

2009 MIAC Women's Soccer Season Preview

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St. Paul, Minn. – If the 2009 Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) Women's Soccer Preseason Coaches' Poll is any indication of how the season will shape up, one thing is for certain, every game will be a tough challenge. Carleton narrowly edged out St. Thomas for the top spot in the poll, but both teams received six first place votes. The next ten positions were also extremely close and, if the ranking hold true, should lead to great parity throughout the season. Concordia, Macalester, and St. Olaf rounded out the top five in the poll.

Carleton, ranked No. 21 in the NSCAA Preseason National Poll, won the 2008 MIAC Playoffs and become only the fourth MIAC team ever to advance to the NCAA Quarterfinals. Eight starters return to the Knights' line-up, including captains Emma Dobbins and Merritt Swain.

St. Thomas returns a deep team from a 2008 squad that finished 14-1-5 and won the MIAC Regular Season title. 2008 MIAC Player of the Year Erin Sprangers returns for the Tommies along with All-Region forward Kirsten Moran and midfielder Alison True.

Concordia will look to have a strong regular season and make their sixth consecutive MIAC Playoff Title game in November. The Cobbers feature a trio of juniors in Abby Habein, Sam Johnson, and Sue Obermiller who were named All-Region last year.

Macalester has made the MIAC Playoffs every year since the post-season format began in 2003 and will figure into the playoff race again in 2009. The Scots return eight starters from a team which ranked second in the league in goals allowed, including All-MIAC defender Maddie Mette.

The prospect of ten starters returning to the St. Olaf line-up has the Oles optimistic for the 2009 season. The top four scorers from last year all return for the Oles and all four will only be sophomores in 2009. Two-time All-MIAC junior midfielder K.C. Beed will again be a player to watch for St. Olaf.

Augsburg will feature a young squad in 2009, but the Auggies will be talented with seven returning starters and 13 returning letterwinners. Senior starters Whitney Holman, Kristi Castelic, and Gaby Hamerlinck return to lead a defense that allowed only 12 goals in 2008.

Despite finishing in a four-way tie for third place, Saint Benedict did not qualify for the MIAC Playoffs in 2008. First-year head coach Steve Kimble and seniors Allison Tourville and Shannon Strohm will look to lead the Blazers back to the playoffs.

St. Catherine has shown steady improvement over the past three seasons and with eight starters returning, except the Wildcats to continue improving. A junior class of Brittni Deeb, Kayla Engel, Kim Engel, Kelsey Nistler, and Gina Throwick are experienced and ready to lead St. Catherine.

Gustavus will look to steady improvement of a young team in hopes of moving up the conference ladder. Honorable Mention All-Conference senior defenders Alison Dittmer and Rachel Iblings lead a stifling Gustie defense.

Bethel experienced the best season in program history in 2008, but the Royals will need to fill the roles of six graduated seniors in order to improve upon last season. Sophomores Sophie Christiansen and Brittany Griffore and junior Krista Polding will lead the Bethel offensive attack in 2009.

The 2009 Hamline roster will feature numerous new names to the program. Seniors Haley Leverington, Kelly Kunowski, and Lizzie Steinert will be the leaders of a Piper squad that will look to make a move up in the conference in 2009.

Head Coach Eric Zimmerman expects improve play of his Saint Mary's team during his second season at the helm of the program. The Cardinals' return their top defensive player in Mariana Sanchez and top offensive threat in Amy Sibik.

2009 MIAC Preseason Coaches' Poll

Coaches voted for every team in the conference except their own team. Points were assigned for each vote (1 for first, 2 for second, etc.) Teams are ranked in order of lowest point total to highest with first place votes shown in parentheses.

1. Carleton (6)
2. St. Thomas (6)
3. Concordia
4. Macalester
5. St. Olaf
6. Augsburg
7. Saint Benedict
8. St. Catherine
9. Gustavus

- 10. Bethel
- 11. Hamline
- 12. Saint Mary's

2009 MIAC Playoff Dates: Semifinals (Tuesday, November 3), Finals (Saturday, November 7)

| [2009 MIAC Schedule](#) | [2008 MIAC Statistics](#) | [MIAC Recordbook](#) | [MIAC Archives](#)

Augsburg

Coach: Mike Navarre
Career Record: 85-72-22 (11 seasons)
2008 Finish: Tied 3rd (5-2-4 MIAC, 10-4-4 overall)

Augsburg Season Preview

There's no doubt about it. Augsburg College's women's soccer team will be young in 2009.

