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BOYS BASKETBALL PREVIEW

5 things you need to know

Movin' up

Cape Henry won its first boys Virginia Independent Schools state title last season. The Dolphins move up in competition this season from Division II to Division I and also upgraded their schedule significantly to include several nationally-ranked teams. Cape Henry plays No. 1 Huntington Prep (W.Va.) on Jan. 12 at the MLK Roundball Classic at Churchland High School.

For a good cause

Deep Creek will host the Hornet Tip-Off Classic on Saturday. The tournament includes boys and girls teams from Deep Creek, Tallwood, Pasquotank (N.C.) and Northeastern (N.C.).

'State tourney or bust'

A boys team from South Hampton Roads failed to reach the Group AAA state tournament last season for the first time since 2007. Hampton and Kecoughtan advanced from the Eastern Region, with the Crabbers winning the state title.

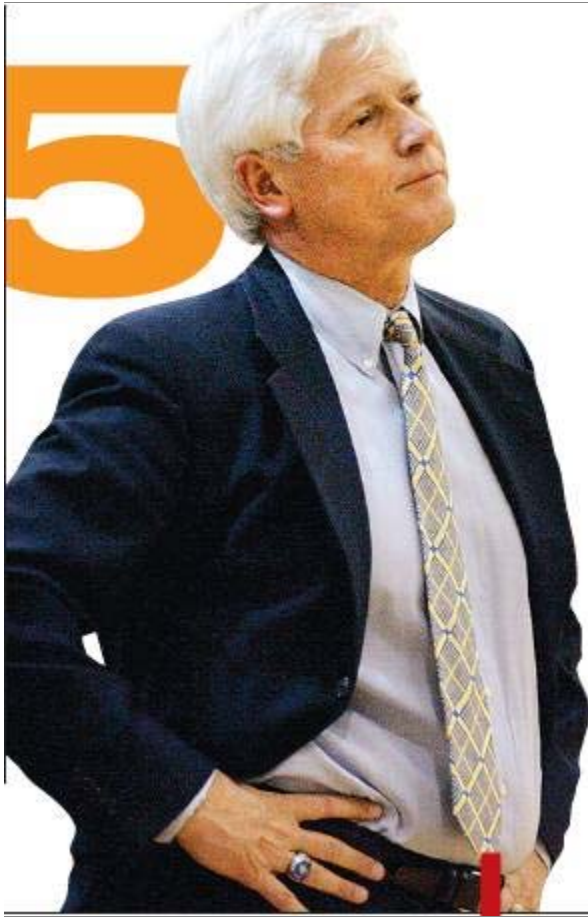
Enjoy it while it lasts

The Virginia High School League moves to a six-classification system next school year, so this is the final season of the Eastern Region and Group AAA tournaments as they've been known for years. The new system separates longtime playoff rivals, including Maury (moving to Group 5A) and Norcom (Group 4A).

Coaching milestones

Maury coach Jack Baker, left, leads all active Virginia High School League coaches with 649 victories. Baker has been at Maury since 1976. Other coaches piling up the wins are Nansemond River's Ed Young (384), Norfolk Collegiate's Jim Markey (232), Landstown's Dwight Robinson (190) and First Colonial's Mark Butts (182).

—Larry Rubama



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high school

BOYS BASKETBALL PREVIEW

preseason Top 10 in South Hampton Roads

By **LARRY RUBAMA** | The Virginian-Pilot

1

CAPE HENRY

The Dolphins are by far the best team in South Hampton Roads and could get some national attention before season's end.

2

NORCOM

The Greyhounds have a big-time scorer in guard Malique Trent.

3

GREEN RUN

The Stallions have depth, size and a star point guard in Lequan Thomas.

4

MAURY

The Commodores will rely on 6-foot-5 center Jaleel Ferguson.

5

LAKE TAYLOR

Titans coach Kenny Brown has big aspirations for this team, led by junior Treyvond Lockhart.

6

GREAT BRIDGE

The Wildcats will go as far as junior guard Marcus Evans can take them.

7

LANDSTOWN

Eagles coach Dwight Robinson always finds a way to win.

