

2007 MIAC Women's Soccer Season Preview

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Saint Paul, Minn. -- The 2007 MIAC women's soccer season looks to be a bit unpredictable. Four different teams received first place votes in the MIAC Preseason Coaches Poll with Macalester leading the poll, followed closely by Carleton, Saint Benedict, and Concordia.

Macalester and veteran coach Jon Leaney will look to return to the top of the MIAC standings after being denied their third straight crown last season. The Scots will rely on All-MIAC performers Grace King and Anne Kintop to provide leadership for the experienced Scots. Carleton, who was ranked second in the preseason poll, will be led by 2006 MIAC Coach of the Year Keren Gudeman. The Knights return their top ten scorers from last season and will count on a tough defense led by sophomore goalkeeper Yusi He.



Saint Benedict will count on experience as they contend for a MIAC playoff spot in 2007. The Blazers return 18 student-athletes from last year's squad and will look to that experience as they battle their way through a tough schedule. Concordia, defending MIAC regular season and playoff champions, will be looking to make its fifth straight conference tournament appearance. The Cobbers will need to fill the shoes of two-time MIAC MVP Morgan Bain in order to continue their recent success.

St. Thomas will be led by first year head coach Shelia McGill. The Tommies will look to their 11 returning players to contend for a playoff spot in 2007. Augsburg will be looking to qualify for the MIAC playoffs for the fourth consecutive season. The 2007 Auggies will feature a strong defense led by junior goalkeeper Maggie DeGroot.

Gustavus will be looking to improve upon its sixth place finish in last year's conference standings. The Gusties return their leading scorer from a year ago, senior forward Jenna Iaizo, to lead the attack. St. Olaf will rely on its strong defense as the 2007 season commences. This season the Oles will play a difficult non-conference schedule that includes four 2006 NCAA tournament qualifiers, including the 2006 NCAA champions Wheaton College.

Saint Mary's head coach, Chris Dembiec, will be looking to transition from coaching the men's program to coaching both the men's and women's programs. Dembiec's Cardinals will attempt to improve upon last season's 10-5-3 record. St. Catherine will look to junior Mikaelyn Llewellyn and senior Nicki Kielsa for leadership on the field in 2007. The Wildcats will also have a large group of first-year players to help them attempt a move up the conference standings.

Bethel returns eight starters and more players with varsity experience than at any time in program history. Offensively, the Royals will lean on junior Esther Sowles and senior Jessie Tschetter. Hamline and first-year head coach Ted Zingman look to mix veteran leadership with young enthusiasm as they look to turnaround last seasons 3-11-1 record. The Pipers will feature the one-two combo of seniors Ann Donner and Anna McMahon, both from Stillwater.

MIAC Preseason Coaches Poll: 1. Macalester, 2. Carleton, 3. Saint Benedict, 4. Concordia, 5. St. Thomas, 6. Augsburg, 7. Gustavus, 8. St. Olaf, 9. Saint Mary's, 10. St. Catherine, 11. Bethel, 12. Hamline.

2007 MIAC Playoff Dates: Semifinals (Tuesday, October 30), Finals (Saturday, November 3)

Augsburg

Coach: Mike Navarre

Career Record: 66-61-15 (8 seasons)

2006 Finish: 4th (7-3-1 MIAC, 10-6-2 overall)

Augsburg Players to Watch
Maggie DeGroot (GK, Jr., Waukesha, Wis./West)
Felicia Faison (D, Jr., Minneapolis, Minn./South)
Whitney Holman (F, So., New Hope, Minn./Robbinsdale Armstrong)
Angie Neuhaus (MF/F, Sr., Minneapolis, Minn./Southwest)
Kristi Castelic (D, So., De Pere, Wis./West De Pere)
Jackie Keller (D/MF, Sr., Traverse City, Mich./Traverse City West)

Augsburg Season Preview

Over the past decade, the Augsburg College women's soccer team has evolved into one of the best teams in the Midwest. A team that was 1-15 back in 1998 is now a consistent contender for the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference title. Since 2002, the Auggies have produced four double-digit win seasons (50-27-13 over the last five seasons) and have reached the MIAC postseason playoffs the last three seasons in a row. Now, the goal for head coach Mike Navarre's Auggies is to take the next step -- to win the MIAC championship.

"As I've told the team, what we play for when we play is to win the MIAC," said Navarre, entering his ninth season at Augsburg. "Why we play is for each other, for the individual and collective growth, and expansion of human potential that results from being in our program."

While Augsburg lost five seniors to graduation from a team that went 10-6-2 overall and 7-3-1 in MIAC play (the best conference record in school history), the Auggies return 14 letterwinners and seven starters, and also have a solid class of newcomers that bring confidence to the team's dreams of reaching the postseason for the fourth straight year.

