

2019 MIAC Women's Tennis Preview & Preseason Coaches' Poll

Posted: Jan 24, 2019

BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – Gustavus Adolphus College will enter the 2019 Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) women's tennis season as the favorites to take home the conference title, as the defending champs secured eight of a possible 10 first-place votes in the annual Preseason Coaches' Poll, released on Thursday.

Despite winning the MIAC Playoff crown each of the last three seasons and claiming at least a share of the regular season conference title in three of the last four years, this is the first time since 2012 that MIAC coaches have picked the Gusties to win the league. Gustavus will enter the 2019 campaign ranked No. 28 in the nation and No. 5 in the Central Region by the Intercollegiate Tennis Association (ITA). Sophomore **Ginger Valentine** (Delano, Minn.) will also open the year in the national spotlight, having earned All-America status when she won the singles championship at the ITA Regionals last September. Valentine wrapped up the fall season by taking eighth place at the ITA Cup and is currently No. 17 in the nation in the most recent singles rankings. The Gusties are also set to return senior **Briana Hartmann** (Owatonna, Minn.), who won the 2017 ITA Midwest Regional and went undefeated in MIAC play as a junior last season.

Carleton received one first-place vote and 84 total points to come in at No. 2 in the Preseason Coaches' Poll. No. 31 in the nation and No. 7 in the Central Region in the latest ITA rankings, the Knights have suffered just two regular season conference losses combined in the last three years. Senior **Kristina Conrad** (Plymouth, Minn. | Robbinsdale Armstrong) and junior **Madeline Prins** (Pacific Palisades, Calif. | Palisades Charter) will open the spring season ranked No. 22 in the country after finishing the 2018 ITA Midwest Regional as the doubles runners-up.

Bethel finished right behind Carleton in the preseason balloting with 83 points, good for No. 3 in the Coaches' Poll. The Royals earned their fourth trip to the MIAC Playoffs in the last six seasons under the continued guidance of MIAC Co-Coach of the Year **Drew Fernelius** in 2018. Bethel will aim to continue climbing up in the conference standings in 2019 and the sisterly tandem of sophomore **Maggie Riermann** (Stillwater, Minn. | Mahtomedi) and first-year **Grace Riermann** (Stillwater, Minn. | Mahtomedi) will play a key role in that effort. The Riermann sisters earned All-America status in September when they became the first Royals ever to win the Midwest Region doubles championship. The pair will open the season ranked No. 10 in the nation.

St. Thomas received two first-place votes and totaled 82 points in the balloting to come in at No. 4 in the Coaches' Poll. The Tommies will feature a youthful roster again in 2019, with no seniors and just three juniors -- **Natasha Hood** (London, England), **Paige McLeod** (Vadnais Heights, Minn. | Benilde-St. Margaret's) and **Taylor McLeod** (Vadnais Heights, Minn. | Benilde-St. Margaret's). UST will also rely heavily on talented first-year competitors, including **Olivia Paradise** (Mahtomedi, Minn.), who is one of eight rookies on the 16-woman roster.

St. Catherine received 54 points in the Preseason Poll to come in at No. 5. The Wildcats have reached the MIAC Playoffs each of the last eight seasons. **Bri Dorr** (Princeton, Minn.) competed in the No. 1 slot for much of her sophomore campaign last season and figures to play a key role in the team's success again this year. Dorr went 1-1 in ITA Regional play back in September.

Saint Benedict collected 52 points in the balloting to rank No. 6 in the Preseason Coaches' Poll. The Bennies return all but two competitors from their 2018 roster; however, all four of the team's juniors spent the fall semester studying abroad, opening the door for five first-years and a trio of sophomores to gain valuable experience ahead of the spring season. One of those sophomores is **Kayla McIver** (Foley, Minn.), who was named the team's Most Valuable Player in her debut season last year after leading CSB with 15 wins in singles action.

After returning to the MIAC Playoffs for the first time in a decade, Macalester received 45 points to land at No. 7 in the Poll. **Emma Baker** (Bentonville, Ark.) is among three sophomores back in the lineup in 2019. Baker went 5-2 in doubles play in her first season as a Scot and began her sophomore campaign with another doubles victory, this time alongside fellow second-year **Natalie Sorajja** (Rochester, Minn. | Mayo) in the opening round of the ITA Midwest Regionals last September.

Saint Mary's received 42 points in the Preseason Coaches' Poll, good for eighth place. The Cardinals closed out the 2018 season by winning eight of their last 11 matches and recorded 9-0 sweeps in five of the team's 12 wins on the year. Senior **Laura Sondag** (West St. Paul, Minn. | South St. Paul) was an All-MIAC honoree as both a singles and doubles competitor last season after sharing the team lead with a career-high 16 singles wins to go along with a team-best 16 doubles victories. Sondag has played 59 straight matches at No. 1 singles and will enter the year ranked fifth in program history with 43 singles wins and second all-time in doubles wins with 40.



Ginger Valentine earned All-America honors after winning the ITA Regionals last September.

St. Olaf collected 37 points in the Preseason Coaches' Poll to come in at No. 9. **Sabrina Barboza** (Katy, Texas | Seven Lakes) started her sophomore season on the right foot, winning her first round singles match at the 2018 ITA Midwest Regionals and teaming with **Emily Otteson** (Red Wing, Minn.) to advance to the round of 32 with a pair of wins in doubles play.

Hamline received 20 points to come in at No. 10 in the Coaches' Poll. The Pipers have a rising star in sophomore **Ali Kopiecki** (Andover, Minn. | Mounds View), who became the first HU competitor ever to advance to the ITA Midwest Regional when she did so last September. Kopiecki - ranked No. 35 in the nation to start the 2019 season - went 16-3 in her debut last year en route to becoming Hamline's first All-Conference honoree since 2009.

Concordia collected 10 points to land at No. 11 in the Coaches' Poll. The Cobbers will enter a new era in 2019 under the guidance of former Concordia competitor **Zach Zitur**, who was named the head coach of both the men's and women's programs last August. Concordia's 2018 roster featured just two upperclassmen and six first- or second-year competitors. Among those six was **Jenna Forknell** (Fargo, N.D. | Davies). The rising sophomore competed at the No. 1 singles spot all season, going 8-11 on the year with a .500 mark in her final ten matches.

Complete 2019 Preseason Coaches' Poll

Coaches voted for every team in the conference except their own team. Points were assigned for each vote (10 for first, 9 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.

2019 MIAC Women's Tennis Preseason Coaches' Poll

Rank	Institution (First-Place Votes)	Total
1.	Gustavus (8)	96
2.	Carleton (1)	84
3.	Bethel	83
4.	St. Thomas (2)	82
5.	St. Catherine	54
6.	Saint Benedict	52
7.	Macalester	45
8.	Saint Mary's	42
9.	St. Olaf	37
10.	Hamline	20
11.	Concordia	10

2019 MIAC Women's Tennis Playoffs

The 2019 MIAC Women's Tennis Playoffs will include the top six teams in the Conference standings, squaring off in a single-elimination tournament. Teams seeded No. 3 through No. 6 will square off on May 1 in the quarterfinals, with the winners meeting the top two seeds in the semifinals on May 3. The championship match will be held May 5 on the home court of the top remaining seed. The winner will receive the MIAC's automatic bid to the 2019 NCAA Division III Women's Tennis Tournament.