



Baseball | 1/7/2019 11:02:00 AM | Shawn D. Smith, Director of Athletic Media Relations

## Hjelle Named NSIC Preseason Player of the Year; Golden Eagles Selected 10th in NSIC Baseball Preseason Coaches' Poll



**BURNSVILLE, Minn.** – The University of Minnesota Crookston baseball program was picked to finish in 10<sup>th</sup> in the 2019 NSIC Preseason Baseball Coaches' Poll released on the morning of Thurs., Jan. 17. The Golden Eagles received 67 votes in the poll. They were 24 votes behind University of Minnesota Duluth in ninth, and were two votes ahead of University of Sioux Falls, who was slotted 11<sup>th</sup>.

In addition, Minnesota Crookston senior [Reed Hjelle](#) was selected as the NSIC Preseason Player of the Year. It is the first time in school history the Golden Eagles have received a Preseason Player of the Year nod. Hjelle was the 2018 NSIC Player of the Year, also a first in Minnesota Crookston program history. He was also selected as the 2018 ABCA/Rawlings Central Region Player of the Year. Hjelle was named 2018 ABCA/Rawlings All-America Third Team, and NCBWA All-America Third Team. He had an outstanding junior season, hitting .436 with 10 home runs and 50 RBI, with 19 doubles, five triples, and 38 runs scored. In league play, Hjelle led the NSIC in slugging percentage at .761, on base percentage at .476, total bases with 80, and was tied for the league-lead in home runs with seven.

University of Minnesota Crookston baseball team enters their fifth season under Head Coach [Steve Gust](#) in 2019. The Golden Eagles are coming off a 24-27 (10-22 NSIC) season. Minnesota Crookston had some major wins last season with upsets over top programs in Seton Hill University, and Northwood University in non-conference play, but they struggled to get going in NSIC play. The Golden Eagles are looking to get back to the NSIC Tournament for the third time in four years.

Minnesota Crookston is led by Hjelle at the plate. The Golden Eagles also return starters [Jonathan Lund](#) (Sr., IF, Toiwa, N.D.), [Wyatt Poppel](#) (R-Fr., DH, Greenbush, Minn.), and [Aron Holcraft](#) (So., C/IF, Clearbrook, Minn.) from the 2018 team. On the mound, Minnesota Crookston welcomes back returning starters [Jayden Grover](#) (Dr., RHP, Cooperstown, N.D.) and [Zach Rustad](#) (Sr., LHP, Blaine, Minn.). Grover was 4-4 with a 5.56 ERA in 2018, while Rustad went 2-6 with a 5.98 ERA. Out of the bullpen, [Louis Gerzin](#) (Sr., RHP, Ely, Minn.) leads the way after posting a 3.50 ERA in 18.0 innings as a junior. Minnesota Crookston also has several newcomers who look poised to contribute at the plate and on the bump. Also look for [Aron Holcraft](#) (Sr., LHP, Crookston, Minn.) to have a major impact either starting or from the bullpen. The Crookston-native was 2-1 with a 4.00 ERA last season.

The Golden Eagles have several newcomers joining the fray that will also look to have a major impact in 2019. Some key newcomers to watch in the field are [Scott Finberg](#) (Dr., 3B, Stillwater, Minn.), [Brook Baller](#) (So., OF, Grand Forks, N.D.), [Mason Sullivan](#) (Dr., IF, Algona, Mich.), [Landon Swenson](#) (Dr., OF, Devils Lake, N.D.), and [Bryce Jorgensen](#) (Dr., UT, Thunder Bay, Ontario). The Golden Eagles also several newcomers to watch on the mound, including [Matt Nelson](#) (Fr., RHP, Akon, Minn.), [Conner Richardson](#) (Fr., RHP, Grand Forks, N.D.), [Tyler Papp](#) (Fr., RHP, Thompson, N.D.), among others.

Augustana University was picked to win the league with 13 first-place votes, while Minnesota State University was slotted second. Concordia University-St. Paul pitcher Louie Varland was named the 2019 NSIC Preseason Pitcher of the Year.

Rustad and Hjelle were selected as Minnesota Crookston's "NSIC Players to Watch" in 2019. The Golden Eagles open the 2019 season Feb. 15 on the road with a three-game series at the University of Central Missouri in Warrensburg, Mo. Minnesota Crookston opens conference play March 16 at Wayne State College in Wayne, Neb., with a three-game series with the Wildcats.

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### NSIC Preseason Coaches' Poll

1. Augustana University (13) 193
2. Minnesota State University, Mankato (2) 175
3. Minot State University 172
4. St. Cloud State University 162
5. Concordia University, St. Paul 139
6. Wayne State College 121
7. Winona State University 115
8. Northern State University 109
9. University of Minnesota Duluth 91
10. University of Minnesota Crookston 67
11. University of Sioux Falls 65
- T-12. Southwest Minnesota State University 55
- T-12. Upper Iowa University 55
14. Bemidji State University 34
15. University of Mary 22

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### PLAYERS MENTIONED

- #35 Jayden Grover**  
RHP / 6' 3" / Sophomore / R
- #25 Aaron Holcraft**  
LHP / 6' 0" / Junior / L
- #12 Wyatt Poppel**  
DH / 6' 0" / Redshirt Sophomore / R
- #16 Jonathan Lund**  
3B / 6' 2" / Junior / R
- #37 Louis Gerzin**  
RHP / 5' 11" / Junior / R
- #33 Reed Hjelle**  
1B / 6' 2" / Junior / R
- #28 Matt Nelson**  
OF / 6' 3" / Redshirt Junior / R
- #29 Ben Thoma**  
UT / 5' 10" / Freshman / R
- #24 Zach Rustad**  
LHP / 5' 10" / Junior / L
- #1 Landon Swenson**  
OF / 5' 10" / Junior / R



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