Fifteen of the 24 members of the squad in preseason camp are first-year students or sophomores, part of the largest recruiting class in head coach Mike Navarre's 11 seasons at Augsburg. Just four seniors are on the roster.

But don't confuse "inexperience" with "lack of talent."

Combined with seven returning starters and 13 letterwinners, the large recruiting class gives Navarre plenty of options for his team, in order to maintain Augsburg's position among the elite programs in the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference.

Augsburg's recent history of top-four finishes in the MIAC standings has enabled Navarre to attract top-flight talent, and the dozen recruits this year include an all-state honoree and eight players who earned all-conference honors in their high school days.

Augsburg is coming off of a 10-4-4 overall finish and 5-2-4 mark in MIAC play. The Auggies finished in a four-way tie for third place in the conference standings, but did not qualify for the four-team MIAC postseason playoffs due to tiebreaker criteria, ending a streak of four straight conference playoff appearances. Augsburg has finished with 10 or more wins in five of the last seven years.

The biggest question mark for Augsburg this season will be who will start in goal. The Auggies have to find a replacement for Maggie DeGroot, the team's starting goalkeeper the last four seasons and holder of every school career record. An all-region selection last year, DeGroot will remain in the program as a goalkeeper coach this season.

Newcomer Diana Bocklund (FY, Mahtomedi, Minn.), a starter on last season's Minnesota high school state championship team and a club state championship team, is one of the top candidates to fill the position, along with returning sophomores Taylor Becker (SO, Red Wing, Minn.) and Katie Flakne (SO, Burnsville, Minn./Holy Angels HS). Flakne appeared in part of one game last season.

While the Auggies' goalkeeper will be new, the team's defense will feature plenty of experience. Three starters are back -- All-MIAC honorable-mention and NSCAA Scholar All-Region honoree Whitney Holman (SR, New Hope, Minn./Robbinsdale Armstrong HS), Kristi Castelic (SR, De Pere, Wis./West De Pere HS) and Gaby Hamerlinck (SR, St. Paul, Minn./Highland Park HS). A versatile all-around player, Holman scored two goals with four assists last year, while Hamerlinck had a goal and an assist.

Augsburg had one of the top defenses in the MIAC last season, allowing just 12 goals -- second-lowest among MIAC teams in overall statistics -- with a conference-high 10 shutouts. The team's 0.63 goals-against-average ranked 31st among NCAA Division III teams nationally.

Replacing all-conference and all-region outside back Felicia Faison will also be a big challenge on the defensive side. Returners Gina Liddell-Westefeld (JR, Iowa City, Iowa) and Emily Sell (JR, White Bear Lake, Minn.) appeared in 14 games each last year, while Becky Solheim (SR, Waconia, Minn.) appeared in 10 games.

Several starters return to the Auggies' midfield and forward spots. In the midfield, starters Courtney Gamrath (SO, St. Michael, Minn./St. Michael-Albertville HS) and Lisa Weniger (JR, Eagan, Minn./Environmental Studies HS) are back. Gamrath scored a goal with three assists last season, while Weniger contributed a goal and two assists, both starting all 18 games.

Samantha Thompson (JR, White Bear Lake, Minn.) saw action in 11 games last season, while Katie Jacobson (SO, St. Cloud, Minn./Apollo HS) will return to compete for time after injuries sidelined her last season.

Up front, starter Lacey Hoover (JR, Duluth, Minn.) returns. A starter in 30 of 35 games in her career (eight goals), she had three goals and two assists last season. Newcomers Olivia Faison (FY, Minneapolis, Minn./South HS), Laurie Barger (FY, Monticello, Minn.) and Sorensen will also compete for time at the forward spot. Barger was a three-time all-conference selection and 2008 all-state honorable-mention honoree, while Faison earned all-city honors at Minneapolis South.

