

2010 MIAC Women's Soccer Preview and Preseason Coaches' Poll

ST. PAUL, Minn. – On the surface, it would appear the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference's (MIAC) 2010 women's soccer season could play out strikingly similar to the way things went in 2009. The league's Player- and Coach-of-the-Year both return, and the top six teams from a year ago appear poised to pick up where they left off. However, no two seasons are ever identical, so a lot of the excitement surrounding the 2010 campaign comes from the speculation of what surprises will unfold.

The top recurring subplot revolves around a dynasty-in-the-making at Concordia College. The Cobbers have won the MIAC championship three of the past four seasons, including last year thanks to a 18-1-2 overall mark and a near-perfect 10-0-1 record in conference play. This year, expectations soar just as high behind 2009 MIAC Coach-of-the-Year **Dan Weiler**, and star **Sam Johnson** (Sr., F), who was the league's Player-of-the-Year and Concordia's first All-American. Johnson led the MIAC in goals, points and game-winning goals.

However, Concordia's talent doesn't stop there. **Abby Habein** (Sr., M), **Sue Obermiller** (Sr., M), **Sarah Rounds** (So., F) all joined Johnson on the All-MIAC team, and **Ali Nelson** (So., GK) was an All-Conference Honorable Mention selection.

With the Cobbers' returning talent and recent success are factored together, it should come as no surprise that Concordia was a near-unanimous No. 1 selection in the 2010 MIAC Women's Soccer Preseason Coaches' Poll. Concordia received 10 of the 12 first-place votes and finished with 120 out of a possible 121 points. Coaches were asked to vote for every team except their own, and 11 points were awarded for first, 10 for second, and so on.

The other two first-place votes, and the No. 2 spot in the poll, went to Carleton College. The Knights claimed the MIAC Playoff championship a year ago – the first No. 4 seed to do so – and reached the NCAA Division III Championships. All-Region and All-MIAC selection **Niki Tomita** (Jr., F) is back to lead Carleton after scoring 12 goals as a sophomore, and All-MIAC teammate **Rachel Foran** (Jr., D) also returns. Senior goalie **Kate Trenerry** and junior midfielder **Abby Wills** are also back to help make Carleton the preseason favorite to challenge Concordia's run at the top.

The University of St. Thomas, which finished second in the league a year ago, was a close third in the poll with 100 total points. St. Olaf College was picked to move up a spot into fourth place, Macalester College was also predicted to earn another top-five finish, and the College of Saint Benedict slotted in at No. 6. Though the predicted order is slightly different, the top six teams in the MIAC were the same last year, and all will open 2010 with plenty of reason for optimism.

The Tommies had an outstanding 2009 season, finishing 13-6-1 overall and 8-2-1 in the league and earning a spot in the NCAA Division III Championships. Seven starters return, led by All-MIAC selection **Lexie Fisher** (Sr., M/F) and Honorable Mention pick **Regina Horak** (Sr., F), to help St. Thomas contend again in 2010 after winning the league in 2008 and finishing second in 2009.

St. Olaf tied for fifth in the MIAC last year with an 11-7 overall record and a 6-5 conference mark. The Oles hope to improve on that this season behind a pair of talented juniors – All-MIAC selections **Lindsay Howard** (F) and **Deanne Schmidt** (M/D).

Macalester lost its legendary coach – **John Leaney** – and a pair of All-MIAC selections to graduation during the offseason, but former Scots All-American **Kate Ryan Reiling** has been tabbed to take over the program and continue her alma mater's success. All-Conference forward **Emily Bardwell** returns for her senior season, along with five other players who started at least 15 matches for 2009's squad that went 14-6-2 overall and 7-3-1 in the MIAC.

Saint Benedict was the team that tied St. Olaf for fifth place in 2009 with a 6-5 MIAC record and a 12-5-1 overall mark, and the Blazers hope to continue their improvement in head coach **Steve Kimble's** second season. Junior **Sami Meyman** (D) returns after earning All-MIAC honors, and Honorable Mention selection **Heather Beshears** (Jr., M) is also back for Saint Benedict.

The second half of the 2010 Preseason Coaches' Poll had a slightly different order than the 2009 standings, so it will be interesting to see which teams from this group take a leap forward and outperform expectations this fall. Augsburg College was picked to finish seventh, Gustavus Adolphus College was eighth, Bethel College was No. 9 and St. Catherine University rounds out the top 10. Saint Mary's University and Hamline University occupy the final two spots, respectively.

