

2008 MIAC Women's Cross Country Championship Preview

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St. Paul, Minn. – The 2008 MIAC Women's Cross Country Championships will feature some of the best runners in the region as nine of the top 11 finishers from 2007 return. The chase for the team title will be equally as competitive as five MIAC teams are ranked in the top 10 in the Central Region. The MIAC Championships will be held Saturday, November 1 at Como Golf Course in St. Paul, Minn. The women's race will begin at 3 p.m., after the men's race which starts at 2 p.m.

St. Thomas enters the 2008 Championships as the two-time defending team champion. The Tommies have won a MIAC-best 14 team titles, are ranked 14th nationally and third in the region, but will face stiff competition from Carleton. The Knights are ranked 11th in the nation and second in the region and will look to knock St. Thomas off the top spot. After winning team titles in 2004 and 2005, Carleton finished second to the Tommies in 2006 and second by only two points in 2007.

St. Olaf, Bethel, and Gustavus are the three other regionally ranked MIAC teams. The Oles, ranked fifth in the region and 27th in the nation, have finished third behind St. Thomas and Carleton in each of the last three seasons. Led by talented seniors and good depth, St. Olaf should once again challenge for a top three spot. Ranked seventh in the region, Bethel features the reigning MIAC champion in junior Marie Borner. A talented supporting cast around Borner should provide the Royals the ability to be in the chase for the team title. Gustavus, currently tenth in the region, have had a strong fall season and look to break back into the top five in the conference after finishing sixth a year ago. The Gusties are still fairly young, but they have good depth and should have five competitive finishers.

The next seven teams in the conference aren't regionally ranked, but all could play a big factor in the conference standings both individually and in the team competition. Saint Benedict has traditionally been a tough competitor and Concordia, Macalester, and Hamline all have talented runners leading their squads. St. Catherine, Saint Mary's, and Augsburg will feature young teams with the goal of improving upon last season's performance.

Nine All-MIAC athletes from 2007 return to Como Golf Course on Saturday led by the top two finishers from a year ago, Marie Borner of Bethel and Katie Theisen of St. Thomas. Other 2007 All-Conference returners include St. Olaf's Jenna Carlson, Carleton's Sarah Forzley, Macalester's Erin Lowrey, Concordia's Hailey Brenden, Carleton's Laura Roach, Hamline's Margot Branigan (who transferred from Saint Benedict), and St. Thomas' Kelly Russ. Carleton's Simone Childs-Walker and St. Olaf's Annie Knutson have had strong seasons thus far and have been MIAC Athletes of the Week along with Borner, Theisen, and Brenden.

2008 MIAC Cross Country Championships Website

St. Thomas is planning to produce a live webcast of Saturday's MIAC Men's and Women's Championships, starting at approximately 1:45 p.m. Besides audio, some live highlights and results will be posted as they become available. Go to www.mnsportsnetwork.com and scroll to the MIAC CC channel.

Augsburg

Coach: Dennis Barker (15th season)

2007 Championship Finish: 12th

Augsburg Championship Preview

Veteran head coach **Dennis Barker** and the Augsburg College women's cross country team has its goals set on moving up a notch or two in the conference standings in 2008. The Auggies finished 12th at the MIAC meet last season and are looking to improve at this year's conference race.

The young Auggie squad has been led all season by **Jennifer Lovering** (SO, Bemidji, Minn.), who has recorded three top-20 finishes so far this season. She set a personal-best time at this year's Wisconsin-Eau Claire Invitational, posting a 23:34.39. Lovering just missed All-Conference Honorable Mention honors in 2007, and will be looking to break into the top 25 at this year's meet.

The Auggies have been aided this season by the return of **Sadie Dietrich** (SR, Luverne, Minn.), who was the team's top runner in 2006, but took last season off to study abroad in China. Dietrich has picked up where she left off, setting a personal-best time this season at the Wisconsin-Eau Claire Invitational when she recorded a 25:05.15. Dietrich will be looking to improve upon her 62nd place finish from two years ago at the conference meet.

Also having good seasons for the Auggies are first-years **Kacie Bahr** (Brainerd, Minn.) and **Jennifer Pulscher** (Colorado Springs, Colo./Liberty HS). Bahr and Pulscher have both finished in the top seven for the Auggies all season and will look to have a strong race in their first MIAC conference meet.

The youthful Augsburg squad has seen nearly every single team member record a personal-best time this season and has hopes of continuing the trend at this weekend's championships.