[Complete Augsburg Season Preview](#)

Bethel

Coach: Pepe Jon Chavez

Career Record: 16-15-5 (2 seasons)

2008 Finish: 10th (2-7-2 MIAC, 9-7-2 overall)

Bethel Season Preview

In 2008, the Bethel women's soccer program put together their best season in team history by finishing 9-7-2 overall, setting numerous individual and additional team records along the way. With the graduation of six seniors, all of whom played a significant amount of minutes last year, Coach Chavez will look to a number of underclassmen and newcomers to step up into leadership roles this season. While Bethel was led by a strong core of seniors last season, a pair of newcomers in Sophie Christiansen (So., Portland, Ore.) and Brittany Griffore (So., Maple Grove, Minn.) made an impact immediately as the two combined for 16 goals and 13 assists. The Royals are excited to once again put the pressure on opposing defenses, though Christiansen begins the season on the injured list. Krista Polding (Jr., Waconia, Minn.) also had a breakout year by scoring four goals and assisting on five others for 13 points, giving her 20 points in her two years thus far. Coach Chavez will also be looking for strong offensive support from Katelynn Hains (Sr., Prior Lake, Minn.) and Breanna Posey (Sr., Champlin, Minn.) as well as newcomers Kelsey Flaherty (Fr., Shoreview, Minn.), Anne Fazio (Fr., Holland, Mich.), and Brittany Flight (Fr., Mokena, Ill.). Jami Johnson Two of the biggest holes the Royals will have to fill are those left by the departures of Kristin Kishaba and Kylie Dirks, both four-year starters at defense. Kishaba earned All-MIAC recognition her sophomore year, and honorable mention her junior and senior years. Among the returning players looking to step up on defense are Kelci Schedler (Sr., Fon du Lac, Wis.) and Jami Johnson (Jr.,Fergus Falls, Minn.). They will be joined by Kelsey Holmberg (Fr., Cambridge, Minn.) and Ellen Potts (Fr., Fargo, N.D.) in the back as well as Carolyn Kishaba (Fr., Eau Claire, Wis.) in the middle. For the first time in four years, the position of goalkeeper is open. Charli Sorensen finished her career in 2008 with the most wins, shutouts, and saves of any goalkeeper before her at Bethel. Sorensen's efforts in front of the net garnered her All-MIAC recognition her senior year. Alyssa Riggs (Jr., Columbia Heights, Minn.) patrolled the posts as Sorensen's backup and did not allow a goal in 180-plus minutes last season. Newcomers Janel Pechacek and Abby Furlong (Fr., White Bear Lake, Minn.) will compete for the starting job with Riggs. Complete Bethel Season Preview

Carleton
Coach: Keren Gudeman
Career Record: 43-16-3 (3 seasons)
2008 Finish: 2nd (9-2-0 MIAC, 18-6-0 overall)

Carleton Season Preview

Last season saw the Knights elevate their play to a new level as the team tied for the most conference wins during league play, won the MIAC's post-season tournament, and earned a spot in the NCAA Championships.

Not content with simply making it to the national tournament for the first time, Carleton advanced all the way to the "Elite Eight," becoming only the fourth MIAC team ever to reach the national quarterfinals. The Knights finished the year with a school-record 18-6-0 mark, ranking No. 21 in the final national poll. Carleton was listed in the same spot in this year's pre-season rankings.

Gone from last year's squad are four graduated seniors, including all-region defender Sophie Wood and forward Nicky Bloom, the Knights' leading scorer from a year ago. Additionally, rising senior Mia Zutz (Middleton, Wis.), a two-time all-region pick in the midfield, is out with a knee injury.

That means the 2009 version of Carleton women's soccer brings back eight starters. Two of this year's captains, senior Emma Dobbins (Portland, Ore./Grant) and junior Merritt Swain (Mendota Heights, Minn./St. Paul Academy) were key starters last season and lead a deep group of returners.

Dobbins' communication and strong one-versus-one abilities from the back line coupled with Swain's poised play and distribution in the midfield provides Carleton with a pair of strong on-field leaders.

Although the high-impact play of Zutz, the third captain on the Knights roster, will be missed, she will provide key leadership from the sidelines.

Junior Kate Trennery (Rochester, Minn./Century) is back in net after posting 10 shutouts in her 15 starts a year ago. She ranked among NCAA leaders in goals against average and save percentage.

Joining Dobbins on Carleton's backline defense will once again be Leigh-Anne Borkowski (Jr./Elverta, Calif./Center) and Rachel Foran (So./River Forest, Ill./Oak Park River Forest). As a unit, the Knights surrendered only 0.62 goals per game last season, including five consecutive shutouts during Carleton's post-season run.