"We've created a culture of success," Navarre said. "We've established ourselves as one of the best programs in the MIAC and in the region. Our players understand the work that it takes to be successful at our level. The thing that I'm the most proud of is that our players genuinely play for each other. I think that the relationships that get developed have a transformative effect on how they play; they engender a sense of will that enables their success."

One of the most important elements in Augsburg's success in recent years has been its defense. Last season, the Auggies allowed just 12 goals, a total tied for second-lowest in the MIAC in overall play, and its seven goals allowed in 11 league games was fourth-lowest in the conference.

A key to the defensive success has been the play of goalkeeper Maggie DeGroot (Jr., Waukesha, Wis./Waukesha West HS), who set a single-season school record with 10 shutouts, including six straight to start the season. Her 0.65 career goals-against-average and .625 career winning percentage (18-9-9) are both currently the best in school history. She has earned All-MIAC honorable-mention honors the last two seasons.

"Maggie is one of the best goalkeepers in the country, and she keeps improving," Navarre said. "We pride ourselves on our ability to shut people down. It starts with all 11 players on the field having significant defensive responsibilities."

DeGroot, who has played every minute in goal for the Auggies the last two seasons, will be backed up this year by Jenny Kieffaber (Fr., Lakeville, Minn./Burnsville HS), an all-conference honorable mention selection in her high school days and a Minnesota Premier League champion for the Eagan Soccer Club.

Despite losing two four-year starters, 2006 All-MIAC selections Shannon Olson and Aili Brom-Palkowski, to graduation, the Auggie defense should still be solid. Outside back Felicia Faison (Jr., Minneapolis, Minn./South HS), a two-year starter, earned All-MIAC honorable-mention honors last year, and has developed a reputation as one of the top marking backs in the conference, Navarre said. Kristi Castelic (So., De Pere, Wis./West De Pere HS) started last season on the defense and will also return.

The center back spot could be filled by Gina Liddell-Westefeld (Fr., Iowa City, Iowa), who earned all-state honorable-mention honors in her Iowa high school career. Returners Erin Gave (Sr., Cambridge, Minn./Cambridge-Isanti HS) and Becky Solheim (So., Waconia, Minn.) will also contend for time on the defense, along with newcomer Emily Sell (Fr., White Bear Lake, Minn.).

Jackie Keller (Sr., Traverse City, Mich./Traverse City West HS), a three-year starter in the midfield, may move to the stopper spot on defense to expand on the backfield's overall experience, Navarre noted.

The Auggie midfield is anchored by a solid corps of seniors. In addition to Keller, Angie Neuhaus (Sr., Minneapolis, Minn./Southwest HS) is a returning starter who scored four goals last season. Mitra Rahimi (Sr., Eden Prairie, Minn.) and Noreen Hogan (Sr., Moline, Ill./Alleman HS) played significant minutes last season in the midfield and add to the overall strength of the position.

Kelsey Watsabaugh (Jr., Eden Prairie, Minn./Hopkins HS) started all 18 games last year as an outside midfielder and will be continued to be counted on in that role. Katie Edelen (So., Madison, Wis./Edgewood HS) also returns as a contender for time at midfield.

Several newcomers with solid credentials will also contend for midfield duties. Katie Jacobson (Fr., St. Cloud, Minn./Apollo HS) was a five-time high school all-conference selection, while Kate Woolever (Fr., Erhard, Minn./Pelican Rapids HS) was an all-conference selection as well. Samantha Thompson (Fr., White Bear Lake, Minn.) started on a strong White Bear Lake club team.

Up front, the Auggies will have to find replacements for two of the top goal-scorers in school history -- forwards Emily Anderson and Becky Lewis -- and returners Whitney Holman (So., New Hope, Minn./Robbinsdale Armstrong HS) and Katie Medd (Jr., Mankato, Minn./East HS) will be the top candidates to fill the positions. Holman, a wing midfielder last season, scored four goals and made a tremendous impact with her speed on the field. She will be moved to the forward position and join Medd, who scored a goal last season as a reserve.

Kelley Schreiber (Jr., Albert Lea, Minn.) also returns with forward experience, and will be joined by newcomer Lacey Hoover (Fr., Duluth, Minn./Central HS), a two-time all-conference player in her high school days.

Bethel

Coach: Pepe Jon Chavez

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

2006 Finish: Tied 9th (3-6-2 MIAC, 7-8-3 overall)

Bethel Players to Watch

Kristin Kishaba (Jr., Eau Claire, Wis.)

Jessie Tschetter (Sr., Sioux Falls, S.D./ O'Gorman)

Esther Sowles (Jr., Waconia, Minn./Mayer Lutheran)

Jane Stephens (Sr., Woodbury, Minn./New Life Academy)

Bethel Season Preview

In 2006 the Royals doubled there win total for the second consecutive season. This could be the year the Royals break out and become a consistently competitive program in the MIAC. The Royals return 8 starters and more players with varsity experience than at any time in program history. With a strong recruiting class, this looks to be one of there best seasons yet.