Augsburg finished eighth in the MIAC a year ago and just missed a .500 record at 6-7-5, so with seven returning starters, the Auggies enter 2010 with higher aspirations. Among the returners is leading scorer **Lacey Hoover** (Sr., F) and senior defenders **Gina Liddell-Westefeld** and **Lisa Weniger**.

Gustavus also flirted with .500 in 2009 at 7-8-3, and Mike Stehlik has his top two scorers back – forwards **Ashley Anderson** (Sr.) and **Meghan McMillan** (Jr.) – as the dean of the MIAC coaches embarks on his 20th season with the Gusties. Six starters return for Gustavus, and Stehlik thinks some of his newcomers could infuse some talent into his lineup as well.

Bethel – which finished seventh in the MIAC in 2009 – finished 12-5-1 a year ago, including a perfect 7-0 record in nonconference action. First-year head coach **Ryan Servaty** takes over the Royals' program this season, and he has some young talent to work with. **Kelsey Flaherty** (M) was an All-MIAC pick as a freshman last year and juniors **Brittany Griffore** (M/F) and **Carrie Kishaba** (M/F) were Honorable Mention selections.

St. Catherine hopes to play better in close games in 2010 – the Wildcats were 6-9-1 last season with five losses coming by a single goal. St. Catherine returns senior All-MIAC selections **Brittini Deeb** (D) and **Kelsey Nistler** (F), as well as Honorable Mention pick **Kim Engel** (Sr., D) to lead the team this fall.

Saint Mary's finished 9-8-1 a year ago, and two of its top three scorers return in 2010. Senior forward **Amy Sibik** was All-MIAC Honorable Mention last year and **Caitlyn Cole** also returns for the Cardinals, who have four starters back.

Hamline will be young in 2010 with 70 percent of its roster made up of either first- or second-year players, but a trio of upperclassmen – **Heather Butzlaff** (Sr.), **Emily Jacobson** (Sr.) and **Liz Stock** (Jr.) – will serve as captains and provide leadership as the Pipers' young talent adjusts to the college game.

The season starts Wednesday, Sept. 1, with 10 of the league's 12 teams opening that day with nonconference action. Conference play opens Sept. 14 and 15, with the regular season finale schedule for Oct. 30.

The 2010 MIAC Women's Soccer Playoffs will feature the top four teams in the final regular-season standings, and they'll be held Nov. 3 (semifinals) and Nov. 6 (Championship) with the high seed hosting each game.

Listed below are the complete results from the 2010 MIAC Preseason Women's Soccer Coaches' Poll as well as team-by-team previews submitted by each institution's sports information director.

2010 MIAC Women's Soccer Preseason Coaches' Poll

Coaches voted for every team in the conference except their own team. Points were assigned for each vote (11 for first, 10 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.

2010 MIAC Women's Soccer Preseason Coaches' Poll		
Rank	Institution	Total
1	Concordia (10)	120
2	Carleton (2)	106
3	St. Thomas	100
4	St. Olaf	91
5	Macalester	83
6	Saint Benedict	62
7	Augsburg	54
8	Gustavus	50
9	Bethel	42
10	St. Catherine	40
11	Saint Mary's	31
12	Hamline	13

2010 MIAC Playoff Dates: Semifinals (Wednesday, Nov. 3), Finals (Saturday, Nov. 6)

| [2010 MIAC Schedule](#) | [2009 MIAC Statistics](#) | [MIAC Recordbook](#) | [MIAC Archives](#)

Augsburg

Coach: Mike Navarre

Career Record: 91-79-27 (12 seasons)

2009 Finish: 8th (3-6-2 MIAC, 6-7-5 overall)

Augsburg Season Preview

On paper, the Augsburg College women's soccer team may look young. Just three seniors and five juniors are on the 21-player roster.

But soccer games aren't played on paper.

With a corps of 14 returning letterwinners -- including seven returning starters -- and a solid group of young players, prospects are positive for the Auggies to improve from last year's 6-7-5 overall record and 3-6-2 Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference mark.

"We've clearly had good players and good teams go through here, and rest assured with this group, it's being communicated to them that we take a lot of pride in being one of the top teams in the MIAC," said head coach Mike Navarre, entering his 12th season as the Auggies' mentor. "It takes a lot of work because there are so many good teams in our conference. We're definitely grateful for the success we've had, but we certainly can't rest on any laurels. We have to get after it every day and compete."

Augsburg had a stretch of five straight seasons with top-four finishes in the MIAC standings snapped last year, and the Auggies are aiming for a return to the four-team MIAC postseason playoffs for the first time since a four-year stretch from 2004-07.

