

2009 MIAC Women's Tennis Season Preview

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St. Paul, Minn. -- The three-month long journey to crown the 2009 MIAC Women's Tennis Champion has begun. As always, some of the most talented teams and individuals in all of Division III will take to the courts to challenge for the title of MIAC Champion.

Gustavus enters 2009 as the Coaches' pick to capture the conference championship. The Gusties have won the last 17 MIAC regular season titles. Carleton, St. Thomas, and Macalester should all challenge Gustavus for the top spot with talented and deep squads. Saint Benedict, St. Olaf, Saint Mary's, and St. Catherine should all be in the mix to compete for one of the six MIAC Playoff berths. Concordia, Bethel, and Hamline look to use the experiences of last season and make a move upwards in the conference standings.

The 2009 MIAC Women's Tennis Playoffs will take place May 1-2 on the campus of Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minn. Run in conjunction with the MIAC Men's Tennis Playoffs, the top six teams from the MIAC regular season standings will compete in the playoffs.

2009 MIAC Women's Tennis 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. Gustavus (10)
- 2. Carleton (1)
- 3. St. Thomas
- 4. Macalester
- 5. Saint Benedict
- 6. St. Olaf
- 7. Saint Mary's
- 8. St. Catherine
- 9. Concordia
- 10. Bethel
- 11. Hamline

Bethel

Coach: Dan Morton (10th season)
2008 Finish: 9th (5-14, 2-8 MIAC)

Bethel Season Preview
Bethel finished the 2008 season at 5-14 overall and 2-8 in the MIAC, which placed them a notch above their 2007 finish in a competitive conference. Despite losing their #1 singles player and All-MIAC selection Allison Kishaba, the Royals remain balanced as a blend of veteran returners as well as some new faces will take the court this year. In her first year on the team, All-MIAC selection Kristin Kishaba (Sr., Eau Claire, Wis.) was one of the pleasant surprises of last year's squad and is back for her senior year, looking forward to competing at the top of her game. Also returning are LeRoyce Chapman (Sr., Elk River, Minn.), Heather Blair (Jr., Glenwood, Minn.), Ashley Dohlen (Jr., Morris, Minn.), and Sarah LeVahn (Jr., Alexandria, Minn.). A handful of freshmen will round out the Royals roster as they compete to finish in the mid-upper echelon of the conference.

Carleton

Coach: Luciano Battaglini (2nd season)
2008 Finish: Tied 5th (7-10, 5-5 MIAC)

Carleton Season Preview

In his second season, head coach Luciano Battaglini is excited about his team's prospects for success in 2009. Carleton finished the fall season ranked 11th in central region by the Intercollegiate Tennis Association, and the Knights' roster balances experienced veterans with exciting newcomers.

Leading the returnees are a trio of juniors: Hannah Clemons (Prairie Village, Kan./Pembroke Hill); Hannah Goldberg (North Oaks, Minn./Mounds View) and Frances Leung (Oakland, Calif./Bishop O'Dowd). These three spent the majority of the 2008 season at or near the top of the singles lineup, with Goldberg and Leung also competing as the leading doubles tandem.

Leung played at either #1 or #2 singles during the last two seasons. Clemons competed everywhere from spots 1-4 a year ago, and Goldberg shuffled between the third, fourth and fifth slots.

Rookies Kathryn Schmidt (Hopkins, Minn.) and Erin Gudul (North Oaks, Minn./Mounds View) will challenge for spots at the top of the lineup after both turned in very strong showings this fall. Schmidt advanced to the quarterfinals in singles competition at the ITA Regionals and enters 2009 ranked 12th in the region. She joins Gudul as the region's eighth-ranked doubles duo after they advanced to the semifinals at the same tournament.

The addition of Schmidt and Gudul to the lineup, coupled with the return of Leung, Clemmons and Goldberg makes the Knights a deeper squad heading into the 2009.

Also competing for court time are senior Emily Ho (Wisconsin Rapids, Wis./Lincoln); sophomores Devin Daugherty (Eugene, Ore./South Eugene) and Amy Teller (Toms River, N.J./North); and first year Linnea Carlson (Evanston, Ill./Evanston Township), who was also a member of Carleton's nationally ranked soccer team.