8

KING'S FORK

The Bulldogs' athleticism and quickness will keep them atop the Southeastern District.

9

KELLAM

Senior forward Ramone Snowden wants to go out on top.

10

NANSEMOND RIVER

The Warriors lost a lot but have enough to be competitive.

– Larry Rubama

EASTERN DISTRICT

HIGH FIVE

Churchland PG Dre Demiel, a 6-1 senior, was second-team All-Eastern District last season.

Maury C Jaleel Ferguson, a 6-5 junior, averaged 14.7 points and 10 rebounds and was second-team All-Eastern District last season.

Lake Taylor G Treyvond Lockhart, a 5-11 junior, averaged 13.8 points last season for the Titans.

Lake Taylor PG Marquise Poole, a 5-11 sophomore, was the Eastern District Newcomer of the Year last season when he played at Booker T. Washington.

Norcom G Malique Trent, a 6-3 senior, averaged 18.7 points last season and was first-team All-Eastern District.

PREDICTIONS

1. Norcom (16-10 overall, 9-5 Eastern District) The Greyhounds have dominated the district for the past six seasons, either winning the regular-season title or tournament title, or sweeping both. Last season they won their fifth tournament. Coach Leon Goolsby has averaged 21 victories over his six seasons and has 128 career wins. This season he'll add to that total with guard Malique Trent leading the way. Last season Trent averaged 18.7 points, including a 40-point game against Central. Helping to carry the load is 6-6 senior F James Whitaker (12.1 ppg).

2. Maury (16-7, 10-4) The Commodores will miss Jamal Ferguson, now at Marquette, but they have his brother, Jaleel. Jaleel came into his own last season, averaging 14.7 points and 10 rebounds a game. The Commodores also will count on junior G Mike Basnight, (11.1 ppg), G Jalon Williams, F Domontae Chapman, F Anthony Williams, Avontae Ferguson, Blake Gibson and Lake Taylor transfer Shyheim Draughan. Coach Jack Baker, now in his 36th season at Maury, is one of the winningest coaches in Virginia High School League history.

3. Lake Taylor (15-8, 8-6) Coach Kenneth Brown said he is "very excited" about this season, and he should with veterans Treyvond Lockhart (13.8 ppg) and Darnell Jenkins (10 ppg). He also has forwards Jalyn Holmes and Donovan Powell. Throw into the mix guard Marquise Poole, a transfer from Booker T. Washington, and you can see why the coaching staff is looking forward to this season. The only problem? Seven players – including Holmes, Powell and Poole – haven't stepped on the court yet because of the football team's success. "So we're just waiting for our horses," Brown said.

4. Booker T. Washington (12-11, 7-7) The Bookers didn't make the Eastern Region tournament last season but have hopes of returning this season. Coach Darren Sanderlin returns 6-2 senior F Zain Upshur and 5-11 senior PG Marquis Coleman. The Bookers also will rely on senior C Billy Barnes and junior F Steven Whitley.

5. Norview (22-5, 11-3) The Pilots enjoyed one of the best seasons in school history last season when they won their first district regular-season title since 1991. Gone from that team are Rashawn Madison and Jason Luckie. Madison was the All-Tidewater and Eastern District Player of the Year. In all, the Pilots graduated six players, but coach Jonathan Wilson returns several who contributed, including guards Stephen Scarborough, D'Shaun Thomas, Emmanuel Tanner and Damion Madison. Wilson also is high on 6-2 freshman G Jaylen Frazier. "As our other younger players develop," Wilson said, "we will be a very tough team to deal with come mid-January."

6. Granby (16-9, 8-6) The Comets advanced to the Eastern Region tournament last season. But they graduated several key players, including their top three scorers in Aaron Johnson, Aubrey Burrus and Kareem Thompson. "Graduation hurt but we are confident that we can still be competitive," coach Mike Donovan said. He will count on Aaron Meredith, Willie White and Laguna Foster.