The midfield is filled with veterans. Joining Swain in controlling play will be junior Megan Milligan (Las Cruces, N.M.). Opponents will once again have to keep on eye on sophomores Abby Wills (Portland, Ore./St. Mary's)—a first team All-MIAC pick in 2008—and Lily VanderStaay (Bellingham, Wash.). Both stepped into the lineup as rookies and made immediate impacts.

Carleton also welcomes back another pair of dynamic sophomores atop the attack. Forward Cassie Burke (Sunfish Lake, Minn./Minnehaha Academy) and Nicole Tomita (Redwood City, Calif./Woodside) were second and third respectively in scoring on last year's squad. Burke's eighth goal of the campaign provided the difference in the Knights' 1-0 victory over No. 6 University of Puget Sound in the second round of the NCAA Championships. Tomita notched seven scores and received All-MIAC honorable mention.

Which newcomers will play key roles in 2009? Time will tell, but with seventeen first-year players entering the program this fall, head coach Keren Gudeman has plenty of options.

Since Gudeman took over the program in May 2006, the Knights have totaled 24 conference victories and a 43-16-3 overall ledger, with both figures tops among MIAC teams over that time.

[Complete Carleton Season Preview](#)

Concordia

Coach: Dan Weiler

Career Record: 84-44-10 (7 seasons)

2008 Finish: Tied 3rd (6-3-2 MIAC, 12-5-3 overall)

Concordia Season Preview

For the first time in the past three seasons, Concordia enters a new year without the title of defending MIAC champions. The Cobbers finished tied for third in the regular season in 2008 and then lost to Carleton in the conference tournament title game. Their appearance in the MIAC championship game marked the fifth straight season that Concordia has played in the league championship game – a streak they hope will reach a half dozen come November.

Concordia head coach Dan Weiler enters the 2009 campaign with a load of optimism as the team returns eight starters from last year's squad. He also brought in a bumper class of 13 freshmen to help the Cobbers get back to the NCAA Tournament. Concordia will also be trying to continue its recent tradition of being the premiere women's program in the MIAC. Over the past five years, the Cobbers have won more league games (42) than any other team in the conference.

To continue with their wining ways, Concordia will rely on an extremely deep junior class. Returning from that class for the Cobbers are three All-Region players in 2008. Abby Habein (Billings, Mont./Billings Senior), Sam Johnson (Fargo, N.D./Fargo North HS) and Sue Obermiller (Fargo, N.D./Fargo North HS) all earned All-Region honors last year and all have been starters since they stepped on the field as a freshman. That trio will be the trigger for the Concordia offense that returns all six attacking players from last year's squad.

The biggest holes to fill for the Cobbers will be in defense where the team lost starting goalkeeper Britt Reiersgord and starting central defender Chelsea McLaughlin to graduation. Reiersgord was a four-year starter for the Cobbers and McLaughlin was the anchor for a defensive crew that was consistently at the top of the league in goals allowed.

Concordia will be pumped up by the presence of the 13 newcomers on the squad. The biggest contributions will come from the starting goalie and from forward Sarah Rounds (Plymouth, Minn./Wayzata HS). Rounds was an All-Conference and All-State Tournament Team performer for Wayzata last fall. She will give the Cobbers another scoring threat on the front line. The goalie competition will be between freshmen Haley Haddock (Greenwood Village, Colo./Cherry Creek HS) and Ali Nelson (Maple Grove, Minn.)

Concordia will be hoping that their mix of experienced returners and enthusiastic first-year players will continue their elite program status and get them back into the NCAA Tournament at the end of the year.

[Complete Concordia Season Preview](#)

Gustavus

Coach: Mike Stehlik

Career Record: 205-106-26 (19 seasons)

2008 Finish: 8th (4-5-2 MIAC, 7-8-3 overall)

Gustavus Season Preview

Gustavus women's soccer coach Mike Stehlik will look for continued improvement from a young squad that compiled a record of 7-8-3 overall and finished eighth in the MIAC last year with a league mark of 4-5-2. Stehlik returns 14 letterwinners including honorable mention All-Conference defenders Alison Dittmer (Sr., Plymouth, Minn.) and Rachel Iblings (Sr., Plymouth, Minn.). The team will build around a strong defense and veteran midfield and look to improve its goal scoring after being limited to one goal or less in 13 of its 18 games last season.

