

Top 25 Capsules for 2009 Rankings

By Nathan Rode (*Baseball America*)

A familiar face sits atop the Baseball America/National High School Baseball Coaches Association Preseason Top 50. Bishop Gorman of Las Vegas, a three-time state champion in Nevada, earns the preseason top spot. The Gaels have five Division I signees on the roster and won an American Legion national title as a unit in addition to their domination of the Silver State.

The Gaels will have plenty of competition. Most of the top-ranked teams will venture beyond their local opponents and participate in national tournaments such as the Anderson Bat National Classic in Anaheim and Big League Dugout National Invitational in Scottsdale, Ariz., so the rankings should see plenty of shakeups as teams prove their status or get upset by opposing underdogs.

Bishop Gorman will compete in the Scottsdale tournament along with No. 9 Rocky Mountain and five perennial Arizona powers—Brophy College Prep (Phoenix), Chaparral (Scottsdale), Horizon (Scottsdale), Hamilton (Chandler, Ariz.) and Canyon Del Oro (Tucson).

The National Classic includes No. 2 El Toro (Lake Forest, Calif.), No. 6 Don Bosco Prep (Ramsey, N.J.), No. 16 Norco (Calif.), No. 20 Notre Dame Prep (Scottsdale, Ariz.), No. 30 Jesuit (Carmichael, Calif.), No. 31 Mater Dei (Santa Ana, Calif.) and No. 35 Mamaroneck (N.Y.)

The staffs of Baseball America and the NHSBCA compile the Top 50 rankings. In-season polls of the top 25 will be conducted every two weeks and released every other Tuesday throughout the season. The first in-season poll will be released on March 17 and the final poll will be released June 9 and will expand to 50 teams. Records indicated do not include ties.

<u>Rank</u>	<u>School</u>	<u>2008 Final Record</u>	<u>(Rank)</u>
1	Bishop Gorman HS, Las Vegas	41-3	(2)

The Gaels have slowly but surely made their way to the top after finishing the 2006 season at No. 33 with their first state title in more than 50 years. 1B/LHP Jeff Malm (.564-7-73 in 2008), a Southern California signee, was just a freshman then and boldly predicted they were primed for a run at four straight titles. A second title in 2007 put Bishop Gorman at 35th in the nation and a title in 2008 brought them all the way up to No. 2. Malm and four other D-I signees—Joey Rickard (OF/LHP, Arizona), Stephen Manthei (RHP, Arizona), R.J. Santigate (IF, Long Beach State) and Tyler Wagner (IF/RHP, Utah)—are ready to reel in a fourth straight state title and their first-ever national crown.

2	El Toro HS, Lake Forest, Calif.	25-7	(NR)
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Though the Chargers had a strong club heading into 2008, it wasn't expected that they would claim the Division II Southern Section title. Behind a deep junior class they rolled through the competition and now have a chance to repeat. Nine seniors return, including RHP Chad Thompson (12-3, 1.28) and SS Nolan Arenado (.456-4-32). With four D-I signees and championship experience, the Chargers have higher aspirations than a sectional crown.

3	Park Vista HS, Lake Worth, Fla.	30-2	(27)
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The Cobras lost in the 6-A state finals last year but return three D-I signees in OF Kamm Washington (Florida) and IFs Cody Dent (Florida) and Ryan Lashley (Stetson). Eight starters total are back so Park Vista expects to have a potent offense. The team's biggest question will be on the mound, where it plans on having 5-foot-9 RHP/OF Kenny Sharpe and 5-foot-10 RHP Brad Gero emerge as top starters after combining to go 9-0 last spring.

4	Lassiter HS, Marietta, Ga.	21-10	(NR)
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National champions in 1999, the Trojans are perennial contenders in 5-A Georgia baseball. The three RHPs who comprise this year's rotation—Princeton recruit Kevin Link, Red Handler and Jake Stephens—each have more than 100 innings of varsity pitching experience. C Blake Crohan (Tulane) leads the offense, with talented sophomore SS Nelson Ward and junior OF Andrew Gordon as the supporting cast.

