

2020 MIAC Women's Tennis Preview

Posted: Jan 22, 2020

BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – For the third time in the last four seasons, Carleton College will open the women's tennis season as the favorite to take home the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) title. The defending regular-season and playoff champions secured nine of a possible 10 first-place votes in the annual Preseason Coaches' Poll, released on Wednesday.

Carleton received 99 points in the preseason polling and placed no lower than second on any ballot. The Knights are ranked No. 26 in the [Oracle/ITA Preseason Top 40 Poll](#) and came in at No. 5 in the organization's Central Region rankings on January 16. Carleton is set to return a trio of 2019 All-MIAC honorees this spring, including senior **Madeline Prins**. The Pacific Palisades, Calif. native picked up All-Conference honors in both singles and doubles play last year. She and doubles partner **Elizabeth Yim** are ranked No. 16 in the nation as a tandem to start the year.



Madeline Prins and the Knights are picked to repeat as MIAC champions in 2020.

Bethel is second in the MIAC Preseason Coaches' Poll with 89 points and one first-place vote. The Royals - ranked No. 36 in the nation and ninth in the Central Region to begin 2020 - set a single-season program record with 20 wins last spring and reached the MIAC Playoff title match for the first time in school history. Bethel returns sisters and two-time defending ITA Midwest Regional doubles champions **Grace Riermann** and **Maggie Riermann** to the lineup this year. The duo is ranked No. 15 in the nation, while Grace ranks 16th among singles competitors after winning the ITA Midwest Regional singles championship last fall.

Gustavus was not far behind in the preseason balloting with 85 points and one first-place vote. The Gusties will begin 2020 as the No. 37-ranked team in the nation and hold the No. 10 spot in the ITA Central Region Rankings. Gustavus has advanced to at least the semifinal round of the MIAC Playoffs every year since its current format was established in 2007. **Ginger Valentine** - Division III's No. 17-ranked singles competitor - is back for her junior season and already got a taste of competition back in September when she put together a 7-3 singles record and finished as the ITA Midwest Regional runner-up. Valentine and doubles partner **Simona Potockova** are ranked No. 24 in Division III to start the year.

St. Thomas picked up 68 points in the preseason balloting to come in at No. 4 in the Coaches' Poll. The Tommies reached the semifinal round of the MIAC Playoffs for the eighth consecutive season in 2019 and will look to make it nine in a row in 2020. Senior **Taylor McLeod** will be back in the lineup this spring after earning All-MIAC accolades in both singles and doubles play last year. Taylor reached the fourth round of singles play at last September's ITA regional and teamed with her sister, **Paige McLeod**, to post a 3-1 record in doubles action.

St. Catherine earned 67 points in the balloting to come in just behind the Tommies at No. 5 in the Coaches' Poll. The Wildcats have reached the MIAC Playoffs eight times in the last decade and return an experienced lineup that features four seniors this spring. Among those seniors is two-time All-MIAC selection **Alisha Wiedmeier**, who posted a 9-5 record at No. 2 singles last year. Wiedmeier went 2-2 at the ITA Midwest Regional in September.

St. Olaf came in at No. 6 in the Preseason Poll with 47 points in the balloting. The Oles returned to the MIAC Playoffs for the first time since 2016 last spring. Key to St. Olaf's success has been junior **Sabrina Barboza** who has occupied the No. 1 spot in both singles and doubles play since her debut season in 2018. Barboza most recently reached the round of 32 in singles play and round of 16 in doubles action at the 2019 ITA Midwest Regional last September.

Saint Benedict picked up 46 points in the balloting to land right behind the Oles at No. 7 in the Poll. CSB will look to end a four-year postseason drought by reaching the MIAC Playoffs for the first time since 2015 this spring. Sophomore **Lily Fredericks** is one to watch for, as the Eden Prairie, Minn. native rattled off ten straight singles victories to begin her collegiate career last year and became the first CSB tennis player in at least a decade to reach the third round of the ITA Regional tournament when she did so last September.

