

2017 MIAC Women's Hockey Preview and Preseason Coaches' Poll

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BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – After claiming third place at the 2017 NCAA Championship last season, Gustavus Adolphus College will open the 2017-18 Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) hockey season as the Conference's clear-cut favorite, as voted on by MIAC coaches.

Entering the year at No. 7 in the nation in both the USCHO.com Division III Women's Poll and D3hockey.com Top 10, the Gusties garnered eight of a possible nine first-place votes to claim the top spot in the annual MIAC Women's Hockey Preseason Coaches' Poll. The reigning regular season MIAC champs are primed for success, with as many as 17 playoff-tested players returning to USCHO.com Division III Women's Hockey Coach of the Year Mike Carroll's squad, including rising junior goalie and First Team All-American **Amanda DiNella**.

Runner-ups in last year's MIAC Championship Game, Augsburg enters the new year at No. 2 in the Coaches' Poll. Rising junior **Valerie Whichello** led Augsburg and all MIAC defenders with 13 assists last season, 10 of which came on power plays. The Auggies received one first-place vote in this year's MIAC Coaches' Poll and are just outside USCHO.com's and D3hockey's Preseason Top 10s, receiving votes in both inaugural national polls of the year.

Tied for third in this year's Coaches' Poll are the Hamline Pipers and St. Thomas Tommies. Hamline forward **Bre Simon** earned All-Conference honors after tying for the Conference lead in goals with 16 in her first collegiate season in 2016-17, while rising sophomore goalie **Annie Juergens** earned All-Rookie Team honors last year, posting a .918 save percentage in 12 appearances.

St. Thomas enters the 20th season of Tommie women's hockey ranked 10th nationally and tied for third in the MIAC Coaches' Poll. Experience on the blue line should prove beneficial to the Toms, as rising senior **Allie Borgstrom** and junior **Demi Cooper** figure to lead the defense.

After securing a seventh straight MIAC playoff berth last year, Concordia earned 57 points for a fifth-place finish – even grabbing one first-place vote – in the 2017 MIAC Women's Hockey Preseason Coaches' Poll. Despite graduating a handful of impact players, the Cobbers future appears bright with All-Rookie selection **Amanda Flemming** back on the ice. The rising sophomore finished her first MIAC regular season with three goals and five points in her last five games.

Complete 2017 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.



2017-18 MIAC Women's Hockey Preseason Coaches' Poll		
<u>Rank</u>	<u>Institution</u>	<u>Total</u>
1.	Gustavus (8)	80
2.	Augsburg (1)	64
T3.	Hamline	59
T3.	St. Thomas	59
5.	Concordia (1)	57
6.	Bethel	47

7.	St. Catherine	26
8.	Saint Mary's	25
9.	St. Olaf	21
10.	Saint Benedict	12

Around the MIAC

-Rising senior **Jane Vezina** scored five power-play goals for the Oles last season, the most by any MIAC competitor in Conference play. Vezina led St. Olaf with 11 goals in 2016-17.

-**Tori Thompson** led all active defenders in points (16) and power-play goals (4) last season, while ranking second in goals (5) and assists (11). Her point total represented the highest number by a St. Catherine defender since the 2012-13 season.

-Despite a 1-11-3 record in Conference play last year, no MIAC goalie recorded more saves than Saint Benedict's **Julia Carle** in 2016-17. The rising junior stopped 507 pucks last season.

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-*Oct. 28, 2017: St. Thomas at Lake Forest.* The Tommies open the season in Illinois against a fellow program ranked in the top-10 of USCHO.com's Division III Poll. The results of the two-game swing against No. 8-ranked Lake Forest should provide a good barometer for St. Thomas to start the year.

-*Dec. 6, 2017: Gustavus vs. Wisconsin-River Falls.* The first of two matchups between a pair of teams that finished in the top-five of USCHO.com's final Division III Poll of the 2016-17 season figures to be highly competitive. The Gusties were 0-2 against the Falcons in the regular season last year before cracking the code in a 3-2 NCAA Quarterfinal victory.

-*Jan. 6, 2018: Augsburg at Wisconsin-Eau Claire.* Both the Auggies and Blugolds were left on the outside looking in last year at tournament time. Both hope to change that this season and a victory in this series could go a long way in solidifying a case for NCAA Championship consideration.

2017 MIAC Women's Hockey Playoffs

The 2017 MIAC Women's Hockey Playoffs will feature the top five teams in the Conference standings playing in a high-seed-host, single-elimination postseason tournament. The lone quarterfinal game between the No. 4 and No. 5 seeds will now be played Thursday, Feb. 22, with the two semifinal games to follow on Saturday, Feb. 24. The MIAC Championship game is set for the following Saturday, March 3. The winner will receive the MIAC's automatic bid to the 2018 NCAA Division III Women's Hockey Tournament.

Odds and Ends

-Bethel extended its streak of consecutive seasons with at least one All-Conference selection to 14 when forward **Wendy Roberts** earned the accolade last year. The rising senior recorded 22 points in 2016-17, leading the team with 14 goals and eight assists to go along with a .130 shot percentage.

-After eight years as an assistant, Greg Moore was named the fourth head coach in Saint Mary's women's hockey history in June. Moore helped lead the Cardinals to back-to-back MIAC playoff appearances in 2014-15 and 2015-16.

-All-American goalie **Amanda DiNella** was nearly impossible to get by last season, posting the Conference's only single-digit goals-allowed total (8) in 13 MIAC games for Gustavus. The next-lowest total in the MIAC? Her backup, **Bailey Jackson**, with 12 goals allowed in seven starts for the Gusties.