Navarre is closing in on a career milestone, entering his 12th season with 91 career victories (91-79-27 overall). He has the third-most career victories of any active MIAC soccer coach.

Key contributors are back

Several key contributors return to the Auggie lineup, led by forward Lacey Hoover (SR, Duluth, Minn./Central HS), who led the team with six goals and 13 points last season. Entering her senior year, she currently stands 10th in school history in career goals (14) and 15th in career points (32).

"Lacey is a great player," Navarre said. "She's a threat to score whenever she plays and will definitely be counted on to lead our attack this year."

Defenders Gina Liddell-Westefeld (SR, Iowa City, Iowa) and Lisa Weniger (SR, Eagan, Minn./Environmental Studies HS) have been veterans in the Augsburg system, and will be called on to anchor a defense that lost three starters from last season.

"We take a lot of pride in our defense at Augsburg. It's what we've built our success around. Although we graduated some key players, we have players who can step in and are fortunate to have Gina and Lisa provide the leadership we need," Navarre said.

host of quality returners are back in the midfield, with junior Courtney Gamrath (JR, St. Michael, Minn./St. Michael-Albertville HS) and sophomores Kelsey Sorensen (SO, Eden Prairie, Minn.), Bri Dorale (SO, Ramsey, Minn./Anoka HS) and Devon Ellena (SO, Wales, Wis./Kettle Moraine HS). Meanwhile, Courtney Barthel (SO, St. Michael, Minn./St. Michael-Albertville HS) and Carly Reimer (SO, Eagan, Minn./Henry Sibley HS) received significant playing time last season as first-year players and can play multiple positions for the Auggies.

Gamrath is the lone returner to have started all 18 games last season, after contributing a goal and three assists. Sorensen scored three goals with three assists, while Dorale had a goal and four assists, Barthel scored three goals and Reimer contributed an assist.

Bri Clark (SO, Mound, Minn./Mound-Westonka HS) missed last season due to injury, but has returned healthy and ready to occupy one of the forward spots. Laurie Barger (SO, Monticello, Minn.) saw time in seven games last year as a forward before an injury ended her season. Midfielders Lindsey Niederhaus (JR, Ramsey, Minn./Anoka HS) and Katie Jacobson (JR, St. Cloud, Minn./Apollo HS) also return.

Young goalkeepers, promising newcomers

Diana Bocklund (SO, Pine Springs, Minn./Mahtomedi HS) made a strong impact in goal last season for the Auggies, starting 15 games and recording a 1.11 goals-against-average with five shutouts. She will face a challenge this year for the starting spot with Katie Gajewski (FY, Wausau, Wis./Wausau East HS), who led her high school to back-to-back state tournament appearances, and returner Taylor Becker (JR, Red Wing, Minn.).

Five other first-year players will be counted on to make significant contributions to the Auggies' success. Defender Mikaela Zierden (FY, Eagan, Minn./St. Croix Lutheran HS) earned Minnesota All-State honors last year, and will be joined on defense by Alekzandra Miller (FY, St. Paul, Minn./Highland Park HS).

Alexis Houle (FY, Albertville, Minn./St. Michael-Albertville HS), an all-conference selection last year, and Abby Kangas (FY, Eagan, Minn.) will contribute in the midfield, and Rachel Nelson (FY, Coon Rapids, Minn.) will compete for time at forward.

Bethel

Coach: Ryan Servaty

Career Record: 0-0-0 (first season)

2009 Finish: 7th (5-5-1 MIAC, 12-5-1 overall)

Bethel Season Preview

After a record-setting season in 2009, Bethel returns to the field in 2010 with high hopes and even higher expectations. Last year's squad set new records for wins, conference wins, goals, and shutouts to name a few. Six of the top seven scorers return, including All-MIAC midfielder Kelsey Flaherty (So., Shoreview, Minn.) and All-MIAC Honorable Mention midfielder Carrie Kishaba (Jr., Eau Claire, Wis.).

Offensively, the Royals will look to Leah Hardie (Jr., Ankeny, Iowa), who is coming off of a season that saw her score 23 points on eight goals and seven assists. Lydia Bergeson (So., Mauston, Wis.) was right behind her with 21 points on nine goals and three assists. Flaherty and Kishaba will lead from the middle as they try to create scoring opportunities up front. Sophie Christiansen (Jr., Portland, Ore.) has fully recovered from an injury that sidelined her through the first half of last season and looks to be a significant contributor this year.