The defense returns four starters including four-year regulars Dittmer and Iblings. Seniors Megan Gode (White Bear Lake, Minn.) and goalkeeper Chelsea Bayer (Rogers, Minn.) are also returning starters for the squad. Others expected to contribute on the defensive end include Ana Norell (Jr., Rochester, Minn.), Bekah Jorgenson (Jr., Blaine, Minn.), and Abbey Maus (Jr., Rogers, Minn.). The Gusties finished the season ranked sixth in the MIAC in goals against average at 0.96 goals per game.

The midfield will be led by seniors Becca Hagen (Minneapolis, Minn.) and Kirsten Thulien (Burnsville, Minn.) who both started every game a year ago. A quartet of juniors will be asked to step up and provide depth in the midfield after gaining valuable experience last year. That group includes Mackenzie Del Santro (Apple Valley, Minn.), Nicole Kwapick (White Bear Lake, Minn.), Karen Maus (Rogers, Minn.), and Meghan Faricy (Rosemount, Minn.).

On the attack, the Gusties will be looking to replace All-Conference forward Chelsea Craven, who is spending the fall semester studying abroad. Coach Stehlik will look to junior Ashley Anderson (Corcoran, Minn.), who started every game and scored four goals last season, and sophomore Meghan McMillan (Minneapolis, Minn.) who played in every game in a reserve role and scored one goal. The team will need to find a way to score more goals this season if they hope to increase their win total and contend for a MIAC Playoff spot.

[Complete Gustavus Season Preview](#)

Hamline

Coach: Ted Zingman

Career Record: 17-19-0 (2 seasons)

2008 Finish: 11th (1-10-0 MIAC, 7-11-0 overall)

Hamline Season Preview

Several new names will be seen on the Piper roster as head coach Ted Zingman heads into his third year at the helm of Hamline's women's soccer team, looking to set the tone for a strong future with a successful 2009.

Leading Zingman's returning corps this season will be Haley Leverington (Burnsville, Minn.), a senior who was third on the team in scoring last year with 11 points (three goals, five assists). Leverington is a technically strong midfielder who will be expected to take over some of the Pipers' scoring responsibilities this season. She's also good in the air and has excellent field vision, and will be looked upon to help guide a numerous incoming first-year class.

Another senior returning who will continue her leadership role for the Pipers this year is midfielder/defender Kelly Kunowski (Milwaukee, Wis.). Kunowski is an aggressive and physical player who can win balls and leads by example on the field.

Rounding out Zingman's senior class is midfielder Lizzie Steinert (Chicago, Ill.), who is a strong leader and is working hard in the off-season to make an impact for Hamline in her senior year. Another senior, Lindsey Anderson (Cottage Grove, Minn.), will be unable to play this fall due to injury but is expected to continue to be a significant team leader off the field.

In her first-year campaign in 2008, Courtney McMoore (So., Minneapolis, Minn.) started 17 games for the Pipers on defense. An athletic and fast player, McMoore may find herself spending time at midfield this season.

Also returning to the Piper roster, but making her first appearance on the field, is Emily Jacobson (Jr., Rochester, Minn.). Jacobson was sidelined by an injury the last two years and is eager to make an impact for the Pipers. Zingman will look to her for help in anchoring the back line.

The Pipers also return a pair of goalkeepers who have both seen significant playing time in net. Liz Stock (So., Savage, Minn.) started ten games in goal for Hamline last year, seeing a lot of experience in big games. A very technically sound keeper, Zingman expects her to step up into a larger leadership role this year.

Challenging Stock for time in net will be junior Katie Gardner (Minneapolis, Minn.), who has seen significant playing time in her first two years on the roster, including starting seven games last season.

Zingman's incoming class of first-year athletes will be adding depth to his roster and he will be relying on them to step up and make an impact right away.

Leading that class will be a trio of players who add versatility to the Piper game. Kelsey Caracciolo (Belgrade, Mont.) may be seen at nearly any positions on the field and comes from a state championship club team in Montana. She may be joined on the attack by Alleah Pac (Federal Way, Wash.). Pac is a quality center mid who also comes from a strong club background and is dangerous on set pieces.

Looking to compete immediately for playing time in the back will be Izzy Benjamin-Alvarado (Omaha, Neb.). Benjamin-Alvarado is a strong and athletic defender who has solid defensive skills.

