campaign.

Defensively, the Cardinals are led by seniors Alex Braun (Darwin, Minn.) and Dana Kreuser (Maplewood, Minn.), while Sarah Gustafson (Esko, Minn.) — who split time in goal a year ago — is back after compiling a 1.83 goals-against-average and a .946 save percentage as a freshman.

"This might be one of the deepest teams — offensively and defensively — I've had the luxury of working with," said Mannor. "I wouldn't say we are going to be overpowering offensively, defensively or in goal, but we are going to be as competitive as anyone we face in all three facets."

And Mannor is hoping that competitiveness will be the secret to the Cardinals' success this season.

But the SMU head coach also warned that the MIAC playoffs are a long way off — the Cardinals have to take things one game, one weekend, at a time.

"The key for us this year is to take each game as it come — in our league, you can't afford to look past anyone," Mannor said. "The MIAC is so tight, every point is huge. Last year, we struggled a bit to be consistent from period to period.

"We need to keep our focus and play to our level every minute of every game," Mannor added. "If can do that, I really believe the sky is the limit for this team."



St. Olaf

Coach: John Bazzachini

Career Record: 71-77-4 (6 seasons)

2010-11 Finish: 4th (11-5-2 MIAC, 12-12-2 overall)

St. Olaf Season Preview

The St. Olaf women's hockey team, led by seventh-year head coach John Bazzachini, enters the season with high expectations and a strong senior presence. The Oles are coming off a 12-12-2 season, but excelled in conference play, posting an 11-5-2 record in the MIAC and finishing second in the conference.

The Oles are captained by three seniors this year: defenseman Kristen Latta, and forwards Alex Meyer and Taylor Orr.

The key returning defensemen for St. Olaf are Latta and Alana Patrick. Latta is a three-time all-Conference selection. In addition to stellar play defensively, she quarterbackes the power play and possesses one of the best shots in the conference. She was the Oles' fourth-leading scorer last year. Patrick has good speed and is tenacious in her end of the rink.

St. Olaf has good depth at the forward position, with numerous returning athletes. Alex Meyer, a dangerous two-way player, was one of the leaders last season in goals scored. Orr is a very good defensive center coming off her best season last year. Christina Benjamin, yet another senior, has developed into one of the top penalty killers in the MIAC due to her exceptional speed and aggressiveness.

Junior Nicole Stumpf is a lightning-fast forward that has already been selected to all-conference team twice. She led the Oles in goals and points last season and notched five game-winning goals in MIAC play a year ago. Sophomore Margot Fleming was an All-MIAC honorable mention forward as a freshman whose explosiveness should bloom this year. Junior Alison Umland will also be back, and is a top playmaker in the conference who possesses great hands. Tara Reyelts, a sophomore, is an exceptionally quick forward with an ability to score goals.

The Oles have an impressive incoming class that is expected to contribute this season. At goalie, St. Olaf gains Ali McKeever from Hill Murray, who led her team to the state tournament last season, and Sam Ubl from Anoka, who was a finalist for the Ms. Goalie award last year. Defensemen Courtney Nelson, Caroline Ponessa and Shea Noerenberg will be counted on to contribute right away on the Ole blue line. At forward, the Oles have Devyn Hotho, who was a top forward for the San Jose Jr. Sharks last season, Lauren Bazzachini, and Tala Gallaga, who will all add depth to a very quick group of forwards.

Expect the Oles to be very quick this year and apply pressure offensively, scoring plenty of goals. The challenge will be how quick the young players adjust and what kind of defensive support can be provided for the two freshmen goalies.



St. Thomas

Coach: Tom Palkowski

Career Record: 64-30-11 (4 seasons)

2010-11 Finish: 2nd (10-4-4 MIAC, 11-10-5 overall)

St. Thomas Season Preview

St. Thomas women's hockey has won more than 80% of its conference games over the last nine seasons. The Tommies will look to contend for another top-two MIAC finish this winter.

Tom Palkowski starts his fifth year as UST's head coach. Last year's team finished second in the MIAC at 10-4-4 and closed with an overall record of 11-10-5.

UST will return more than 15 players from last year's team. The Tommies had just three seniors last winter. Graduation losses include forward Kelley Fallen (3g-5a/8 points), an All-MIAC honorable mention selection.

The Tommie bring back a strong core of returners led by three seniors – All-MIAC forward Kaylee Keys (6g-7a/13 points), All-MIAC defenseman Meghan Parker (7g-10a/17 points), and honorable mention All-MIAC forward Taylor Schluter (4g-8a/12 points).

The 2011-12 captains are Parker (Career: 73 games, 15g-28a/43 points) and fellow seniors Jaci Lang (Career: 77 games, 4g-11a/15 assists) and Jamie Tiede (Career: 78 games, 21g-20a/41 points).

Freshmen Paige Baldwin, Morgan Olson, Katy Kvasnicka, Tara Baago and transfer Jenny Saxon of Connecticut should add some offense to a skilled group of returnees. Saxon scored 57 goals and 55 assists in her career at Wayzata High. Baldwin had 19 goals and helped Minnetonka claim the large-class state championship. Kvasnicka scored 37 goals last season for Mankato West. Baago had 22 goals last season at Henry Sibley. Olson had 17 goals as a senior at Totino-Grace.

The Tommies return five blueliners and also return one the best young players in the MIAC in sophomore goalie Alise Riedel, who was named to the conference's All-Rookie team and was honorable mention All-MIAC as a freshman. Riedel had the second best goals-against average in the conference (1.63), and posted a 8-8-5 record in 21 games.

Sophomore defender Mary Grace Flesher (3g-1a/4 points) also made the MIAC All-Rookie Team last winter.

The Toms will open their season on the road against UW-Superior, Nov. 1, and open at home against St. Ben's on Nov. 11.