5	Coppell (Texas) HS	30-7	(NR)
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The Cowboys won't have any shortage of offense in 2009. Six players are signed to play at D-I schools and two of them are in the Baseball America High School Top 100. C Jonathan Walsh (Texas, .337-4-35) anchors the lineup but will have a strong supporting cast that includes his twin brother, OF David (Texas-Arlington, .344-0-8), SS/RHP Chad Kettler (Oklahoma, .394-5-34; six saves), 3B/SS Austin Elkins (Dallas Baptist, .417-8-26) and RHP Zak Hermans (9-2, 1.06). Senior OF Jacob Morris (Arizona State) will continue to try switch-hitting to use his good speed.

6 Don Bosco Prep, Ramsey, N.J. 33-0 (7)

The 2008 season was pretty special for Don Bosco Prep, which had five players signed to D-I schools and finished with a perfect season. This year's club has five more D-I signees. SS Anthony Gomez (Vanderbilt, .467-6-39) and CF Brett Knief (North Carolina, .427-4-29) should anchor the offense while LHP Niko Spezial (Wake Forest, 5-0, 1.18) leads the pitching staff. 1B Chris Picyk (Villanova, .358-1-10) and OF Scott Hansen (Lehigh) round out the deep, potent offense.

7 North Cobb HS, Kennesaw, Ga. 23-12 (NR)

Participants in last year's state final four; North Cobb lost six players to D-I college rosters but returns several starters. The top returnee is RHP Clay Dalton (Georgia Tech, 10-2, 2.14), who threw eight complete games last season and struck out 89 in 72 innings. He's joined by OF Lamar Bridges (Alabama A&M, .359-0-8), RHP/SS Jordan Johnston (.387-4-28; 6-4, 4.36) and C Evan Hester (.339-0-22). The Warriors will need all their talent and experience in a challenging region.

8 Menchville HS, Newport News, Va. 7-4 (NR)

Though they missed the state playoffs in 2008, the Monarchs will have experience on their side as the whole pitching staff returns for 2009. RHP Ethan Carter (South Carolina, 6-3, 1.76) will lead the rotation before facing the decision to head to college or sign a pro contract. OF/RHP Matt Armstead (.531-10-22; 4-0, 0.98) is signed to play at Virginia Military Institute, while 6-foot-3, 210-pound junior RHP Austin Chrismon already has orally committed to East Carolina.

9 Rocky Mountain HS, Fort Collins, Colo. 23-4 (33)

Colorado's 5-A state champs have a shot to repeat with six seniors and a junior class that head coach Scott Bullock says is the best they've had. Senior CF Jake Stewart, a Stanford signee, will lead the offense after hitting .303-4-29 in 2008. He'll likely get some help from 3B/RHP Bryan Peters (Nebraska, .436-6-27, 5-0, 1.13). OF/LHP Marco Gonzales (.452-1-26) is verbally committed to Gonzaga. He led the team in innings pitched last year and finished 7-1, 3.80. SS Pierce Trumper (verbal commitment to Arkansas) is one of several juniors who will get a chance to contribute immediately.

10 Farragut HS, Knoxville 43-3 (8)

The Admirals did lose RHP Matt Ramsey (now at Tennessee), but have three D-I signees, two talented sophomores and a resume with four state titles this decade. SS Curt Powell (.493-8-56) is signed to Vanderbilt and will lead the offense with 3B and Louisville commit Cade Stallings (.462-9-52). Two LHPs, senior Jordan Cooper (Ole Miss, 7-1, 2.08) and sophomore Philip Pfeifer (13-1, 1.14, 2008 BCA Freshman of the Year), pace the rotation. 2B/C Nicky Delmonico, younger brother to Tony of the Dodgers farm system, will look to improve upon a .423-4-32 freshman campaign.