The first goal for the Pipers this season will be to work on their team cohesiveness with such a large group of new faces on the field. Zingman feels the quality is there to have a successful season and set the bar high for future years as a strong class of talented recruits looks to make their mark at Hamline.

[Complete Hamline Season Preview](#)

Macalester

Coach: John Leaney

Career Record: 285-73-31 (20 seasons)

2008 Finish: Tied 3rd (6-3-2 MIAC, 9-8-2 overall)

Macalester Season Preview

The Scots have made it to the MIAC's post-season every year since the conference playoffs began in 2003 and figure to contend for another top-four finish in '09. Macalester is looking to get back to being a title contender after finishing 6-3-2 in the MIAC and 9-8-2 overall last year, barely avoiding its first non-winning season since 1988.

In his 21st season at the helm of the program, Coach John Leaney has posted a 157-23-22 MIAC record, and this year's squad has the potential to be another contender for the veteran Macalester coach, who ranks fourth among active NCAA Division III coaches in career wins. Leaney has won eight MIAC championships.

"We have a large first-year class and we really hope to see contributions from three or four," reports Coach Leaney. "Their adjustment to college soccer is crucial to our success."

Macalester returns eight starters from a team which ranked second in the league in goals allowed, including All-MIAC defender Maddie Mette (Sr., Burnsville, Minn.). The Scots also return key defenders Kelsey Speer (Sr., Madison, Wis. / West) and Jenna Machado (So., Boulder, Colo. / Fairview).

The Scots feature good depth and experience in the midfielder, led by returning starters Lauryn Gutierrez (Jr., Hickory, N.C. / St. Stephens), Maddy Cochrane (Sr., Grand Marais, Minn. / Cook County) and Martha Coe (Jr., Grand Haven, Mich.). Gutierrez contributed four goals and four assists last season.

Up front, the Scots return their leading goal scorers from a year ago in Emily Bardwell (Jr., Denver, Colo. / East) and Rose Betzler (Sr., Northfield, Minn.). Each netted five goals, while Bardwell assisted on five others. Bardwell led the team with 62 shots and 38 shots on goal – far more than any other player.

Other key returners for Macalester include midfielders Jordan Eckstein (Jr., Northampton, Mass.) and Lucy Miner (So., Seattle, Wash. / Ballard).

[Complete Macalester Season Preview](#)

Saint Benedict

Coach: Steve Kimble

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

2008 Finish: Tied 3rd (7-4-0 MIAC, 13-5-0 overall)

Saint Benedict Season Preview

The College of Saint Benedict soccer team looks to return to the MIAC playoffs and earn an NCAA Division III tournament berth under the guidance of first-year coach Steve Kimble. Kimble inherits a program that finished the 2008 season in a four-way tie for third place in the MIAC with a 7-4 conference record. The Blazers finished 13-5 overall in 2008.

CSB will lean on the leadership and guidance of seniors Allison Tourville and Shannon Strohm. Last season, Tourville scored 11 points from the forward position and was named All-MIAC and All-Central Region. Strohm had another solid season in the net for the Blazers recording three shutouts and a .864 save percentage. With CSB losing 10 seniors to graduation, the Blazers will have to count on their youth to step in and fill the void, including juniors Chelsi Larson (forward), Kelly Suter (forward/midfielder) and Maija Schmelzer (goaltender) and sophomore Heather Beshears (midfielder). Saint Benedict will also add 12 first-year players to the roster who can help make a splash to the team immediately.

With the combination of talented first-years and experienced returners, the Blazers will once again look to be near the top of the MIAC and make their second trip in three years to the NCAA Division III Tournament.

[Complete Saint Benedict Season Preview](#)

St. Catherine

Coach: Steven Bellis

Career Record: 16-30-6 (3 seasons)

2008 Finish: 9th (4-6-1 MIAC, 9-7-2 overall)

St. Catherine Season Preview

Strong performances and steady leadership from an experienced junior class will be a key factor in the continued growth and development of the team. The junior class of Brittini Deeb, Kayla Engel, Kim Engel, Kelsey Nistler and Gina Throwick has proven its mettle at the MIAC level. Deeb was an all-conference award winning defender last season. Meanwhile, Nistler earned MIAC honorable mention honors as the team's leading scorer (20 points), and the Engel's and Thorwick have been starters since they arrived on campus three years ago. That level of familiarity with each other and experience with life in the MIAC should prove invaluable as the season wears on.