Leading the way offensively will be junior forward Esther Sowles (Waconia, Minn. / Mayer Lutheran). Last year she helped the Royals with 5 goals. Joining her in the attack will be senior Jessie Tschetter (Sioux Falls, S.D./ O'Gorman) and junior All Conference defender Kristin Kishaba (Eau Claire, Wis.).

With great leadership from Jane Stephens (Woodbury, Minn./New Life Academy) and talented junior goalkeeper Charli Sorensen (Park Ridge, Ill./ Maine South) as well as a group of talented freshman and transfers, the Royals appear prepared to challenge for a playoff berth in 2007.

Carleton

Coach: Keren Gudeman

Career Record: 12-5-3 (1 season)

2006 Finish: Tied 2nd (8-2-1 MIAC, 12-5-3 overall)

Carleton Players to Watch

Clare O'Connor (Sr., Madison, Wis./Memorial)

Dylan Welch (Sr., San Francisco/French-American International School)

Sophie Wood (Jr., Lake Bluff, Ill./Lake Forest)

Nicky Bloom (Jr., Evanston, Ill./EvanstonTownship)

Megan Molteni (Sr., Manitowoc, Wis./Lincoln)

Carleton Season Preview

The bar has been set high for the 2007 Carleton College women’s soccer team. A total of 18 players return from last year’s squad that recorded the best season in school history.

Carleton went 12-5-3 a year ago, including a victory that not only snapped Macalester College’s 43-game unbeaten streak, but also earned the Knights their first-ever playoff berth. The squad advanced to the championship game before falling on penalty kicks.

Keren Gudeman, the 2006 MIAC Coach of the Year, enters her second season at the helm and enjoys the benefit of returning her top 10 scorers from last year’s squad. That group includes five All-MIAC selections. Clare O’Connor (Sr./Fwd./Madison, Wis./Memorial), Dylan Welch (Sr./Mid./San Francisco/French-American International School), and Sophie Wood (Jr./Def./Lake Bluff, Ill./Lake Forest) were first-team picks. Additionally, Nicky Bloom (Jr./Evanston, Ill./Evanston Township) and Megan Molteni (Sr./Manitowoc, Wis./Lincoln), received All-MIAC honorable mention.

The Knights proved to be the toughest defense to crack in the MIAC last year, allowing only nine goals in 20 contests. Carleton will once again enjoy the luxury of having Yusi He (So./GK/South Pasadena, Calif./South Pasadena) return in net. Last season she recorded a MIAC-best 12 shutouts.

Concordia
Coach: Dan Weiler
Career Record: 56-35-6 (5 seasons)

2006 Finish: 1st (8-1-2 MIAC, 12-6-3 overall)

Concordia Players to Watch
Rachel Lewis (Sr., F, Lakeville, Minn.)
Andi Purcell (Sr., D, Northfield, Minn.)
Britt Reiersgord (Jr., GK, Edina, Minn.)

Concordia Season Preview

The stage is empty. The seats have all been cleared. The last fans have made their way out the gate and the lights have gone to black. One of the greatest shows from last year's Cobber athletic season has finally been put to rest. The 2006 Concordia women's soccer team brought its fans to their feet and played through several encores as they claimed the program's first-ever MIAC regular season and playoff championships. The team also got a taste of the NCAA Tournament by securing a spot in the national playoffs for the first time.

The 2007 season is just around the corner and fans will be wondering if the Cobbers were just a one-hit wonder or will they have the staying power to pack stadiums once more with their exciting style of play. Will the team find replacements to their lead players from last year, including two-time MIAC MVP Morgan Bain, or will they just turn into another cover band trying to recapture the glory of days gone by.

Concordia head coach Dan Weiler has brought in a bumper crop of freshmen to make sure there will be no letdown in 2007. That, coupled with the fact that CC has another very talented senior class, should have the Cobbers playing sweet music come late October.

Gone are Bain and MIAC All-Conference performers Jill Fancher, Suzy Grabko, Miriam Lombardozzi, Betsy Olesen and Amy Ravenhorst, but in their place are players who have been patiently waiting in the wings to take their place on center stage.

The hardest task for Weiler will be to find that "go to" scorer – the role that Bain played so well for four straight seasons. The most logical player to step into that spot will be senior Rachel Lewis (Lakeville, Minn.). Lewis was third on the team in scoring in 2006 with five goals and one assist for 11 points. She has the ability to create space in the penalty box and can finish when given the chance.

In 2007, Cobber women's soccer fans might have the chance to cheer for a slightly different style of play. Gone might be the quick counterattack and the dangerous offensive outburst. In its place might be a squad that relies on shutting down the other team's offense and then patiently waits for an opening to come away with the game winner.