Battaglini once again has his squad facing a challenging schedule in 2009. They will line up against three nationally-ranked programs, two more that are regionally ranked, and Division I opponent the University of Minnesota.

Concordia

Coach: Troy Hanestad (4th season)

2008 Finish: 10th (5-12, 1-9 MIAC)

Concordia Season Preview

One of the most improved teams in the Concordia athletic department this year might be the Cobber women's tennis team. Last year, Concordia snapped a streak of four years without a win in conference play. The Cobbers also went on to win five matches on the season which was more than they had in the 2006 and 2007 seasons combined. This year CC looks to continue their upward trend in the win column and will be looking to move up in the conference standings.

The reason for optimism from head coach Troy Hanestad and the rest of the Cobber team is that they return four of their top six singles players and have added several newcomers to the team. Concordia also sports a roster of 17 players which is the most in recent history.

The Cobbers return their No.1 singles player from last season. Senior Ashley Leister (Thief River Falls, Minn./Lincoln HS) was the team's top singles player for all but one match last year and the experience that she gained will help her in her third full season as the No.1 singles player.

Mollie Miller (Sr., Litchfield, Minn.), Amy Freeman (Jr., Staples, Minn./Staples-Motley HS) and Melanie Gail (So., Madison, Minn./Lac Qui Parle Valley HS) all return to give the Cobbers experience at the top of the lineup. Miller was the team's No.2 singles player last year while Freeman played at No.4 and Gail played 10 matches at No.5.

In doubles play Leister teamed with Gail as the top tandem last year. They could also be penciled into the same spot this season. Miller was part of the No.2 doubles team that posted the best record of any doubles teams for CC last year. She was 6-4 for the season on the second doubles team. Freeman is also an experienced doubles player who has won eight doubles matches in the past two seasons.

Concordia's lineup could feature a couple of newcomers at the top. Katie Edin (Fr., Staples, Minn./Staples-Motley HS) and Andrea Rognlien (Fargo, N.D./Oak Grove HS) both played in the ITA Midwest Region Tournament in the fall and both have extensive high school pedigrees. The two also paired for doubles play in the fall and had success at the tournament.

The 2009 Cobber women's tennis season should be another step up the success ladder as the team looks to progress from earning a historic conference win to making a move in the MIAC standings.

Gustavus

Coach: Jon Carlson (19th season)

2008 Finish: 1st (24-9, 10-0 MIAC)

Gustavus Season Preview

The Gustavus women's tennis team has high expectations for the 2009 season as five key members of the 2008 MIAC Championship team return including junior All-American Sierra Krebsbach (North Oaks, Minn.), junior Ali O'Neal (Stevens Point, Wis.), sophomore Samantha Frank (Mahtomedi, Minn.), and seniors Erica Dobson (Vadnais Heights, Minn.) and Laura Arnebeck (Hibbing, Minn.). That quintet helped the Gusties post a record of 25-9 last season including a fifth place finish at the NCAA Championships, which were hosted by Gustavus.

Krebsbach, who spent the fall semester studying abroad, will likely move into the #1 singles position vacated by All-America performer Jenni White, who graduated. O'Neal (who played in the #3 position), Frank (who played in the #4 position), and Dobson (who played in the #5 position) are all expected to fill in behind Krebsbach in the singles line-up. Coach Jon Carlson will look to senior Christine Reimer (Foley, Minn.), and first year performers Megan Gaard (Edina, Minn.) and Mary Roop (La Crosse, Wis.) to fill out the rest of the line-up. Gaard played very well in the fall as she advanced to the quarterfinals in singles and finished second in doubles with Samantha Frank at the ITA Midwest Regional.

Carlson feels like this group also has the potential to be very strong in doubles play, but he is going to tinker with the combinations early in the season before settling in on specific combinations.

Gustavus opens its spring season on Feb. 13-14 with matches against Winona State, the University of Nebraska-Omaha, and the University of North Dakota. The following weekend, the Gusties will host the first ever ITA Indoor Championships at the Swanson Tennis Center. Eight of the top Division III teams in the country will come to St. Peter to play for the ITA Indoor National Title.