7. Churchland (8-14, 3-11) Last season the Truckers were the first team to knock off eventual Eastern Region champ Norview, and Churchland lost to Booker T. Washington, Norcom, Granby and Lake Taylor by a total of nine points. "My team will always play hard," coach Pat Dulin said. "I always feel we have a puncher's chance in every game." Their scrappy play which helps keep them in games. Churchland will be led by senior PG Dre Demiel, a four-year starter. Last season he averaged 14 points, 5 assists, 4 rebounds and 3 steals.

8. Wilson (3-19, 0-14) The Presidents should be a good defensive and rebounding team. But coach Ron Cabbler will need some of his younger kids to grow up fast as the season progresses. For now he will lean on seniors Travon Speller (10 ppg, 7 rpg), Jamze Merritt (7 ppg, 6 rpg), Derwounte Greene and Lindsey Rodgers. Also watch for juniors Malik Sessoms and JaQuan Smith.

SOUTHEASTERN

HIGH FIVE

Western Branch PG Demonte Burns, a 5-11 senior, averaged 10 points and 5 assists last season.

Great Bridge G Marcus Evans, a 6-2 junior, was second-team All-Southeastern District last season.

Deep Creek SG Marcellis Perkins, a 6-4 junior, averaged 11 points, 6 rebounds and 4 assists last season.

Western Branch F Jashad Jamison, a 6-4 senior, averaged 9 points, 9 rebounds and 3 blocks last season.

Nansemond River F Kendric Washington, a 6-5 senior, was a starter on the Warriors team that won the Southeastern District tournament title.

PREDICTIONS

1. Great Bridge (21-5 overall, 16-2 Southeastern District) The Wildcats are the defending district regular-season champions. And with Marcus Evans leading the way Great Bridge will once again be the team to beat. Evans had a sensational sophomore season, averaging 14.1 points, including one stretch in which he scored 20 or more points in three of four games. He'll get plenty of help from seniors Steven Bienlien, Andrew Banks and Byron Williams. Junior G Mark Madison also will contribute. Others who will help are Deep Creek transfer Aaron Ferguson, Atlantic Shores transfer Byron Nelson and K.J. Holloway, who is from England. Coach Gary Obenour said he'll start four 3-point shooters.

2. King's Fork (18-9, 14-4) The Bulldogs made a nice run in the Eastern Region tournament last season with victories over Norcom and Landstown before losing to eventual state champion Hampton in the semifinals. But they will miss All-Tidewater forward Zach Johnson (Army). Coach Joshua Worrell said this team will rely on team speed and play transition basketball. The Bulldogs also have experience with seniors Akanni White, Rod Parrett, Jacorey Smith and Byron Taylor. They know what's at stake. It's been three seasons since the Bulldogs last put a regular-season or tournament title banner on the gym wall. This group wants to end that streak.

3. Nansemond River (21-5, 15-3) The Warriors graduated 10 players, including All-Tidewater players Dontrell Brite and Shannon Evans. The only returning starter is 6-5 senior F Kendric Washington (5.5 ppg, 5 rpg). Others who will contribute are Ed Drew, Cristian Alexander and Daniel Wallace. Lakeland transfers Khalil Carroll and William Goodman also will help. Coach Ed Young said the team's strengths are its multiple defensive looks and that several players can contribute. The weakness is obvious: lack of experience.

4. Western Branch (16-9, 12-6) The Bruins have high expectations after their first winning season since 2000 and their first region tournament appearance since 2003. The best news is coach Chris Fuhrmann returns four of five starters. Leading the way is 5-11 senior G Demonte Burns (10 ppg, 5 apg). Other seniors to watch are 6-4 F Jashad Jamison (9 ppg, 9 rpg, 3 bpg), 6-2 F Desmond Johnson and 6-1 G C.J. Thomas. "We fully believe we are going to have the best season in school history," Fuhrmann said.

5. Deep Creek (2-20, 1-17) The Hornets are trying to forget about last year's disappointing season. Coach Leroy Ricks said "this team should see significant improvement with the level of experience returning." Those players include a large group of seniors and juniors. Junior G Marcellis Perkins (11 ppg, 6 rpg, 4 apg) and 5-10 PG D'Andre Mullen (8 ppg, 3 apg) lead the Hornets.