The defense will be one of the most intact parts of the Cobber team in 2007. Returning for another season are goalie Britt Reiersgord (Jr., Edina, Minn.) and defenders Andi Purcell (Sr., Northfield, Minn.) and Chelsea McLaughlan (Jr., Blackfoot, Idaho). The trio helped the Cobbers keep the clamps on the rest of the MIAC and were one of the top-rated units in the league. Reiersgord tied for the best goals against average in the conference, while Purcell was one of the top "shut down" defenders in the MIAC. McLaughlan has had two years to grow into her spot as the team's premiere central defender and her experience and skill will make it even tougher for teams to break down CC this season.

The midfield might pose the biggest question for Weiler. In the middle of the field, Darcy Swagger (Sr., Burnsville, Minn./Apple Valley) returns as a two-year starter. She will have to assume the role of the No.1 playmaker – a role left by the graduation of Lombardozzi. Joining Swagger in the middle of the park will be junior Maia Johnson (Northfield, Minn.). Johnson is a perfect compliment to any player in the center midfield and has a game suited for the tough MIAC.

The two wing midfield spots will be open with the loss of Grabko and Ravenhorst. Look for several returning players and freshmen to fight for those starting spots.

Up front, Lewis will be joined by sophomore Megan Rice (Kalispell, Mont., Flathead HS). Rice was fifth on the team in scoring last season with seven points and has the speed to break defenses down on the counterattack.

If Weiler can find a rhythm for the Cobbers to carry early in the season, then come October the team might be on their way to their fifth straight conference tournament and another sold out show waiting for the heart- stopping encore.

For more on Cobber women's soccer go to: www.cord.edu/dept/sports/fall/ws/index.php

Gustavus

Coach: Mike Stehlik

Career Record: 190-88-23 (17 seasons)

2006 Finish: 6th (5-4-2 MIAC, 8-8-2 overall)

Gustavus Players to Watch

Jenna Iaizo (Sr., Forward, White Bear Lake, Minn.)

Rachel Iblings (So., Defender, Plymouth, Minn./Armstrong)

Callie Christensen (Jr. Midfielder, Bloomington, Minn./Jefferson)

Ashley Ohlson (So., Goalkeeper, Anchorage, Alaska/Diamond)

Gustavus Season Preview

The Gustavus Adolphus College women’s soccer team returns six starters and 14 letterwinners from a team that finished with a mark of 8-8-2 overall, and 5-4-2 (sixth) in the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) last season. Coach Mike Stehlik will build the 2007 squad around senior forward Jenna Iaizzo (White Bear Lake), the team’s leading returning scorer, and defender Rachel Iblings (sophomore, Plymouth, Minn./Armstrong). Both were honorable mention all-conference performers last season.

Iaizzo, a two-year starter at forward, will lead the team’s attack. She tallied four goals and two assists for ten points in 18 games a year ago. At six-feet tall, Iaizzo is a big target for the Gusties who will look to play the ball to her in the air. In the midfield, Coach Stehlik welcomes back two starters including junior Callie Christensen (Bloomington, Minn./Jefferson) and sophomore Becca Hagen (Minneapolis, Minn./South). Defensively, the team will be led by sophomore defenders Rachel Iblings and Alison Dittmer (Plymouth, Minn./Osseo), and sophomore goalkeeper Ashley Ohlson (Anchorage, Alaska/Diamond).

The Gusties will open the season in Iowa with matches at Simpson and Grinnell on August 31 and September 1 before returning home to face UW-Stevens Point on Friday, September 7. Coach Mike Stehlik’s squad will open MIAC play at St. Olaf on Wednesday, September 12.

Hamline
Coach: Ted Zingman
Career Record: 0-0-0 (1st season)

2006 Finish: 12th (1-10-0 MIAC, 3-11-1 overall)

Hamline Players to Watch
Ann Donner (Sr., F/M, Stillwater, Minn./Stillwater)
Anna McMahon (Sr., M, Stilwater, Minn./Stillwater)
Allyce Mohs (Jr., D, Chaska, Minn./Chaska)
Kim Magill (Jr., M, Stillwater, Minn./Stillwater)
Jamie Kelly (Fy., M/D/F, White Bear Lake, Minn./White Bear Lake)
Emily Jacobson (Fy., D, Rochester, Minn./Rochester Century)

Hamline Season Preview

First-year head coach Ted Zingman heads into the 2007 season hoping to successfully mix veteran leadership with young enthusiasm in order to turn around a 3-11-1 record from 2006.

Zingman's squad returns just three seniors and three juniors this year, and he will be looking to them for on- and off-field leadership to help ten first-year Pipers make the transition to soccer in the MIAC. "We are returning a core of players who saw a lot of playing time in 2006, and we also have several talented incoming players who will be able to contribute early on," said Zingman.

"When a team heads into a season with this much youth, it's important to balance that with players who have proven that they know what it takes to make it through an entire season at this level," said Zingman. "Fortunately, we have several student-athletes coming back who can provide that leadership."