Hamline

Coach: Jon Henning (2nd season)

2008 Finish: 11th (4-15, 0-10 MIAC)

Hamline Season Preview

With many faces returning from last year's team, and new faces ready to contribute, the Hamline University women's tennis program looks to be a threat in the MIAC this year. The difference with the 2009 edition of the Pipers will be the team's depth. "We didn't lose one player last year and added many key, talented players who are going to contribute immediately this year," said head coach Jon Henning.

The Piper women's tennis team is looking to improve on their 4-15 mark from a year ago which included a 0-10 record in conference play. Returning are the two captains, at first and second singles, respectively. The pair also partners at first doubles - Kelly Gust (Sr., East Grand Forks, Minn.) and Liz Gunderson (Sr., New Prague, Minn.). With a year of experience at the top positions under their belt, these two are very motivated to take their games to the next level. Kristen Kiemele (So., Eagan, Minn.) and Sara Mitambo (Sr., Minneapolis, Minn.) have worked diligently in the off-season to advance their games to be threats in the MIAC. Also, returners Kristin Sczublewski (So., Pierz, Minn.), Ashley Johnson (Jr., Maplewood, Minn.), and Kate Burnevik (So., Minneapolis, Minn.) look to contend for spots in the top six.

Several new names should contribute to the women's team as well. Transfers Kelsey Eatherton (So., Spring Lake Park, Minn.) and Andrea Kirsch (So., Champlin Park, Minn.) come to Hamline looking to compete for a spot in the lineup along with first-years Nicole Krier (Woodbury, Minn.) and Kristen Fosness (Champlin Park, Minn.).

The 2009 Pipers will have their work cut out for them in the much-improved MIAC Conference. It's going to take a great attitude and work ethic to attain their goals of making the MIAC tournament for the first time since the six-team format came to be.

Macalester

Coach: Jason Muhl (3rd season)

2008 Finish: 3rd (15-5, 8-2 MIAC)

Macalester Season Preview

Two years ago, the Scots matched their win total from the previous three seasons combined when they went 10-14. Then last spring, the team made an even bigger leap and put together the most successful season in the history of the program when Macalester went 15-5 and took third place in the MIAC standings at 8-2. Although the No. 4 and No. 5 players in the singles lineup graduated, Macalester is looking forward to another big season in '09 under MIAC Coach of the Year Jason Muhl.

Macalester is especially talented at the top of the singles and doubles lineup and returns last season's top two players in Angie Horner (Jr., Bismarck, N.D. / Century) and Stephanie Lee (Jr., Camarillo, Calif. / Oaks Christian). Horner re-wrote the program's record books as a sophomore, going 19-1 at No. 1 singles and joining forces with Lee to go 18-2 at No. 1 doubles.

Lee also went 15-5 in singles play (8-2 in the MIAC) at No. 2 singles. Like Horner and Lee, teammate Amanda Wenzel (Jr., Green Bay, Wis. / Southwest) was honored with All-MIAC status after going 8-2 in the MIAC and 13-6 overall at the third position in the singles lineup.

Saint Benedict

Coach: Scott Larsen (3rd season)

2008 Finish: 4th (13-9, 6-4 MIAC)

Saint Benedict Season Preview

Despite the loss of four seniors from 2008, the College of Saint Benedict tennis team looks to be another top competitor within the MIAC in 2009. The addition of six first-year women to the returning players has created a lot of excitement for the Blazers. The team will be led by juniors Katie Rudnitski and Rachel Tiegs as well as sophomores Kylie Huether and Elissa Husby. The Blazer tennis team has a very talented and deep team with all ten players capable of contributing immediately to the success of the 09 season. The Blazers hope to continue their recent successes in the MIAC by finishing in the top half of the conference again this year. They will rely heavily on the singles depth of their team and hope to establish some quality doubles teams as the first-year players gain experience.

St. Catherine

Coach: Ben Hageseth (1st season)

2008 Finish: 8th (9-9, 4-6 MIAC)

St. Catherine Season Preview

The College of St. Catherine tennis team enters their 2009 season with last year's assistant coach Ben Hageseth taking over as the head coach and Athletic Director Eric Stacey resuming his duties as assistant coach. Last season the Wildcats finished MIAC play with a 4-6 record (9-9 overall), and this season they hope to continue to improve their standings in the MIAC.