Macalester logged 43 points to come in at No. 8 in the Coaches' Poll. The Scots reached the MIAC Playoffs for the second time in program history two years ago and will return five players from that 2018 lineup in 2020, including junior **Natali Sorajja**. Sorajja posted nine wins playing at No. 2 and No. 3 singles last season. She recorded a pair of victories at the 2019 ITA Midwest Regionals to become one of two Scots - along with her sister and doubles partner, **Amalin Sorajja** - to reach the third round of the tournament.

Saint Mary's received 26 points in the Preseason Coaches' Poll. The Cardinals closed out the 2019 campaign with victories in 12 of their final 14 matches, including a program-record 11-match winning streak. The Cards reached the MIAC Playoffs for the second time in the last three seasons and return a handful of experienced competitors from those postseason teams, including senior **Cassandra Barr**, who has won 11 singles matches in each of her three seasons at Saint Mary's.

Concordia received 20 points in the balloting. The Cobbers return three competitors from last year's squad, including **Jenna Forknell** who won a trio of matches at No. 1 singles last year. Forknell already has one win under her belt this season with an opening-round victory at the 2019 ITA Midwest Regional last September.

Hamline received 15 points in the Preseason Poll. Junior **Ali Kopiecki** went 11-2 for the Pipers at No. 1 singles last season and is one of six competitors back in the lineup this spring. Kopiecki became Hamline's first All-MIAC honoree in nine seasons as a first-year competitor and was the program's first-ever All-America selection after finishing as the regional runner-up at the 2018 ITA Midwest Regional.

Complete 2020 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.

2020 MIAC Women's Tennis Preseason Coaches' Poll

Rank	Institution (First-Place Votes)	Total
1.	Carleton (9)	99
2.	Bethel (1)	89
3.	Gustavus (1)	85
4.	St. Thomas	68
5.	St. Catherine	67
6.	St. Olaf	47
7.	Saint Benedict	46
8.	Macalester	43
9.	Saint Mary's	26
10.	Concordia	20
11.	Hamline	15

2020 MIAC Women's Tennis Playoffs

The 2020 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 matchup on April 28 in the quarterfinals, with the winners meeting the top two seeds in the semifinals on April 30. The championship match will be held on May 2 on the home court of the top remaining seed. The winner will receive the MIAC's automatic bid to the 2020 NCAA Division III Women's Tennis Tournament.

Odds and Ends

-Two women's tennis coaches will be celebrating three-plus decades in the MIAC this season, with St. Olaf's **Scott Nesbit** entering his 31st season and Gustavus' **Jon Carlson** coming into year 30. **Jeff Halberg** is the next-longest tenured women's coach in the conference, entering his 22nd season at Saint Mary's, followed by **Jason Muhl** - who has spent the last 14 years at Macalester - and **Luciano Battaglini** - who is in his 13th season at Carleton.

-Six MIAC women's tennis coaches are alumni of conference schools. Concordia's **Zach Zitur**, Gustavus' **Jon Carlson**, and Hamline's **Spencer Jones** are all coaching at their alma maters, while Gustavus grad **Megan Gaard** is at St. Catherine, St. Olaf alumnus **Jeff Halberg** is at Saint Mary's, and St. Thomas Hall of Famer **Drew Fernelius** is at Bethel.

-There are three new tennis coaches in the MIAC this season, with **Spencer Jones** at Hamline, **Ken Cychosz** at St. Thomas and **Chris Kuna** at St. Olaf. Jones and Cychosz will coach both the men's and women's teams for the Pipers and Tommies, respectively, while Kuna will take over the Oles' men's program.

Celebrating a Century

The MIAC is celebrating its 100-year anniversary throughout the 2019-20 season. The conference's Centennial celebration will highlight the many outstanding moments, memories, and individuals who helped build the MIAC over the last century. Initiatives will include student-athlete, coach, and administrator spotlights, historical photos showcasing the evolution of MIAC sports and teams through the years, recognition of former MIAC student-athletes who continued their time in the conference as coaches and administrators, and more. The official #MIAC100 webpage is housed at <https://www.miacathletics.com/miac100>.