Bethel

Coach: Jim Timp (4th season)

2007 Championship Finish: 4th

Bethel Championship Preview

Last season, Bethel's women's cross country team placed 4th at the conference meet, led by Marie Borner's (Jr., Cottage Grove, Minn.) first place finish, which earned her MIAC Athlete of the Year honors. All-Conference runner Nikki Umhoefer finished third overall, and the two of them went on to become Bethel's fifth and sixth women's cross country NCAA All-Americans by virtue of finishing in the top 35 at the national meet.

Although the women's squad lost Umhoefer to graduation, the 2008 Royals look to build upon their success of last year. They will once again be led by the defending conference champ and NCAA All-American, Marie Borner, who recently finished first out of 400 runners at the Brooks Invitational hosted by UW-Oshkosh. Along with Borner is co-captain Heather Jelen (Sr., Sioux Falls, S.D.), who missed last year to study in Washington, D.C. Jelen has finished in the top 20 in Bethel's last two races and will be a key factor in how the Royals place at the conference meet this year. And while Borner has certainly done her share to make headlines, she and Jelen have been joined by a very strong supporting cast that has lifted the Royals as high as 27th in the USTFCCCA national poll, and sixth in the regional poll. Alex Potter (So., Windom, Minn.) has been a consistent front-runner in an outstanding sophomore class that includes Julia Holm (Northfield, Minn.), Kristin Mork (Cambridge, Minn.), Kayla Jelen (Sioux Falls, S.D.), and Kristen Tengwall (Chisago Lakes, Minn.).

Coach Timp says, "I'm very optimistic about our team this year. Marie has been great, but what's been most encouraging is the other runners around her. There are schools that have only one really good runner and the rest of the team is marginal at best. I take a look at how we've placed throughout the season, and I know that's not the case with us. We've got a lot of women running very well right now, and we've faced some really good competition so far. Even with Nikki gone, I think we'll do better than we did last year."

Carleton

Coach: Donna Ricks (16th season)

2007 Championship Finish: 2nd

Carleton Championship Preview

Carleton's overall team depth will be a key factor in determining if the Knights can claim their first conference crown since 2005. Donna Ricks' team finished second in each of the last two MIAC meets, but a balance of returning All-MIAC performers and several first-years that have burst onto the scene give the Knights confidence heading into the conference championship.

The Knights return a trio of All-MIAC performers. Juniors Sarah Forzley (South Windsor, Conn.) and Laura Roach (Lakeville, Minn./Lakeville North) earned all-conference honors last year as Carleton came up only two points shy of the team title. Forzley placed fifth with a time of 22:48, while Roach was ninth at 23:02. Senior Karen Campbell (Rochester, N.Y./Brighton) raced to an eighth-place finish and All-MIAC distinction at the 2006 meet.

Simone Childs-Walker (Fy./Seattle, Wash./Lakeside) has been Carleton's most dominant racer this season, helping propel Carleton to as high as No. 10 in the USTFCCCA national poll. She has won her last two races and has finished in the top 10 in every race she's run this fall.

First-years Taylor Ffitch (Portland, Ore./St. Mary's Academy) and Alison Smyth (Billings, Mont./Billings West) have consistently been among the scorers on this year's team. Meanwhile, seniors Kate Meyer (Saint Paul, Minn./St. Paul Academy); Lindsey Nietmann (Kirkland, Wash.) and Hannah Specht (Shelburne Falls, Mass./Mohawk Trail Regional) further add to the experience of this year's squad.

Carleton has finished among the top two teams at six of the last seven MIAC Championships.

Concordia

Coach: Marv Roeske (10th season)

2007 Championship Finish: 7th

Concordia Championship Preview

The 2008 MIAC Championship is shaping up to be a muddled picture for Concordia. The Cobbers have a chance to finish anywhere from the top five all the way to ninth place. CC enters the conference meet on the heels of winning their first multi-team championship since the 2001 season. Concordia won the team title at the Crown College Invitational on Oct. 18 and has also posted a pair of runner-up finishes during the season. The Cobbers finished second at the Black Hills Invite and then again at the Jimmie Invite hosted by Jamestown College.

For the second straight year, the Cobbers will be led by Hailey Brenden (So., Rothsay, Minn.). Brenden earned her first collegiate individual championship at the Crown College Invite on Oct. 18. She ran a personal best 22:54.3 on the hilly course and bettered her time at last year's NCAA Regional Meet where she earned All-Region honors. Brenden has recorded top four finishes in five of the six races this season and has also posted top two finishes in three of the last four meets she has raced.