Seniors Ann Donner (Stillwater, Minn.) and Anna McMahon (Stillwater, Minn.); junior Kim Magill (Stillwater, Minn.); and sophomores Lindsey Anderson (Cottage Grove, Minn.), Ana Panone (St. Paul, Minn.) and Kelly Kunowski (Milwaukee, Wis.) all started 13 or more games for the Pipers in 2006.

Donner and McMahon return for their fourth and final season, already holding several school records for scoring. Donner enters 2007 as Hamline's all-time leader in goals in a game (five versus Milwaukee School of Engineering in 2006), in a season (nine in 2005) and in a career (20 during the 2004-2006 seasons). McMahon follows that up by holding the spot at the top of all three categories for assists (in a game – three versus Northwestern in 2005, in a season – seven in 2005, and in her career – 11 during the 2004-2006 seasons).

The biggest question mark for Hamline this season may come in goal, as the Pipers do not return any of their keepers from the 2006 campaign. Zingman will be relying on two first-year players, Katherine Gardner (Minneapolis, Minn.) and Laura Triplett (White Bear Lake, Minn.), to compete for the starting role. Teams usually hope to have some experience returning in front of the net, but Zingman believes his freshman keepers will rise to the challenge. "This situation gives Katie and Laura an opportunity to make an impact in their first season," said Zingman. "They should be able to rely on each other for support as they feel out the position and figure out what it takes to excel at the collegiate level."

In front of the goal, the Pipers need to fill holes left by the losses of defenders Christine Feely (Stillwater, Minn.) and Katie Laase (Culver City, Calif.). Junior defender Allyce Mohs (Chaska, Minn.) looks to compete for a starting role in order to bring more of that veteran experience onto the field. She may be joined by newcomer Emily Jacobson (Rochester, Minn.), who will also be fighting for a starting position on defense to help her classmates in goal. "Emily is a strong defender with a solid club soccer background, and we hope to see her contribute from the start," said Zingman.

Offensively, Zingman also anticipates first-year players Jamie Kelly (White Bear Lake, Minn.) and Allison Brisson (White Bear Lake, Minn.) will make an impression on opponents. Kelly, a strong central player, will be competing for significant playing time, as will Brisson, to whom Zingman will look for additional scoring opportunities.

Of the start of the season, Zingman notes that "the returning players have demonstrated a great work ethic throughout the off-season. They have prepared themselves to carry this team to a higher level." As the season progresses, Zingman hopes to see his young Pipers learn from each game, and take it forward with them. "We are willing to learn as we go during the season, and that combination of youth and excitement for the game will help us as we move forward."

Macalester

Coach: John Leaney

Career Record: 266-59-28 (17 seasons)

2006 Finish: Tied 2nd (7-1-3 MIAC, 13-3-5 overall)

Macalester Players to Watch

Grace King (Jr., F, Northampton, Mass.)

Anne Kintop (Sr., MF, Minneapolis, Minn./South)

Amy Hutchinson (Jr., MF, Minneapolis, Minn./South)

Jenny Lee (Jr., GK, Circle Pines, Minn./Centennial)

Meghan Garrity (Sr., MF, Walled Lake, Mich./Marian)

Liz Hormann (Sr., D, Salem, Ore./South Salem)

Macalester Season Preview

Macalester's 43-game MIAC unbeaten streak was snapped late in the year by Carleton as the Scots were denied a third straight conference crown, settling for second place with a 7-1-3 slate. The Scots made their fourth straight NCAA Division III playoff appearance, falling in the second round to eventual national champion Wheaton (Ill.) to finish at 13-3-5.

Even with the loss to graduation of three-time All-America forward Annie Borton, a 52-goal scorer in her career at Mac, the Scots look once again to be among the prime contenders for the 2007 MIAC championship. They've finished on top of the standings in seven of the past 10 seasons.

Macalester has always been strong defensively, having yielded just 22 goals in conference play over the previous 10 seasons. The Scots look to be very healthy at the goalkeeper position where third-team all-region goalkeeper Jenny Lee (Jr., Circle Pines, Minn. / Centennial) returns. Lee will be supported by steady veteran defenders Liz Hormann (Jr., Salem, Ore. / South Salem) and Maddie Mette (So., Burnsville, Minn.), who was a regular starter as a frosh.

With the departure of Borton, opposing defenses will need to concentrate on the speedy Grace King (Jr., Northampton, Mass.). King was the MIAC co-leader in goals netted last season and in two years at Macalester has produced 19 goals and 10 assists. King received first team all-conference and All-Central region honors.