6. Indian River (9-14, 9-9) The Braves will be inexperienced with just two players with significant playing time in junior PG Breon Heckstall (5.2 ppg) and 6-3 senior F Kelvin Powell (5.2 ppg). Coach Chavez Mabry will need Reggie Hodges, Justin Martin and Stephon Parker to contribute immediately.

7. Oscar Smith (13-10, 11-7) The Tigers will be young and inexperienced. It didn't help that G Brehon Britt transferred to Atlantic Shores. He was second-team all-district last season and the team's leading scorer. But coach Lavar Griffin said he's excited about this group. His team includes Marcel Moss, Deshawn Hatten, Tristan Cahill and Dequan Nichols. He'll also count on freshman Donald Hicks, who is one of four freshmen on varsity.

8. Hickory (7-15, 4-14) The Hawks will be led by 6-5 senior F Arron Sturdifan (7 ppg, 3 rpg). He will be counted on to lead the team offensively. Others who will contribute: 5-11 junior PG Thomas Peterson, 6-3 junior forward Mac Loud, 5-5 senior PG Erik McGee and 6-2 junior F Xavier Nichols.

9. Lakeland (5-19, 5-13) Clint Wright is in his first year at the helm after replacing James Jones, who led the Cavaliers to the Eastern Region tournament in 2009 and 2011. Wright, who starred at the old John Yeates High, spent the past two seasons at Nansemond-Suffolk Academy. Before that he served as an assistant at Nansemond River and King's Fork. "Success will be directly impacted by the grasping of a very basic, but new philosophy," he said.

10. Grassfield (6-16, 3-15) For the school's first four seasons, the Grizzlies had seen gradual improvement, but last season they took a step backward with just six victories. Coach Andy Schwerzler is hopeful that the Grizzlies will turn it around this season because he graduated only two players and returns four starters in Marcus Anderson (4 ppg, 7 rpg), Demond Dowson (7 ppg, 7 rpg), Trey Fayton (7 ppg) and Blake LaRussa (6 ppg).

BEACH DISTRICT

HIGH FIVE

Green Run F Keon Buchanan, a 6-3 junior, averaged 11 points last season.

Tallwood G Tommie Flournoy, a 5-10 senior, was second-team All-Beach District last season.

Landstown G Jordan Roberson, a 5-6 senior, was third-team All-Beach District last season.

Kellam F Ramone Snowden, a 6-5 senior averaged 17.4 points last season.

Green Run G Lequan Thomas, a 5-10 senior, was second-team All-Beach District last season.

PREDICTIONS

1. Green Run (17-8 overall, 7-3 Beach District) The Stallions return three starters, led by PG Lequan Thomas. Green Run coach Kenny Harris calls him his "defensive pest," and "leader." Harris said guard Tyler Blount is one of the best shooters in the Eastern Region and thinks 6-3 F Keon Buchanan can prove he's one of the top players in the area. There's size: 6-5 C Shaun James and 6-4 F Jamaal Matin. Coming off the bench are 6-6 Kevin Holmes and 6-4 Sterling Carrington. "Our depth is probably the best since I have been here," Harris said.

2. Landstown (24-3, 9-1) The Eagles have won Beach regular-season and tournament titles in three of the past four seasons, and they've lost just six district regular-season games in that stretch. Pint-sized point guard Jordan Roberson, who should not be overlooked because of his 5-6 size, leads the way this season. He brings leadership, intensity and toughness. Coach Dwight Robinson also has Cameron Austin, Sebastian Sandifer, Andre Stanley and 6-8 sophomore C Darius Bolstad.

3. Kellam (10-11, 7-3) The Knights are led by senior Ramone Snowden (17.4 ppg), and he's joined by seniors Jani Raynor Powell, Tyler Vinsand and Chris Smith. Coach Norman Hassell said these seniors are focused on the district title, especially Snowden. "Ramone is extremely focused and ready to leave his mark on this program," Hassell said. Newcomers Alex Ratajczak and Colten Ward played on the Knights' undefeated JV team last year.