Kelsey Holmberg (So., Cambridge, Minn.) looks to be the ringleader on defense as the Royals will once again try to hold the opposing offense at bay. Last season, Bethel allowed a school-best low of 15 goals in the 18 games thanks to quick, smart, and aggressive play. But one of the main factors in keeping opponents from scoring is solid play from the goalkeepers. Last season Alyssa Riggs (Sr., Columbia Heights, Minn.) platooned with another goalkeeper and the two managed to record nine shutouts. Riggs will be the go-to goalie again this season, and will have additional help from Abby Furlong (So., White Bear Lake, Minn.).

Overall, the Royals have had little turnover in terms of player personnel. With a new head coach in Ryan Servaty, Bethel aims to pick up where it left off in 2009 and make a convincing run toward a MIAC playoff spot come November.

Carleton

Coach: Keren Gudeman

Career Record: 53-22-8 (4 seasons)

2009 Finish: 4th (6-2-3 MIAC, 10-6-5 overall)

Carleton Season Preview

Coming off consecutive trips to the NCAA Championships, the Knights possess an experienced squad in 2010. Last fall, a strong second half carried Carleton into the post-season, where the Knights became the first No. 4 seed to win the MIAC Playoffs. Carleton welcomes back 10 starters and 18 players, graduating only one senior who saw playing time.

Leading the returnees is NSCAA All-Region and All-MIAC forward Niki Tomita (Redwood City, Calif./Woodside). The junior tallied a team-best 12 goals, scoring a whopping 10 times—including seven goals against ranked opponents—during a crucial five-match stretch to propel Carleton into the national tournament.

All-MIAC center back Rachel Foran (Jr./River Forest, Ill./Oak Park River Forest) is the centerpiece of the Knights' stingy defense, which ranked second in the conference last fall. She also contributed a pair of key game-winning goals.

Coaches around the conference recognize the impact midfielder Abby Wills (Jr./Portland, Ore./St. Mary's) has on the game. She often makes the opening pass in a series that results in a Carleton goal and was voted an All-MIAC pick in 2008 and All-MIAC honorable mention in 2009.

Goalkeeper Kate Trenerry (Sr./Rochester, Minn./Century) earned All-MIAC honorable mention in 2009. During the playoffs she stopped three penalty kicks during a shootout victory over national No. 7 Concordia. Sophomore Beth Ashinsky (Mount Kisco, N.Y.) will push for more playing time at the position after posting a 0.24 GAA in 9 matches last season.

Atop the Carleton attack, Tomita will be joined by juniors Cassie Burke (Sunfish Lake, Minn./Minnehaha Academy) and Linnea Carlson (Evanston, Ill./Evanston Township) as well as dynamic sophomores Quinn Stewart (Irvine, Calif./Woodbridge), Marlena Hartman-Filson (Evergreen, Colo./Colorado Academy), and Karlie Haug (Rapid City, S.D./Stevens).

The Knights will once again feature an experienced midfield, including Wills and senior captains Merritt Swain (Mendota Heights, Minn./St. Paul Academy) and Liz Arakaki (Seattle, Wash./Nathan Hale). Junior Lily VanderStaay (Bellingham, Wash.) has started every match over her first two seasons, while sophomores Zoe Suche (Clagary, Alb./Western Canada) and Sarah Hagerty (Boulder, Colo.) both appeared in at least 17 contests as rookies.

Joining Foran on the backline are seniors Megan Milligan (Las Cruces, N.M.) and Leigh-Anne Borkowski (Elverta, Calif./Center). Milligan showed her versatility last season by pacing the team in assists, and the back line will benefit from the consistent play of Borkowski, who is healthy after being limited to just six matches in 2009.

Concordia

Coach: Dan Weiler

Career Record: 102-45-12 (8 seasons)

2009 Finish: 1st (10-0-1 MIAC, 18-1-2 overall)

Concordia Season Preview

After posting a record-breaking season that saw an undefeated regular season and a trip to the NCAA Sweet 16, it would be easy to reflect and say "that was a once in a lifetime program." Unfortunately for the rest of the teams in the MIAC, last year's eye-opening season-long run might be just the first act of a two-part act.

The Cobbers, who won their third conference regular season championship in the past four years and went 18-1-2 on the year, return 10 of their 11 starting players from last season. The cupboard is also restocked with the returning MIAC MVP, an offensive unit that led the league in goals scored and a defense that had the best goals against average in the conference. All that could add for another deep run into the postseason for Concordia

Head Coach Dan Weiler enters his ninth season in the MIAC having won 52 MIAC games in the past six seasons – the most of any coach in the conference. He has demonstrated the ability to collect championships and prepare his team for the struggle of a grueling MIAC season. The 2010 campaign might be his toughest challenge as Concordia enters the year ranked 14th in the preseason NSCAA national poll and will have a target on their backs all season long.