Joining Coach Bellis' eight returning starters and 14 returning letter winners are 13 new faces in the program. The skills and strengths these newcomers will add to the rotation should not only continue to make the team more competitive, but also allow them to be more attack minded and further develop the team's speed up front.

If the Wildcats are able to meet Coach Bellis' goal of continuing to develop their game savvy, technical skills and come together as a team, there is no telling how much the team will continue to improve.

Saint Mary's Season Preview

Saint Mary’s University women’s soccer coach Eric Zimmerman got his first helping of collegiate soccer a year ago, and it left a rather bitter taste in his mouth.

Not to mention a strong desire to savor a much sweeter season the second time around.

“Last year was a huge learning experience — for me and for the players,” said Zimmerman. “I was the third coach in the last three years, and that transition was a little tough. I think this season — with virtually the same team returning — everything will be a little smoother.”

Which, the second-year head coach hopes, will result in a few more W’s in the win column.

“I expect us to be better, especially in the conference,” predicted Zimmerman, whose Cardinals came up empty in their 11 Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference contests in 2008, while finishing 5-12-1 overall. “The MIAC is so tough, it’s really hard to predict how many wins we are capable of, but there’s no doubt in my mind we are going to turn a few heads this year.”

Part of the reason for Zimmerman’s optimism is the return of the team’s top defensive player — goalkeeper Mariana Sanchez (Puebla, Mexico) — and top offensive threat — Amy Sibik (Onalaska, Wis.).

“The foundation is there,” said Zimmerman, who got an honorable-mention All-MIAC season out of Sanchez, while Sibik was the team’s leading scorer for the second straight season. “We just have to keep working to improve our overall team performance day-in and day-out.”

For the Cardinals to make that leap into the middle of the conference heap, it’s the final third of the field — the offensive third — that is in need of an overhaul.

SMU scored just 23 goals in 18 games a year ago, led by Sibik’s team-best eight, and Zimmerman knows that, no matter how good his goalkeeper may be, one goal a game is not going to win the Cardinals many games.

“We have got to be more dangerous in the final third of the field,” said Zimmerman. “We possessed the ball as well as any team we played last year, we just weren’t assertive enough — we didn’t take enough risks — when it came to attacking the net.

“If we are going to be successful this season, we have to do a better job of creating more offensive opportunities, and then capitalizing on them.”

[Complete Saint Mary's Season Preview](#)

St. Olaf

Coach: Jeremy Driver

Career Record: 20-28-6 (3 seasons)

2008 Finish: 7th (5-5-1 MIAC, 8-9-1 overall)

St. Olaf Season Preview

If 2008 was a step forward for the St. Olaf women's soccer team, head coach Jeremy Driver hopes 2009 is a giant leap ahead as the Oles will return ten starters to a lineup that was .500 in conference play.

2008 saw the Oles finish five games better than their effort in 2007, finishing 8-9-1 overall and 5-5-1 in MIAC games. Driver, in his fourth season, knows that getting his team to the next level will be a challenge. "It's never easy," he said, "but we think this is a season of opportunity for us. It's the deepest team we've had in my four years. We have quality returners and a good group of incoming first years."

That group of quality returners includes the top four scorers from last year, all sophomores in 2009. Lindsay Howard's nine tallies led the way last year and she will return with a group of fellow scoring

sophomores: Caitie Christoffell, who had seven goals in her rookie season, Ellie Steiner and Deanne Schmidt. Steiner (six goals and two assists) and Schmidt (five goals, two assists) will be back after 14- and 12-point efforts. Schmidt was an all-conference honorable mention choice and an example of the strong core of underclass players that the team will lean on this year.

The midfield will be anchored by two-time All-MIAC junior K.C. Beed and senior Liz Brustad. Beed led the team with five assists last fall after spending her first campaign as a forward.

Also returning are Becca Neuger, Allyson Connor and Christina Herron-Sweet. Each had two goals last fall. Sophomores Hannah Rosenthal, who played in 17 games in 2008, and Callie Knaeble could see some action again this year.