Concordia has had several runners step up throughout the season. Behind Brenden will be the trio of Brittney Christianson (Sr., Glenburn, N.D.), Anna Hagen (Jr., East Grand Forks, Minn.) and Rachel Pederson (So., Plymouth, Minn./Wayzata HS). Christianson has been the team's No.2 runner in five of the six meets this season and is coming off a third-place finish at the Crown Invite. Hagen has also found success in 2008. She has been a solid No.3 runner and has posted back-to-back top 10 finishes. Pederson finished in eighth place at the Crown Invite and owns the other No.2 team finish this season when she captured 10th place at the Black Hills Invite.

Cobber head coach Marv Roeske is full of anticipation for this year's conference meet as he knows there are a group of five teams that are all bunched in the middle of the MIAC and if one of those can have a breakout meet, then they can position themselves for an outstanding top five finish.

Gustavus

Coach: Jed Friedrich (5th season)

2007 Championship Finish: 6th

Gustavus Championship Preview

The Gustavus women will be looking to move back into the top five at the MIAC Championships after slipping to sixth place a year ago. Coach Jed Friedrich returns four of his top seven runners from last year's conference meet squad. That group includes senior Kelly Chaudoin (Ely, Minn.), who finished 53rd, and sophomores Megan Lundgren (Mankato, Minn./East), who finished 21st, Kate Reins (Osseo, Minn.), who finished 39th, and Brooke Beskau (Hastings, Minn.), who finished 59th.

Beskau has been the Gusties top finisher in every meet this season and appears to have an opportunity to place in the top 20. Chaudoin has been the squad's #2 runner, followed by Vanessa Jones in the #3 spot. Jones transferred from Illinois Wesleyan where she finished 34th at the CCIW meet last year.

First- year runner Danielle Burgmeier (Plymouth, Minn./Wayzata) has consistently finished in the #4 spot, followed by sophomores Kathy Westergren (Duluth, Minn./East) and Megan Lundgren in the fifth and sixth spots. It appears that the Gusties will be battling St. Ben's, Hamline, and Macalester for that fifth place position behind frontrunners Carleton, Bethel, St. Thomas, and St. Olaf.

Hamline

Coach: Paul Schmaedeke (3rd season)

2007 Championship Finish: 9th

Hamline Championship Preview

With the new-found leadership of junior transfer Margot Branigan (Roseville, Minn.) pacing the Pipers in 2008, head coach Paul Schmaedeke will be looking to the Hamline women's cross country team to make a marked improvement over a ninth place finish in 2007.

Branigan has been the top performer in the 2008 fall races for Hamline, leading them across the line in each of their races this year, including a 17th place performance in the prestigious Roy Griak Invite and winning the St. Catherine Invite by 12 seconds over her nearest competitor. Schmaedeke will be looking to her to be one of the top finishers in the MIAC at the championships.

As the Pipers return all of their key runners from their 2007 campaign, a pack of veteran cross country runners have been helping to lead Hamline across the line this fall. Seniors Freya Fitzer (North Oaks, Minn.) and Katie Drinane (Roseville, Minn.) have been joined by juniors Ashley Cooper (Stillwater, Minn.) and Rachel Glissman (Omaha, Neb.) and sophomore Jessica Kociscak (Ramsey, Minn.) at the top of the Piper scoring finishes this season.

Schmaedeke's senior returners, Fitzer and Drinane, continued to improve steadily throughout the summer and fall, as Fitzer was the second Piper to cross the line at the Roy Griak and Drinane has consistently been at the top of the Piper performance lists this season, as well.

Kociscak has a strong debut season last year in cross country, improved tremendously as the Pipers headed into the track season, and has shown no signs of ending her climb up the standings this fall. Most recently, at the Tori Neubauer Invite at UW-La Crosse, Kociscak was the third Piper to finish the race after doing the same at the Roy Griak.

Branigan is not the only new-comer to the 2008 Piper cross country team who has brought veteran experience to Saturday races. "Super senior" Sara Burns (LeSueur, Minn.) returned for her final semester of classes and joined the team after four years of volleyball and track competition. The cross country rookie is hardly inexperienced in collegiate running, following several all-conference track performances and appearances at the Drake Relays.

Schmaedeke's Pipers will be running in the MIAC championships with this unusual mix of experience amongst his student-athletes, as he has impressive newcomers with a veteran student-athlete mentality running alongside several key roster returners. Look to the Pipers to carry their success this fall into an improved 2008 conference standing at the end of the race.