Weiler is optimistic about this year's team to repeat its success from a year ago because of five senior starters that have catapulted the program into the forefront of DIII soccer. The leader of the standout seniors is Sam Johnson (Fargo, N.D./Fargo North HS) who was named the league's Most Valuable Player last year and went on to become the program's first All-American. Johnson scored 11 goals in conference play and had five game-winning goals. She led the MIAC in goals scored, points and game-winning goals. She finished the 11-game conference slate with 11 goals and one assist for 23 points. During the season she also scored in 11 consecutive games which is the longest consecutive game scoring streak in program history.

Despite her individual success in 2009, Johnson has several teammates that will give her a run for the team's MVP. Abby Habein (Billings, Mont./Billings Senior), Sam Johnson (Fargo, N.D./Fargo North HS), Sue Obermiller (Fargo, N.D./Fargo North HS) and Erika Swenson (Fargo, N.D./Fargo North HS) all earned postseason honors last year. Obermiller was named to the All-Region Team for the third straight year while Swenson was named to the All-Region squad for the first time in her career and Habein came away with MIAC All-Conference honors for the second straight year. The fifth senior starter might be the most underrated player in the conference. Central midfielder Brittany Mayer (Bismarck, N.D./Bismarck Century) is the workhorse in the middle of the field that sets the table for the other four.

One of the key ingredients for Concordia in 2009 was to find a front line mate for Johnson. In 2008, teams would double Jophnson to slow down the Cobber offense. In 2009, freshman Sarah Rounds (Plymouth, Minn./Wayzata) gave Concordia a legitimate two-player scoring threat and helped take the pressure off of Johnson. Rounds finished the year with nine goals and 11 assists for 29 points and was named to the MIAC All-Conference Team.

Another key element of last year's national tournament team was the emergence of Ali Nelson (So., Maple Grove, Minn.) as the team's No.1 goalie. Nelson developed throughout the entire year and gave the Cobbers an All-Conference shot stopper. She finished the MIAC season with a 0.44 goals against average and posted seven shutouts. She led the MIAC in shutouts and was second in goals against average and was named to the MIAC All-Conference Honorable Mention Team.

Only time will tell if the second act is as sweet the first as the 2010 Cobber women's soccer team attempts to rewrite program history one more time.

Gustavus

Coach: Mike Stehlik

Career Record: 212-115-29 (19 seasons)

2009 Finish: T-9th (3-7-1 MIAC, 7-8-3 overall)

Gustavus Season Preview

Hamline Season Preview

Fourth-year head coach Ted Zingman will be relying on a young and talented corps of players as the Hamline University women's soccer team enters the 2010 season with 70% of their players in their first-year or sophomore campaigns.

The Pipers graduated a trio of players from their 2009 squad in Kelly Kunowski, Haley Leverington, and Lizzie Steinert. The team has strong leadership returning with a pair of seniors in Heather Butzlaff (White Bear Lake, Minn.) and Emily Jacobson (Rochester, Minn.) and junior Liz Stock (Savage, Minn.) taking the helm as captains this season.

Butzlaff returns to help lead the back line of the Pipers after starting every game last season. She will be playing in front of Stock, who started the majority of the games her first two years. Stock posted a GAA of 2.62 while playing over 1,300 minutes in net last season.

Junior Courtney McMoore (Minneapolis, Minn.) has been a cornerstone for the Piper defense over the past two season as the starting right back. This year, Zingman will expect her to contribute in both defensive and midfield roles. Last season she tallied a pair of assists for the Pipers.

Zingman also returns a pair of sophomores who made a major impact on the field last season for the Pipers. Kelsey Caracciolo (Belgrade, Mont.) had a pair of goals while playing every position except for keeper. She will be expected to contribute in many roles once again this year.

Her classmate Izzy Benjamin-Alvarado (Omaha, Neb.) started every game as a first-year. She has great strength and poise and will be a defensive force in the back and midfield.

Zingman brings several new faces to the 2010 Piper roster that should be seen contributing immediately. In that class of first-years is Alyssa Koulentis (Fy., Portland, Ore.). Koulenis played for the very strong FC Portland Soccer Club and her versatility will help her immediately contribute to the team in many positions.

Another FC Portland product, Molly Jacobs (Fy., Portland, Ore.), Molly is a very technically sound keeper who is expected to immediately challenge for minutes.