Former high school teammates Anne Kintop (Sr., Minneapolis, Minn. / South) and Amy Hutchinson (Sr., Minneapolis, Minn. / South) are the captains and are joined by Meghan Garrity (Sr., Walled Lake, Mich. / Marian) to give the Scots a very experienced midfield. The emergence of Maddy Cochrane (So, Grand Marais, Minn. / CookCounty) and Maggie Yates (So, Spokane, Wash. / Lewis & Clark), should give Macalester plenty of depth in this area. Rose Betzler (So., Northfield, Minn.) was one of the MIAC's top newcomers last year and finished with six goals and four assists.

"In previous years we have lacked the depth to compete against the top teams in the playoffs," reports Coach Leaney. "I feel we now have sufficient cover at every position to be able to play back-to-back games at tournament time and have enough players to rest anybody when needed.

See the complete Macalester season outlook at:

http://www.macalester.edu/athletics/wsoccer/news/07_0723_season_outlook.html

Saint Benedict

Coach: Kate McNeil

Career Record: 45-20-7 (4 seasons)

2006 Finish: 5th (7-4-0 MIAC, 10-6-1 overall)

Saint Benedict Players to Watch

Adrienne Racek (Sr., Forward)

Tina Lisk (Jr., Forward)

Allyson Draxler (Jr., Forward/Midfielder)

Erin Flynn (Jr., Defender)

Rachel Loftus (Jr., Defender)

Alison Tourville (So., Midfielder/Forward)

Saint Benedict Season Preview

The College of Saint Benedict soccer team hits the field this fall with a team loaded with experience and ready to make its return to the top tier of the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference.

The Blazers, who finished 10-6-1 overall last season, return 18 athletes making them one of few teams in the MIAC that possess a high number of returning athletes. Of the 18 returners, three are seniors and 11 are juniors making this one of the most experienced Blazer soccer team in the past three years.

Senior captains Adrienne Racek, Jeannie Stubenvoll and Annie Clintsman are at the top of the list of players who would enjoy restoring Saint Benedict's place as one of the elite soccer teams in the MIAC.

Racek is No. 2 on the active team in career points with 18 and is coming off a season in which she scored four goals, three of which were game-winning goals.

Stubenvoll and Clintsman will anchor the Blazer midfield striving to win possession battles and make good passes to create scoring opportunities.

Two juniors – All-MIAC honorable mention Tina Lisk, All-MIAC Allyson Draxler – and sophomore All-MIAC honorable mention Alison Tourville combine to form one of the best offensive attacks in the MIAC. They combined for 13 goals and 36 points in 2006.

CSB ranked fifth in goals allowed in the MIAC last season with an average of 0.82 goals allowed, which is in large part due to the outstanding play of the Saint Benedict defensive crew that has gained valuable experience over the past two seasons.

Juniors Rachel Loftus, Jenny Murray, All-MIAC honorable mention co-captain Erin Flynn, Sam Vanderlinde and sophomore Paige Samuelson have caused many teams and goal-hungry players to go home frustrated over the past two seasons and hope to continue their dominance this fall.

Sophomore Shannon Strohm will be between the posts as the Blazers' No. 1 goalkeeper and is backed up by first year Maija Schmelzer (Rochester, Minn.). Strohm compiled a 4-2-1 record and collected two shutouts in 2006. Schmelzer, an All-Big Nine Conference selection at JohnMarshallHigh School, gives the Blazers a capable backup who has the ability to stop breakaways.

Joining Schmelzer as newcomers on the Blazer soccer team are sophomore Concordia-Moorhead transfer Emily Willaert (North Mankato, Minn.) and first years Erica Nelson (White Bear Lake, Minn.), Jillian Daleiden (Blaine, Minn.), Chelsi Larson (Minnesota City, Minn.) and Jenny Birkhofer (Albert Lea, Minn.).

Saint Benedict will rely on strong veteran leadership and gutsy defensive play to achieve their goal to return to the playoffs this fall.

St. Catherine

Coach: Steven Bellis

Career Record: 2-13-1 (1 season)

2006 Finish: 11th (1-9-1 MIAC, 2-13-1 overall)

St. Catherine Players to Watch

Mikaelyn Llewellyn (Jr., MF, Waukee, Iowa/Waukee)

Nicki Kielsa (Sr., D, North St. Paul, Minn./North St. Paul)

Gina Thorwick (Fy., C, Maplewood, Minn./Roseville)

Megan Dean (Fy, MF, Pomona, Calif./San Dimas)

St. Catherine Season Preview

Wildcat head coach Steve Bellis begins his second season at the helm of the Wildcat soccer program with a great deal of optimism. Coach Bellis will look to a pair of key returners to lead the Wildcats during their 2007 campaign. In addition to some key returners, coach Bellis welcomes a large class of first-year players that will be looked at to contribute this season. "During the offseason our athletes worked on improving their general strength and fitness, becoming stronger as a group of players who want to meet the program's goals and objectives," stated Bellis. "I believe this offseason work will pay lasting dividends as we move through the season," added Bellis.