In his first season directing the Wildcats, Hageseth will have a lineup that includes five of last year's six varsity players. Leading that group of returners is senior Susie Hallquist. She earned MIAC All-Conference honors last season and will strive to end her college career with another strong season. Junior Jenna Olson is once again expected to join with Hallquist at the top of the Wildcats lineup in both singles and doubles competition.

In addition to his five returners, Hageseth will look to first-year athlete Lauren Beadnell to help bolster the middle of the Wildcats lineup this season.

Coach Hageseth noted that "we have a very young team and we will be looking to build on the end of last season and improve throughout the year."

The Wildcats open their season on February 10, 2009 when they play Northwestern College.

Saint Mary's

Coach: Jeff Halberg (11th season)

2008 Finish: Tied 5th (15-8, 5-5 MIAC)

Saint Mary's Season Preview

It was a year of ups and downs for the Saint Mary's University women's tennis team.

On the up side, the Cardinal women enjoyed a 15 win season.

On the down side, when the MIAC Tournament kicked off in late April, SMU was not on the invite list.

And that, Cardinal head coach Jeff Halberg hopes, will change this season.

"Our women's team enjoyed a lot of success last year," said Halberg, whose team kicks off their season on Feb. 7, with the SMU women are entertaining Winona State. "But we weren't able to close out the season the way we wanted to, with a conference tournament berth."

"Hopefully we can clear that final hurdle this year."

To do so, however, the team will have to overcome the loss of all-conference performers. Aubrey Hirsch graduated and Kayla Lenz did not return for her sophomore season.

"It's tough to lose quality performers like that," said Halberg. "But every year you lose players and have to find people to step into those spots."

Finding replacements for Hirsch and Lenz will be no easy task for Halberg, but the veteran head coach's roster is filled with talented individuals, led by seniors Sara Clements (La Crosse, Wis.) and Brianna Placek (Greendale, Wis.).

"It's like putting a puzzle together," Halberg said of his search for the perfect lineup. "Hopefully, I can find a way to get all the pieces to fit."

St. Olaf

Coach: Scott Nesbit (19th season)

2008 Finish: Tied 5th (6-8, 5-5 MIAC)

St. Olaf Season Preview

The St. Olaf Women's Tennis team enters the season returning all players from last year's team. The Oles will look to sophomore Abigail Ho and junior Aimee Ny to lead the team, players who each earned all-conference honors last spring. Ho was 9-3 from her No. 1 singles spot while Ny was 7-4 in MIAC matches.

First year additions include Claire Carlson, Christine Muller and Caitlin Harper. Assistant Coach Kristin Stets rejoins the Oles and will be joined by second year coach Jacie Haroldson.

Last season, the Oles reached the semifinals in the MIAC playoffs, falling to conference champions Gustavus. The Oles ended with a 6-8 season record, going 5-5 in the MIAC.

St. Thomas

Coach: Terry Peck (14th season)

2008 Finish: 2nd (17-4, 9-1 MIAC)

St. Thomas Season Preview

Head coach Terry Peck, who is beginning his 19th season at St. Thomas, coached 500th match with the Tommies in 2008 and will reach 400 victories in 2009. He has a combined men's and women's dual record of 397-137 (.744 win%). The Tommie women have built a 162-42 dual record over the last 10 seasons, including a 48-14 record since 2006.

The Tommies graduated two seniors (Dana Vilar and Brittany Bachman) from a 17-4 team of 2008. That squad lost twice to Gustavus (5-0 and 8-1) and also lost a pair of 5-4 decisions. Leading the returners are juniors Ali Bruflodt; Hadley Syverud and Suzanne Brophy, sophomores Alexandra Frank and Madeline Gail; and senior Laura Thomas.

Last season, Bruflodt went 16-3, most at No. 2 singles. Frank was 11-10 at Nos. 1-2 singles and 17-3 in doubles. Gail was 12-1 at Nos. 4-6 singles and 9-1 in doubles. Hadley Syverud went 16-2 in doubles.