At forward, Brie Garside (Fy., Broomfield, Colo.) is a very talented attacking player who will be relied upon to be a scoring threat throughout her first year. Also on the attack will be Hannah Plagman (Fy., Cedar Rapids, Iowa), who has great speed and attacking abilities and should add playmaking abilities as a midfielder and forward.

Rounding out the newcomers is Jenna Albert (Fy., Toddville, Iowa), a strong and experiences outside player who will likely see playing time at both outside back and outside mid.

The Pipers will be a young and dynamic team on the field as an impressive class of new talent combines with a strong group of returners to form the foundation for a successful 2010 campaign.

Macalester

Coach: Kate Ryan Reiling
Career Record: 0-0 (first season)
2009 Finish: 3rd (7-3-1 MIAC, 14-6-2 overall)

Macalester Season Preview

Former All-American Kate Ryan Reiling takes over head coaching duties at her alma mater, replacing one of the most successful Division III coaches of all-time in John Leaney, and is prepared for the challenge of keeping the Scots among the top squads in the MIAC. Coach Ryan Reiling, who led the Scots as an All-American player to the 1998 national championship, is looking to guide the Scots to their 15th national playoff appearance.

The Scots went 7-3-1 in the MIAC last season, beat St. Olaf in the conference semi-finals, and were picked as an at-large team to the NCAA playoffs. Macalester topped St. Scholastica in a first round NCAA match before going down in defeat to MIAC rival Concordia.

Macalester loses four starters to graduation, including All-America defender Maddie Mette, but looks to be an MIAC contender with the return of numerous talented veterans.

All-MIAC and All-Region forward Emily Bardwell (Sr., Denver, Colo. / East) netted 16 of her team's 34 goals in '09, becoming just the sixth player in the program's history to reach that level. She ranked third in the MIAC with eight goals in 11 MIAC games.

The Scots return – in addition to Bardwell - five other players who started at least 16 matches a year ago: midfielders Lauryn Gutierrez (Sr., Hickory, N.C. / St. Stephen's), Lucy Miner (Jr., Seattle, Wash. / Ballard), Martha Coe (Sr., Grand Haven, Mich.), and defenders Kat Lenhart (So., Fairview, N.C. / A.C. Reynolds) and Erica DeJong (So., Woodinville, Wash. / Eastside Catholic).

Gutierrez was second on squad last season with five goals, and Miner was second on the team with four assists.

Midfielder Emily Humphreys (So., Eau Claire, Wis. / Memorial) and defender Jenna Machado (Jr., Boulder, Colo. / Fairview) also started several matches, while both Rosie Glenn-Finer (So., San Francisco, Calif. / Lick Wilmerding) (1.02 goals against average) and Tressa Versteeg (Sr., Pella, Ia.) (0.94 GAA) provide experience in goal.

The Scots kick off their season Sept. 1 at St. Scholastica and open their home schedule Sept. 5 against Loras (Ia.). The MIAC opener is Sept. 15 against defending champ Concordia.

Saint Benedict

Coach: Steve Kimble

Career Record: 10-7-1 (2nd season)

2009 Finish: T-5th (6-5-0 MIAC, 10-7-1 overall)

Saint Benedict Season Preview

Under the direction of second year head coach Steve Kimble the Blazers look to improve off of last year's already successful season.

Last season the Blazers finished with an overall record of 10-7-1 and finished fifth in the MIAC.

This season senior goalkeeper Maija Schmelzer will take the role as starter and junior defender Sami Meyman. Last season Meyman earned the honor of being named to the MIAC all-conference team.

The Blazers will also look to the help of junior midfield/forward Heather Beshears. Last season Beshears led the Blazers in points with 17.

With the addition of six new faces, the Blazers are ready to pick up where they left off last season. The College of Saint Benedict returns most of last year's players and is ready to make a run for the MIAC title.

St. Catherine

Coach: Steven Bellis

Career Record: 22-39-9 (4 seasons)

2009 Finish: 11th (2-7-2 MIAC, 6-9-3 overall)

St. Catherine Season Preview

Entering his fifth season, St. Kate's soccer coach Steve Bellis has been developing one of the most dramatically improved soccer programs in the region. After inheriting a team that finished 2-13-1, Coach Bellis' Wildcats have steadily improved their technical skills, style of play, and game knowledge to move up in the standings. After compiling records of 5-10-3 in 2007 and 9-7-2 in 2008, the Wildcats finished the 2009 campaign at 6-9-3, in a season characterized by tough breaks, as five of their losses came in tightly contested 1-0 games. Look for the 2010 Wildcats to take another step forward and make a run at the MIAC conference tournament.

