

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

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BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – Women's hockey in the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) appears as competitive as ever, with four different teams receiving first-place votes in the annual Preseason Coaches' Poll, released on Wednesday.

Gustavus Adolphus and St. Thomas tied for the most points with 72 apiece, though the Gusties received one more first-place vote (3) than the Tommies (2). Hamline also received three first-place votes in the Poll for a total of 70 points, while Augsburg was not far behind with 61 points and one first-place vote. The Pipers, Gusties, and Tommies will also open the year in the national spotlight, as Hamline is ranked No. 4 in the nation, followed by Gustavus at No. 7 and St. Thomas tied for No. 10 in the season's first [USCHO.com Division III Top 10 Poll](#).

Gustavus enters the 2018-19 campaign with plenty of optimism after claiming a share of the program's 15th MIAC regular season championship last season. The Gusties earned an at-large bid to the 2018 NCAA Division III Women's Hockey Tournament and made history by competing in the longest D-III women's hockey tournament game ever by pushing Wis.-Eau Claire to triple-overtime in a thrilling opening round contest. Two-time All-America goalie **Amanda DiNella** played a big role in the Gusties' success last season and figures to once again be a focal point heading into her senior year. DiNella backstopped the Gusties in 26 games last season, posting six shutouts, a career-high 474 saves, and a 1.38 goals-against average on the year. DiNella has 15 career shutouts and 1,194 total saves to her name - 222 shy of Danielle Justice's program record, set between 2008-12. Gustavus head coach Mike Carroll is on the verge of a historic milestone himself - the longtime Gustie coach is 22 victories shy of becoming just the fourth women's hockey coach in NCAA history to reach 400 career wins.



Amanda DiNella enters the 2018-19 season with 15 career shutouts, 1,194 saves, and two All-America honors.

St. Thomas will look to pick up where it left off at the end of last season, having gone unbeaten (8-0-5) in its final 13 games of the 2017-18 campaign, including a 5-0-3 mark in the Tommies' final eight road contests. Sophomore **Rachel Werdin** played a significant role in that run, contributing 13 goals and eight assists over the final 11 games of the season. Last year was UST's 18th consecutive winning season, while the team's three losses represented a new program record for fewest defeats. Even without graduated All-America selection and 2018 MIAC Player of the Year Allison Borgstrom in the lineup this season, history shows the Tommies will be a tough out in Conference play again, as St. Thomas has won or shared three of the last five regular season titles and all four MIAC Playoff Championships it has competed in during that time span.

Hamline enjoyed the most successful season in program history last year, winning the MIAC Playoff title for the first time ever and finishing third at the NCAA Tournament with a dramatic overtime win over perennial power Plattsburgh State. The Pipers also cleaned up in postseason awards, as head coach Natalie Darwitz was named both MIAC Coach of the Year and USCHO.com Division III Coach of the Year, and the program earned its first two All-America honorees ever in forwards Sarah Bobrowski and rising junior **Bre Simon**. Simon ranked second in all of Division III hockey with 56 points last season and has totaled 47 goals in her two years as a Piper.

With one first-place vote and 61 points, Augsburg is No. 4 in the Preseason Coaches' Poll. The Auggies have appeared in each of the last three MIAC Playoff tournaments and will be looking to make it four in a row under ninth-year head coach Michelle McAteer. McAteer's squad was led last season by forward **Bridget Wagner**, who posted nine goals and a team-best 11 assists as a junior. Wagner registered a point in 12 games last season, including six multi-point performances and one two-goal outing. The senior scorer now has 17 goals and 21 assists for 38 points in her career.

Concordia received 43 points in the preseason balloting - good for No. 5 in the Poll - and will be playing this season for a new head coach in Maureen Greiner. Greiner is no stranger to the MIAC, having played both hockey and golf at St. Thomas from 2002-06, where she was a combined eight-time All-Conference honoree. A two-time MIAC medalist and All-America honorable mention in golf, Greiner was just as productive on the ice, where she finished her career with 56 goals and 142 points in addition to being the D-III leader in assists per game as a senior. She has since served as an assistant coach in the Conference at St. Thomas and Augsburg. Greiner inherits a program that has gone to eight straight MIAC Playoffs and returns several key pieces of last year's squad, including junior forward **Amanda Flemming**, who totaled 28 points to lead the Cobbers last season.

Bethel was neck-and-neck with the Cobbers in the 2018 preseason voting, earning 42 points for sixth place in the Poll. The Royals have reached the MIAC Playoffs seven of the last eight seasons and nine of the last eleven after making their way to the semifinals last February. Sophomore **Bri Stafne** is the leading returning scorer after putting up 25 points in her rookie season last year.

Saint Mary's earned 37 points for seventh place in the Preseason Coaches' Poll. The Cardinals will be celebrating their 20th season of women's hockey this year, as Saint Mary's played its first season as a varsity program in 1998-99. Forward **Bailey Wendt** is back for her senior season after leading the team with career-highs in both goals (13) and points (19) last year. Wendt recorded her first two collegiate hat tricks last season and led the team with eight power-play goals on the year.

St. Catherine received 25 points in the balloting for eighth place in the Poll. A second-half resurgence kept the Wildcats in the playoff hunt late last season. Senior **Tori Thompson** was the top scoring defender in the MIAC last year, leading St. Kate's with 16 points thanks to 13 assists and three goals. She received All-Conference recognition for the second year in a row as a result.

St. Olaf collected 16 points in the preseason balloting for ninth place in the Poll. The Oles finished the 2017-18 season on the highest of notes, scoring seven goals in a victory over Saint Mary's - the Oles' third-highest single-game goal total in program history and the most by the team in seven years. **Xandi Swedberg** had one of those seven goals and assisted on four more in the game. The senior forward has played in all 75 of the Oles' games over the last three seasons.

Saint Benedict registered 12 points in the preseason balloting. The Bennies will enter a new era under first-year head coach Nick Thibault this season; however, CSB will return three of its top four scorers from a season ago, including sophomore forward **Riley Schneider**, who finished second on the team with 12 points in her debut season last year.

Complete 2018 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.

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

Rank	Institution (First-Place Votes)	Total
T1.	Gustavus (3)	72
T1.	St. Thomas (2)	72
3.	Hamline (3)	70
4.	Augsburg (1)	61
5.	Concordia	43
6.	Bethel	42
7.	Saint Mary's	37
8.	St. Catherine	25
9.	St. Olaf	16
10.	Saint Benedict	12

2019 MIAC Women's Hockey Playoffs

The 2019 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. 21, with the two semifinal games to follow on Saturday, Feb. 23. The MIAC Championship game is set for the following Saturday, March 2. The winner will receive the MIAC's automatic bid to the 2019 NCAA Division III Women's Hockey Tournament.

Odds and Ends

-Hamline head women's hockey coach Natalie Darwitz is among the list of 2018 inductees to the United States Hockey Hall of Fame. Darwitz will be formally inducted on December 12 in ceremonies that will be held in Nashville, Tenn.

-A year after Hamline moved into its new home at TRIA Rink, another MIAC program will head into a new arena in 2019. The newly-constructed St. Olaf Ice Arena will open its doors in January 2019 and become the on-campus home of Ole men's and women's hockey.

-The NCAA Division III Women's Hockey Tournament will expand its bracket size from nine teams to 10 in 2019. The MIAC had two teams qualify for the Tournament last season, with Hamline claiming the league's automatic qualifier and Gustavus seizing an at-large bid.