One of the returners who coach Bellis expects to help lead the Wildcats is Mikaelyn Llewellyn (Jr., Waukee, IA). Llewellyn played well throughout her sophomore season and is expected to be a part of any Wildcat success this season. "Mikaelyn is a strong center midfielder, she is very creative and will be one of our leaders on and off the field," stated Bellis.

In addition to Llewellyn Bellis will look to Nicki Kielsa (Sr., North St. Paul, Minn.) to lead a young Wildcat team on defense. "Nicki has been a leader throughout her career at St. Kate's and I am looking for her to have a great senior season," stated Bellis. "She is very strong and will be the heart of our defense this season," added Bellis.

First-year players looking to make a big contribution this season include, Gina Thorwick (Fy, C, Maplewood, Minn./Roseville) and Megan Dean (Fy, MF, Pomona, Calif./San Dimas). Thorwick comes to St. Kate's after a very successful career at Roseville High School. "Gina knows the game very well, she is athletic and we expect her to be a big part of our offensive punch this season," stated Bellis. "Megan is a very versatile player and has a good understanding of the game and I think she will step right in and make a positive impact," added Bellis.

"We are all very excited about the upcoming season and I think we will make huge strides as a program as we strive for excellence and relish the challenges ahead in 2007."

Saint Mary's

Coach: Chris Dembiec
Career Record: 0-0-0 (1st season)

2006 Finish: Tied 7th (3-5-3 MIAC, 10-5-3 overall)

Saint Mary's Players to Watch
Lisa Tlougan (Sr., 5-8, For., Rochester, Minn.)
Keirra Metcalfe (So., 5-7, Mid., Pickering, Ontario)
Melisa Entinger (So., 5-7, Mid., Mound, Minn.)

Saint Mary's Season Preview

A year ago, Chris Dembiec had less than a month to prepare for his first-ever collegiate coaching position, when he replaced Eric Luzzi in late July as the Saint Mary's University men's soccer coach.

This year was supposed to be a far less hectic preseason for the Cardinal men's coach, until coach Tony Guinn stepped down as the Cardinals' head women's soccer coach in early August.

Dembiec was named as Guinn's successor, making him the head coach of both the men's and women's programs, and transforming his "fall frolic" into a second straight "fall frenzy."

"There is no replacing Coach Guinn," said Dembiec. "My goal for this first year is to realize (Guinn's) goals for this team to the best of my ability. I am so excited to coach such fine players. I know together we can make this a great experience."

Fortunately for Dembiec, Guinn didn't leave the cupboard bare when he left.

"This team is loaded with talent," said Dembiec, who inherits a team that has won 30 games over the past three seasons, including a 10-5-3 mark a year ago. "Everything is in place for this team to do great things this season. My biggest challenge early on is just going to be learning who all the players are."

That, and figuring out how to replace two-time All-Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference goalkeeper Jennifer Johnson.

"We've got two huge holes that we need to fill," said Dembiec, noting that, along with Johnson, MIAC honorable-mention selection Kelli Krmpotich, the Cardinals' starting stopper the last four years, also graduated. "It's going to be tough to replace those two, but with the depth and athleticism we have, I have a feeling we're going to be able to find someone to step up and fill their shoes."

For a complete SMU women's soccer preview: <http://www.saintmaryssports.com/News/wsoc/2007/8/9/wspreview8807.asp?path=wsoc>

St. Olaf

Coach: Jeremy Driver

Career Record: 9-7-2 (1 season)

2006 Finish: Tied 9th (3-6-2 MIAC, 9-7-2 overall)

St. Olaf Players to Watch

Jenny Kallas (Jr., Minneapolis)

Jess Magnuson (Jr., Rochdale, Mass.)

Karen Thiebes (Sr., Medford, Ore.)

Jenny Wetzig (Sr., Eden Prairie, MN)

Kira Price (Palo Alto, Calif.)

Christina Mills (Soph., White Bear Lake, Minn)

St. Olaf Season Preview

The St. Olaf women's soccer team begins the 2007 campaign building around a 9-7-2 record in 2006 under then first-year Head Coach Jeremy Driver.

To make a move in the MIAC, Driver knows the Oles must maintain their strong defensive play that was a mainstay last season. St. Olaf held opponents to two goals or less in 17-of-18 games in 2006 (0.97 goals against average) and recorded six shutouts.

"I expect that we will continue our strong team defending," said Driver.

Last fall, St. Olaf went 6-1-0 in a tough non-conference schedule that included wins over UW-Stout, UW-Eau Claire, Wartburg College, UW-Oshkosh, and UW-River Falls. In those seven non-league games St. Olaf outscored its opponents 13-5. In MIAC contests, the Oles managed just six goals.

The Oles' offense will be a focus in camp. "We will work hard during preseason to generate more scoring opportunities and, ultimately, more goal production as a team."