On a team that lost no starters to graduation, a talented senior class returns with a year of leadership experience under their belts. Brittni Deeb has won all-conference honors the past two seasons for her solid play on defense. Kelsey Nistler also earned all-conference honors in 2009, leading the team in scoring (20 points). Kim Engel garnered a MIAC honorable mention nod for her play in 2009. Kayla Engel and Gina Throwick bring experience to the field as three-year starters and Clare Saunders adds an offensive threat. Altogether, the cohesiveness and MIAC playing experience of the senior class will provide a strong foundation for the Wildcats.

Juniors Sam Levercom, Kaitlin Kramer, Dorsher Kolletta, and Jamie Kelly add firepower to the offensive attack of the Wildcats. Sophomores Christina Paik and Liesl Wolf will add depth to the defensive end of the field. The continued development of the sophomores and juniors will be vital to the team's success.

In addition to the 15 returning letter winners, 15 new players join the Wildcats for the 2010 season. The newcomers add depth to both attack and defense and provide a daily challenge for the returners that will only increase the teams' competitive mettle.

The Wildcats open the season on September 1 when they host Northwestern University. After playing host to the Wildcat Invitational on September 11 and 12, they open up their conference schedule with a game against St. Thomas on September 14.

With the experience and depth of the 2010 team, expectations are higher than ever before that this squad can challenge in the MIAC and beyond.

Saint Mary's

Coach: Eric Zimmerman

Career Record: 14-20-2 (2 seasons)

2009 Finish: T-9th (3-7-1 MIAC, 9-8-1 overall)

Saint Mary's Season Preview

Consistency, passion and commitment.

Those are the three characteristics Saint Mary's University women's soccer coach Eric Zimmerman has been stressing to his team throughout the preseason.

And Zimmerman hopes those three things — not to mention a strong core group of returning players — are the Cardinals' keys to a rise up the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference ladder.

"In terms of expectations, we want to be competitive in every match," said Zimmerman, whose team finished 9-8-1 overall a year ago. "And with more experience comes the expectation that we are able to get results."

SMU returns two of its top three scorers from a year ago in Amy Sibik (Onalaska, Wis.) and Caitlyn Cole (Larsen, Wis.), as well as Kelsey Schneider (Portland, Ore.) and Ashley Gernes (Lake Elmo, Minn.), who started the majority of games last season.

With Sibik, the Cardinals boast one of the most feared scorers in the league. The four-year starter is coming off a career year in 2009, when she scored 14 goals and added four assists for 32 points.

Zimmerman has the luxury of returning a bevy of experience, but the Cardinal head coach also has his share of holes to fill.

All-conference goalkeeper Mariana Sanchez is gone to graduation, as are starters Steph Marnocha, Keirra Metcalf, Dana Winkler and Lauren Mazzuca.

"Mariana was really the backbone of our defense last year," Zimmerman said. "But you have to deal with (losses to graduation) every year, and this year is no different.

"We're excited about all our returning players and what they bring to the table in each of their specific roles."

When asked what will be the key to the Cardinals' success this season, Zimmerman answered quickly — and in one word: Consistency.

"If we want to be better than last year, we need to be more consistent overall, and especially more dangerous in the final third of the field," Zimmerman said. "We need to play as a group for 90 minutes."

St. Olaf

Coach: Jeremy Driver

Career Record: 31-35-6 (4 seasons)

2009 Finish: T-5th (6-5-0 MIAC, 11-7-0 overall)

St. Olaf Season Preview

For much of 2009, the St. Olaf women's soccer team looked like it was going get over the hump and reach the MIAC playoffs for the first time since 2004. The team then lost each of its last three games, including back-to-back 2-1 decisions to close the season, and finished the fall a game out of the league playoffs. In 2010, the Oles return all of their scoring punch in a quest to finish the season as strong as they started last year.

Forwards

St. Olaf scored 40 times last year and each of the goal-scorers are back this fall, including all-region forward Lindsay Howard (Jr., Minnetonka, Minn.). Howard had one of the best seasons in school history a year ago, collecting 14 goals and 8 assists. Her 36 points were more any St. Olaf player in at least 15 seasons while her 14 goals are second-best all-time.

Much of Howard's success was, at least in part, due to the offensive weapons around her. Caitie Christoffel (Jr., Woodbury, Minn.) and Deanne Schmidt (Jr., Lincoln, Neb./East) had breakout seasons scoring nine and four goals, respectively. Schmidt will move to defender this season while Christoffel, who missed the final six games with an injury, is expected to be 100 percent to start 2010 at forward.