First years Anna Theis (Jordan, Minn./Prior Lake), Lauren Babcock (Sandy, Utah/Rowland Hall-St. Mark's), Annie Manning (Wayzata, Minn./Minnetonka) and Rachel Saunders (Englewood, Colo./Cherry Creek) will compete for time. The team also added first years Caitlin Fox (Overland Park, Kan.) and Aishi Mengi, who joins the midfield group from Tanzania where she played for Haven of Peace Academy.

The Oles look to a pair of seniors – sisters Allison and Christina Mills -- to lead the backfield. Christina was an All-MIAC honorable mention selection last year while each started every game in their career. Andrea Fossum will compete for a spot with a pair of first years: Christine Barringer (Littleton, Colo.) and Michaela McCarthy (Omaha, Neb.) join the Mills sisters on defense this year.

Samantha Sickbert and Elizabeth Huggins will likely split time in goal this year as they have in the past two seasons. First year Kristin O'Brien (Rosemount, Minn./St. Paul Academy), an all-state selection and team MVP at St. Paul Academy, could also challenge for the spot as the season unfolds.

[Complete St. Olaf Season Preview](#)

St. Thomas

Coach: Sheila McGill

Career Record: 24-8-6 (2 seasons)

2008 Finish: 1st (9-0-2 MIAC, 14-1-5 overall)

St. Thomas Season Preview

This fall's St. Thomas women's soccer team won't have one weapon it did when it came into the 2008 season – the element of surprise.

The Tommies were picked to finish sixth of 12 teams in the 2008 preseason coaches' poll. But second-year Coach Sheila McGill guided St. Thomas to an unbeaten regular season (14-0-4), including a 9-0-2 record that claimed the MIAC championship. It was the program's third conference title in eight years but first outright crown since 1987.

The Tommies, who climbed as high as No. 13 in the Division III polls, stalled in the postseason. They lost a two-overtime match to Concordia in the MIAC playoff semifinals, then ended their season with a shootout tie-breaker loss in the NCAA first round to Loras.

After allowing 24 goals in 18 games in 2007, St. Thomas allowed just 12 goals in 20 games last season. The Toms outscored foes 20-5 in the second half, had 10 shutouts in regulation, scored first in 12 of 16 games, and had three comeback wins.

McGill said the Tommies played well in scrimmages last week against Division II teams Bemidji State and nationally-ranked Minnesota State Mankato. McGill noted that this group has the best depth of any in her three seasons as head coach.

St. Thomas graduated a trio of four-year starters in Stephanie Paasch (three-time All-MIAC, nine goals and six assists in 72 career games); Courtney Walior (All-MIAC, three goals and three assists in 72 games); and Abie Krause (five goals and 14 assists in 71 games).

The 25-player UST roster includes 17 returners, two transfers, and five freshmen. Leading the returners are three senior co-captains -- Erin Sprangers, the conference Player of the Year and an All-Region honoree; All-MIAC and All-Region forward Kirsten Moran; and MF Alison True.

In 56 career games, Sprangers has 21 goals and eight assists, and UST is 16-0 on her career when she's scored a goal. Sprangers led all MIAC players in conference goals (nine), assists (five) and points (23). Moran, who contributed five goals and five assists last season, was a Division I transfer from Southern Methodist who sat out in 2006 and 2007. Moran had a six-game scoring streak with three goals and three assists in the Toms' 6-0 stretch in October. True has played in 53 career games with 13 points.

The three goalkeepers on the roster are returning starter Amanda Domeier (22 career starts, 0.41 GAA in 2008); sophomore Allie Byron; and freshman Callan Faulkner of Edina.

Other returning starters include junior MF Lexie Fisher and sophomores D-MFs Tess Hanson, Emily Burgmeier and Sloane Kuramoto

Also back after a one-year absence is junior forward Regina Horak, who had four goals in nine games as a freshman in 2007 before suffering a season-ending injury.

The eight newcomers include junior Ale Wicka, a Cretin-Derham Hall grad who played one season at Wisconsin; sophomore Whitney Moran, sister of Kirsten Moran; and Orono grad Rachel Personius, who attended the University of Minnesota but didn't play sports last school year. The freshman group includes Faulkner; Owatonna defender Brittany Cochlin; Eagan MF-F Katie Ryan; Woodbury F Emily Wilson; and Mequon (Wis.) MF Anna Strehlow.

[Complete St. Thomas Season Preview](#)