Macalester

Coach: Jordan Cushing (9th season)

2007 Championship Finish: 8th

Macalester Championship Preview

Two-time all-conference runner Erin Lowrey (Jr., Whitefish Bay, Wis.) placed seventh at the MIAC championships a year ago and leads the Scots into this year's race as Macalester attempts to improve on last season's eighth-place finish. Lowrey has been the team's top runner in every meet this fall, placing 19th at the Les Duke Invitational, eighth at the St. Olaf Invitational, 18th at the Roy Griak Invitational and 24th at the Tori Neubauer Invitational. She has two top-seven MIAC finishes in her first two years and is coming into this year's conference meet in top form.

The team's No. 2 runner is Margaret Ho (So., Wisconsin Rapids, Wis.), a transfer from St. Olaf. Ho placed 29th at the MIAC meet last year as a member of the Oles and has been second to Lowrey in every race this fall, most recently taking 139th at the Griak and 81st at the Neubauer.

The Scots will need some runners to step up and reduce the gap between them and Mac's top pair, and top contenders to do so include Libby Tollefson (So., Billings, Mont.), Emily Dunn (Sr., Madison, Wis. / East), Callie Thuma (Jr., Pittsburg, Pa. / Schenley) and Emilie Schur (Jr., Pagosa Springs, Colo.).

Saint Benedict

Coach: Robin Balder-Lanoue (12th season)

2007 Championship Finish: 5th

Saint Benedict Championship Preview
With nine returning seniors and a talented group of underclassmen, the College of Saint Benedict cross country team comes into the MIAC Championships ready to make its mark. They started their season strong, with a second place finish amongst six teams at the UMD Invitational, followed by another second place finish amongst twelve teams in the SJU Invitational. A notable standout on the roster is first-year Kaycee Knutson (Esko, MN), who has been earning a name for herself all season. She has been the first or second runner for her team all season, and just last week had the second best time for a 6K race in the school's history. Seniors Maggie Donahue (Plymouth, MN) and Sam VanWechel (Fergus Falls, MN) have been running stronger each meet, making strides towards being a strong impact in the conference. Sophomore Katy Torchia (Rochester, MN), junior Alyx Chapman (Stillwater, MN) and first-year Kelly Donahue (Plymouth, MN) have also been steady contributors toward the team's score, making a regular impact in the Blazer lineup. Ready to run at full strength, the Blazers rely on their experienced runners as well as newcomers to drive them to a successful finish in the conference.

St. Catherine

Coach: Michael Henderson (3rd season)

2007 Championship Finish: 10th

St. Catherine Championship Preview
The Wildcats cross country team is hoping to continue their string of steady improvement under third-year head coach Mike Henderson. In 2007 the Wildcats recorded their highest conference meet finish since 1998, and in 2008 they hope to continue that trend of lowering their overall team score. Junior Greta Sieve (New Ulm, Minn.) has been the Wildcats number one runner all season long. At the recent Tori Neubauer Invitational Sieve became the first Wildcat runner in history to break 23:00 for the 6k race distance. In the field of nearly 450 runners, her time of 22:56 placed her 38th overall, 7th among MIAC runners. Expected to join Sieve in the Wildcats top five are veterans Susie Hallquist (Sr., Coon Rapids, Minn.), Kristie Bronson (Sr., Princeton, Minn.), Marci Burg (Jr., Hokah, Minn.) and new comer Heidi Sande (Fy. Grand Marais, Minn.). All four athletes have been a part of the Wildcats scoring team all fall, and their steady improvement indicates that they are ready to run their best race so far this season. Coach Henderson summarized the expectations for the team when he said that "This is a good group of athletes. They have a great work ethic and work very well together. I am confident they will compete to the best of their abilities at the MIAC meet."

Saint Mary's

Coach: Ward Berndt (4th season)

2007 Championship Finish: 11th

Saint Mary's Championship Preview

For the Saint Mary’s University women’s cross country team, it’s been a season of on-the-job training.

SMU head coach Ward Berndt’s women’s squad is the polar opposite of their SMU male counterpart — 14 athletes, 11 of which are sophomores or younger.

“We aren’t quite as experienced (on the women’s side),” admitted Berndt, whose women placed 11th in last year’s conference championships. “We lost three of our top seven runners from last year to graduation. However, last year’s freshman class has taken some major steps in development, plus, we have added seven freshmen who have the ability to contribute quickly.

“Right now there is no guaranteed No. 1 runner, but we have a good pack of 3-through-5 that are way ahead of last year at this time.”

Emily Dee (Racine, Minn.) and Joanna Pace (Minocqua, Wis.) made quite a splash during their freshmen campaigns a year ago, and the two have picked up right where they left off this year.