4. Tallwood (12-11, 8-2) The Lions hope to stay in the upper-tier of the conference, but they'll need another big season from guard Tommie Flournoy. Last season he averaged 15.5 points and was the Lions' spark both on offense and defense. The Lions also have depth with Tyler Peterson, James Greene, Quincy Jones, Darius Horton and Langston Petteway.

5. First Colonial (15-11, 6-4) This is the youngest team coach Mark Butts has had in his 14 seasons. DeAndre Barber, a second-team all-district pick last season, has transferred to Bishop Sullivan. That leaves Butts looking for a scorer. One possibility is sophomore PG Gerrard Simpkins, who averaged 7 points last season and has grown two inches. Others to help carry the scoring load are senior forwards James Minter and Zack Marshall. Sophomore Brandon Schlick and junior Joey Brown will contribute, but neither has varsity experience.

6. Salem (13-10, 7-3) Leading scorer and first-team all-district star Divante Walker (16.4 ppg) graduated. Coach Justin Parrish also lost 6-5 F Bash Townes, who transferred to Norfolk Collegiate. Last season he was the SunDevils' second-leading scorer with 15.3 points as a freshman. Parrish is patiently awaiting several football players – including Bucky Hodges and Tioreon Land.

7. Bayside (12-13, 4-6) The Marlins got off to an 0-3 start last season, won eight of 10, including victories over Landstown and Salem, but then faltered late. Coach Martin Russ hopes things will be better this season and thinks they will just as long as the Marlins can take care of the ball. That will put a lot of pressure on freshman G Rayquan Cuffee and sophomore guard Devin Broadnax.

8. Cox (5-15, 2-8) The Falcons are young but have size, led by Paul Grinde, a 6-8 junior. They also have 6-5 sophomore F Critt Johnson and 6-3 freshman G Cole Johnson. "Experience is going to be a factor to overcome," coach Bobby Wolfe said, "but rebounding should be a strength."

9. Ocean Lakes (3-19, 0-10) Last season was tough for the Dolphins, who were winless in the district. But things are looking up with the return of twins Kendall (8 ppg) and Kyle Dillard (5.5 ppg). Several key players haven't practiced because of the football team's success, including Andre Dessenberg, Mike Alston, Jahvonni Simmons and Javon Majors.

10. Kempsville (4-18, 3-7) Coach Steve Loder has a young but athletic team that will be helped by 6-2 senior G Aaron Hall and 6-3 junior G David Terins. "They will help add depth and ability to score," Loder said. Another player who will be counted on is 5-10 senior G Devontae Scott, one of the area's top scorers last year at 16 ppg.

11. Princess Anne (6-16, 2-8) Coach Derrick Canady replaced Robert Woodley, who stepped down in June to become the athletic director and boys basketball coach at Currituck (N.C.) High. This is Canady's first head coaching position at the high school level. He had previous experience at Lynnhaven Middle School. "I am excited about the upcoming season and am looking forward to the challenge of starting a new program from the ground," Canady said. The Cavaliers will be led by seniors James Lee and Justin Stieff. Juniors Zack Tavares, Jamal Moses, Kaleef Walker and Aaron Robinson (a transfer from Washington, D.C.) also will contribute.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS

HIGH FIVE

Bishop Sullivan G De'Andre Barber, a 6-1 junior, was a second-team All-Beach District at First Colonial last year.

Cape Henry PG Devon Hall, a 6-5 senior, averaged 16.5 ppg and recently signed with Virginia.

Cape Henry G Ayron Hutton, a 6-3 junior, averaged 12 points last season for the state champion Dolphins.

Cape Henry G/F Jimmy Paige, a 6-5 junior, returns after averaging 16 ppg last year.

Norfolk Collegiate F Brandon Self, a 6-6 senior, was first-team All-Tidewater Conference last season.

NOTABLE

Atlantic Shores (11-12) The Seahawks, defending Metro Conference tournament champs, added Oscar Smith transfer Brehon Britt. Last season he averaged 14.6 points in his last nine games as a sophomore. He will reclassify at Atlantic Shores and remains a sophomore. Add senior G Brian Kelley (11 ppg, 8 apg) and the Seahawks have a formidable backcourt.