Driver also hopes to get improved play as a result of tough competition. The Oles have four 2006 NCAA tournament qualifiers and the 2006 NCAA champions (Wheaton College) that will aid in preparation for the extremely competitive MIAC season. "We will work towards achieving our goal to qualify for the MIAC playoffs and pursue a bid to the NCAA tournament," said Driver.

St. Olaf has three returning seniors and eleven returning players that have extensive playing experience. "We should be more athletic and have more depth in 2007," Driver said. "I am also excited about the immediate impact and contributions that our first year players will be able to make this season."

The Oles will miss the contributions of graduates Kelsey Watt and Katie Bierlein who accounted for 11 goals in 2006. Watt was a four-time All-MIAC honoree at forward and currently holds the school record for career goals scored. Bierlein led the team with six goals and was team MVP last fall. She was also a All-MIAC honorable mention selection at midfield.

"I don't think it is fair to expect one or two players to be responsible for filling the roles that our seniors played for us last year. Every player on our team needs to take on a little extra responsibility and we should be fine," said Driver.

Returning starter Jenny Kallas (Jr., Minneapolis) was third on the team in shots last season and will continue to create chances. After a season lost to injury, Jess Magnuson (Jr., Rochdale, Mass.) is returning to the lineup and should add scoring punch after tallying three goals and an assist as a first year.

Co-captains Karen Thiebes (Sr., Medford, Ore.) and Jenny Wetzig (Sr., Eden Prairie, MN) will anchor the midfield. The Oles also welcome back two-year starter senior Kira Price (Palo Alto, Calif.) from studying abroad in 2006.

In addition, juniors Aila Crumley (Plymouth, Minn.) and Kristin Kooman (Hopkins, Minn.) will be looked to expand their impact in the midfield from last season.

The backline will be anchored by All-MIAC honorable mention center back Christina Mills (Soph., White Bear Lake, Minn.). The young, but experienced rest of the backfield, will be helped by Allison Mills (Soph., White Bear Lake, Minn.) and Liz Brustad (Soph., Edina, Minn.). Both were defensive starters in 2006.

Calli Olson (Soph., Eagan, Minn.) is the only returning goalkeeper in the program. She will look to add more game experience to her resume in 2007. The Oles also have two first year keepers that will provide depth and compete for opportunities with Olson.

St. Thomas

Coach: Sheila McGill

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

2006 Finish: Tied 7th (4-6-1 MIAC, 7-9-2 overall)

St. Thomas Players to Watch

Stephanie Paasch (Jr., D)

Courtney Walior (Jr., D)

Abie Krause (Jr., MF)

St. Thomas Season Preview

St. Thomas was picked to place fifth in the 12-team MIAC women's soccer race. First-year head coach Sheila McGill has 11 returning players from a 2006 team which posted a 7-9-2 record, led by junior Stephanie Paasch, an All-MIAC defender.

McGill, a former MIAC player at St. Mary's from 1993-97, has been an assistant coach at St. Catherine the last four seasons. Her 10-year local coaching resume also includes four seasons as an assistant coach at Cretin-Derham Hall (1999-2002); five seasons as head coach in White Bear Lake's youth soccer program, and eight seasons coaching local teams in the Olympic Development Program.

The Toms graduated top scorers Sarah Balgord and Jade Crepps. Balgord, an International Business major with a 3.83 gpa, led the team with seven goals and seven assists and finished with 60 career points (24 goals, 12 assists). Crepps made MIAC honorable mention for the third consecutive season. She had four goals and three assists and finished with 41 points (15 goals, 11 assists) in four seasons.

Paasch was an honorable mention All-MIAC honoree as a freshman in 2005. She had a goal and two assists and started all 18 games in 2006, and has three goals and four assists in 34 career games. Paasch is one of three juniors back who started each of the last two seasons. She's joined by MF Abie Krause and defender Courtney Walior.

McGill is looking to tighten up the Tommie defense, which last year surrendered three or more goals in eight of the nine losses. Freshman Amanda Domeier of Park Cottage Grove and senior Kaisa Erickson will handle goalkeeper duties. Erickson has played in 25 games on her career and had five solo and one combined shutout in 2006.

Domeier is among 11 freshmen on the roster. Eight newcomers were all-conference honorees in high school -- forward-midfielders Hannah Gikling of Cretin-Derham Hall, Maggie Lopac of Stillwater; Hannah Baker of Anoka, Kaitlin Dennis of DePere, Wis., Regina Horak of Brookfield, Wis., and Lexie Fischer of Buffalo; and defenders Rachel Thompson of Henry Sibley and Caitlin Carrigan of Green Bay.

UST opens its season with games Aug. 31 and Sept. 1 in Bloomington, Ill., vs. Illinois Wesleyan and Elmhurst (Ill.). UST then plays 10 of its next 13 games at home. The Toms' other non-conference games will come against WIAC teams Stevens Point, Whitewater, LaCrosse and Eau Claire.