“This year’s freshman class is the most talented I’ve had since taking over at SMU,” said Berndt, who also has high expectations for returners Anne Schutte (Columbia Heights, Minn.), Megan Wagner (Webster, Minn.), Brittany Kuehn (Sauk Rapids, Minn.), and Ashley Acosta (Winnebago, Minn.). “And I think the experiences and talent they bring will mesh well with the growth and talent that we already have.”

“By the end of last year and heading into this year, both teams started to realize that they are in a position to continue placing higher at (the conference and regional meets),” Berndt added. “This realization helped many of the athletes to start training for success instead of competing not to lose.”

St. Olaf
Coach: Chris Daymont (28th season)

2007 Championship Finish: 3rd

St. Olaf Championship Preview
In hopes of improving on last year’s third-place MIAC finish, St. Olaf will depend on strong front-runners and a deep team to battle out for the remaining scoring positions. Seniors Annie Knutson and Jenna Carlson have been the Oles’ top runners this season, always scoring as the teams’ first two runners. Knutson, who was fifth on the team and 25th overall at last year’s MIAC Championships, has had a standout season, finishing 18th or better in each race she competed in. She was also named MIAC athlete of the week the week of September 22 following a fourth place finish at the St. Olaf Invitational. Carlson is the Ole’s top returning runner, following up a fourth place finish at last year’s championships. She has finished in the top-20 in all but one race she has competed in this season, and ran her best time of the season at La Crosse’s Tori Neubauer Invitational, where she finished 29th overall with a time of 22:45. The key to St. Olaf’s success as a team will lie with the efforts of the remaining scorers. A combination of juniors Michaela McLaughlin, Abby Smith, and Nellie Adams, senior Katie Duwell, and first-year Hannah Dennis could all be contenders to score for the team, which has seen a variety of combinations in positions three through five this season. The St. Olaf College Oles have won the MIAC cross country championships eight times, most recently in 2002.

St. Thomas
Coach: Joe Sweeney (29th season)

2007 Championship Finish: 1st

St. Thomas Championship Preview

The 2008 St. Thomas women's cross country team has two goals for November -- claim its third consecutive MIAC championship and make its fourth consecutive NCAA national meet appearance. Coach Joe Sweeney's team is currently ranked 14th in the Division III national poll.

The Tommies have nosed out runner-up Carleton for the conference team title two years in a row and now have 15 of a possible 27 MIAC team titles. UST posted a 73-92 margin over the runner-up Knights in 2006. In 2007, in the second closest finish in the 27-year history of the race, the Tommies scored 74 to shade Carleton (76) and St. Olaf (80).

Sweeney has guided Tommie CC, indoor track and outdoor track teams to 60 team championships out of a possible 78 all-time, including eight in a row since March 2006.

The Tommies are led by senior All-American Katie Theisen, who will seek her fourth All-MIAC finish after placing 13th, fourth and second at conference the last three seasons. In 17 races over the last three cross country seasons, Theisen has five victories, 10 other top-five placings and a 20th and a 38th at the 2007 and 2006 NCAA meets. At last month's elite Griak Invite in a field of 497 runners, Theisen finished fourth, two spots behind Bethel's Marie Borner, out of 177 MIAC runners. The versatile Theisen, who has a 4.0 gpa, has helped the Tommies to a rare team sweep of MIAC women's CC and indoor and outdoor track and field in 2006-07 and 2007-08. She anchored the NCAA runner-up distance medley team in indoor track and field last March. In the 2008 MIAC outdoor track meet, she had a hand in 43 points from a victory in the steeplechase to another placing in the triple jump, and qualified provisionally for nationals in four events. On her three-year MIAC track and field career in six indoor and outdoor meets thus far, Theisen has 24 top-five placings including six relay victories and three individual titles.

Junior Kelly Russ, an All-American middle-distance runner, took 10th at the elite Griak race (personal-best 23:09) and third in her last race, in San Francisco (new best of 22:25). Russ will look to claim her third consecutive All-MIAC honor as she placed 15th as a freshman and 11th last season. Last year in track, Russ was an MIAC runner-up at 1,500 meters; an outdoor nationals qualifier at 800 meters; and indoors ran on the NCAA runner-up distance medley.

Other key runners for the Tommies include sophomore Allie Metzler, 30th at last year's meet; freshman Emma Spoon, a three-time top-seven finisher at state in Wisconsin's large class; sophomores Alyssa Rassett-Mehl and Raynee DeGrio; and freshman Nikki Schminski.