Bishop Sullivan (18-9 overall) The Crusaders will miss Marcus Burwell, who graduated, but welcome First Colonial transfer De'Andre Barber, who has reclassified. Last season he averaged 11.8 points. Barber and Atlantic Shores transfer Phil Owens form one of the area's top backcourts. Owens, 5-11, played this summer with CP3, one of the top AAU teams in the country. The Crusaders also have G Thomas East, G Darren Belardo and F Mitch King.

Cape Henry (25-5) The Dolphins won the VISAA Division II state title last season. This season they move up to the tougher Division I level, but they should hold their own, led by a trio of talented guards: Devon Hall, James Paige and Ayron Hutton. Hall is rated the No. 77 prospect nationally by Rivals and the No. 34 point guard by ESPN. He's planning to graduate a year early to attend Virginia next season. Paige was first-team All-Tidewater Conference last season. Also watch for sophomore Chris Clarke (10 ppg) to have a breakout season. Others to watch: 6-7 F Malik Gray, 6-4 F Terry Morris, 6-3 G Aaron Drory and 6-1 G Andrew Langston. This team has enough talent to find its way into national Top 25 polls. "Our guys are hungry," coach Mark Hall said, "and are willing to do whatever it takes to be successful."

Nansemond-Suffolk Academy (6-20) Longtime athletic director Randolph Davis replaced Clint Wright, who left to become head coach at Lakeland. Davis inherits some size and experience, led by senior John Hogan and juniors John Mobley and Jared Morse.

Norfolk Academy (7-15) Coach Eric Acra, who has won 135 career games, is expecting his team to be more competitive. The team includes junior F Walt Plumlee (10 ppg), senior F Barrett McLendan (8 ppg), and juniors Shawn Simmons and Greg Washington.

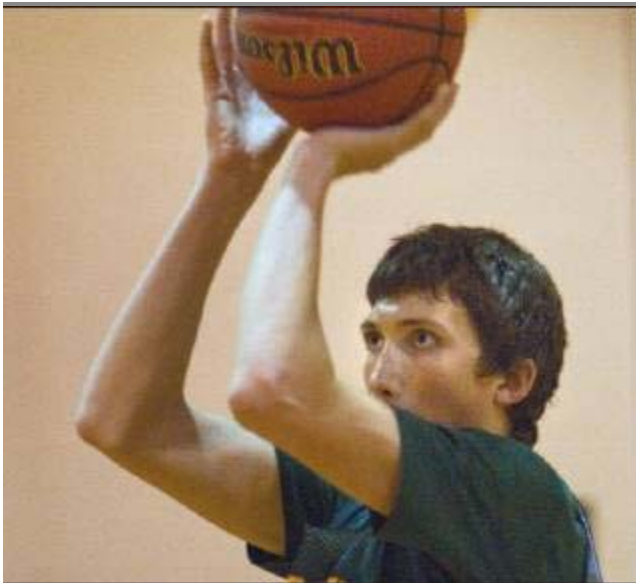
Norfolk Christian (14-11) The Ambassadors graduated many of the core players from the past four Tidewater Conference tournament championship teams. But "the cupboard is not bare," said coach Michael Allen, who has won 148 games in 10 seasons. Norfolk Christian will get challenged by a schedule that includes eight public-school teams. Seniors George Wahee (12 ppg), Jonathan Shoaf, Shawn Christmas and David Cockerill lead the way.

Norfolk Collegiate (14-11) The Oaks will be led by first-team All-TCIS F Brandon Self, along with F Vince Thomas, G Teddy Rich and Salem transfer Bash Townes, a 6-5 forward who last season averaged 15.3 points as a freshman.

Portsmouth Christian (12-15) Senior PG Rayshard Brown leads a team that welcomes four new starters. Brown has scored 1,280 career points and averaged 5.7 assists. Newcomers include Atlantic Shores transfer Randall Smith and Lakeland transfer Will Artis.



Maury's Jaleel Ferguson, left.



Great Bridge's Steven Bienlien