Ellie Steiner (Jr., West Bend, Wis.) will be the Oles' other starter at forward with Howard and Christoffel. Steiner was one of six Oles to start each of the team's 18 games last year and had three goals and two assists.

First year Amanda Leone (Plymouth, Minn./Armstrong) and junior Hannah Rosenthal (Burnsville, Minn./Apple Valley) will likely also see time. Rosenthal had three goals while playing in all 18 games last year, mostly as a reserve.

Midfield

Senior K.C. Beed (Rochester, Minn./John Marshall) will lead an experienced group of midfielders. Beed had a goal and two assists in an injury-riddled 2009. She will be joined by Christina Herron-Sweet (Jr., San Diego, Calif./Francis Parker), Annie Manning (Soph., Wayzata, Minn./Minnetonka) and Anna Theis (Soph., Jordan, Minn./Prior Lake).

First years Mackensie Quade (New Brighton, Minn./Totino Grace) and Emma Crumley (Plymouth, Minn./Wayzata) should also see some time.

Defenders

Schmidt will be flagged by sophomore Christine Barringer (Littleton, Colo./Araphoe) and junior Allyson Conner (Oregon, Wis.). Barringer had a goal and three assists in her first season. Becca Neuger, who started each of the team's 18 games last year, will also support the group. A number of others including junior Andrea Fossum (Plymouth, Minn./Armstrong) or first years Susie Jelinek (Engelwood, Colo./Cherry Creek) and Megan Campbell (Hampton, N.J./North Hunterdon) could also play a role in 2010.

Goalkeepers

St. Olaf will have three keepers in the mix in 2010. Seniors Elizabeth Huggins (Eau Claire, Wis./Memorial) and Samantha Sickbert (Woodbury, Minn.) have shared the duties over the past few seasons and will each compete for the spot with Nora Forbes, a first year from Edina, Minn.

Schedule

St. Olaf opens on Sept. 1 at UW-Eau Claire in the first of six games on the road. The Oles begin conference play on Sept. 14 at Hamline. The team's home opener is Sept. 21 against Wartburg.

St. Thomas

Coach: Sheila McGill

Career Record: 37-14-7 (3 seasons)

2009 Finish: 2nd (8-2-1 MIAC, 13-6-1 overall)

St. Thomas Season Preview

The St. Thomas women bring back 12 players from a 13-6-1 team that reached the NCAA playoffs for the second consecutive season. The returners include all three goalkeepers and six other starters, including senior all-conference honorees Lexie Fisher (first team) and Regina Horak (honorable mention).

The 2010 Tommies will look to continue their strong defense, which has recorded 19 shutouts and allowed just 27 goals over the last 39 games. St. Thomas was ranked as high as No. 13 nationally in 2008 and as high as No. 24 last season.

Sheila McGill starts her fourth season as UST head coach. Her 37-14-6 overall record includes a 22-7-4 mark in regular-season conference games.

The Tommies won the 2008 MIAC championship and came back to place second in the 12-team 2009 race. They won all five regular-season games against Wisconsin state university teams before falling 1-0 to UW-Stevens Point in the NCAA playoffs.

The Tommies are 16-0-3 in road games over the last two seasons. They will be tested this fall on the road in conference play with games at Concordia, Macalester, Augsburg, St. Catherine, St. Olaf and St. Ben's.

Six seniors are on hand to lead St. Thomas -- goalkeeper Amanda Domeier; forwards Fisher, Horak and Hannah Gikling; midfielder Kaitlin Denis; and defender Rachel Personius. Fisher has scored five goals and seven assists over the last two seasons. All nine of Horak's career goals have provided a game-winning margin, and St. Thomas is 9-0 when she scores a goal.

Junior defender Tess Hanson, an Academic All-America candidate with a 3.98 grade-point average, has started all 38 games on her career and helped the Tommies post 27-7-5 record in that span.

St. Thomas has 12 freshmen in 2010, including five players from the Twin Cities area, three from Rochester, and four from Wisconsin.

St. Thomas graduated two key scorers in All-American Kirsten Moran (seven goals, 10 assists in 2008 and 2009) and 2008 MIAC Player of the Year Erin Sprangers (71 points in 71 career games).

The team gets the distinction of opening the 2010-2011 St. Thomas athletics season as they play host to UW-Stout this Wednesday at 2 p.m. on the south campus field. The Toms won last year's game with the Blue Devils 1-0 on a goal late in the second overtime.