11 Bellaire (Texas) HS 37-7 (44)

The preseason No. 1 in Texas, Bellaire is looking for its first state championship since beating Duncanville (Texas) High in 1999. Head coach Rocky Manuel has been with the program since 1991, amassing more than 800 wins in his time as a Cardinal. He has three solid arms to make up his rotation in senior RHP Tyler Duffey (Rice), sophomore LHP Toller Boardman (7-1, 0.38) and junior RHP/3B Kyle Chaskin (6-1, 1.00; .383, 34 RBIs). The offense will also have two other solid seniors in OF Jarrett Higgins (.314-2-22) and 1B Trace Knoblauch (.300-2-20), the nephew of former major leaguer Chuck.

12 Millard West HS, Omaha 31-8 (NR)

Senior SS Brandon Bass (.400-1-48) will look to provide a spark as the leadoff man on a team that returns nine lettermen, four of them on the mound. This team also competed in the American Legion World Series tournament, where they were eliminated by the Legion version of No. 1 Bishop Gorman, which eventually won the title. RHP Tyler Niederklein (4-1, 2.60) is one of those top pitchers returning and is signed to Nebraska. The Wildcats look to add to 11 top-four finishes in the state since 1997.

13 Plant HS, Tampa 25-5 (NR)

Armed with a legitimate two-way threat in RHP/SS Mychal Givens, Plant will look to avenge its 2008 region semifinal loss to Dunedin (Fla.) High. Givens, an Oklahoma State signee, hit .421-17-1 while going 8-1, 1.79 in 43 innings in 2008 and still isn't sure if he'll be selected as a shortstop or pitcher in June. The Panthers will also look to IF Graham Ramos (Tampa), OF Conner Mitchell and OF/RHP Jake Lowe for support.

14 Ocean Springs (Miss.) HS 28-9 (42)

In 2008, the Greyhounds spoiled Tupelo (Miss.) High's party after beating them in a decisive Game Three of the state championship. Ocean Springs has five returning seniors along with a transfer to help defend the title. 3B/RHP Robert Wineski (Harvard, .390-4-19; 9-3, 2.29) will lead the team along with three other seniors signed to play at Mississippi Gulf Coast CC—OF Zach Desoto (.363-7-35), RHP Matt Nettles (5-4, 3.54) and transfer C Ben Slaton.

15 American Heritage HS, Plantation, Fla. 31-2 (1)

In 2008, the Patriots started the season at No. 4, their lowest ranking of the year as it happened. They cruised to their first state title in school history, which also brought in a national championship. That team had four players drafted, but senior SS Deven Marrero (Arizona State, .454-9-41) returns along with senior 2B Eric Acevedo (Gulf Coast CC, .360-10-32). Add in sophomore C/3B Brandon Sedell (.370-8-33), and American Heritage has a strong returning offensive core.

16 Norco (Calif.) HS 24-4 (39)

Last spring, the Cougars weaseled one run off of Lutheran (Orange, Calif.) High RHP Gerrit Cole (2008 28th overall pick) and advanced to the Division I Southern Section semifinals, where they lost to Wilson. RHP Matt Hobgood (10-0, 1.34) went the distance in that game and is back to help Norco make another attempt at a section title before he heads to Cal State Fullerton along with IF Wes Hatton (.360-1-13).

17 Andrean HS, Merrillville, Ind. 30-2 (NR)

The alma mater of the Plesac brothers, Dan and Joe, Andrean lost in the state final eight in 2008, but have four D-I signees returning. LHP Thomas Polus (Georgetown), 2B Ryan Dineen (Eastern Illinois), C Kevin Franchetti (Ball State) and RHP/SS Adam Norton (Notre Dame) will seek the state title in 2009 under head coach Dave Pishkur, who is in his 30th year of coaching and boasts a 689-230 record.

18 Owasso (Okla.) HS 36-3 (4)

Owasso ranks among the nation's most consistent programs, with appearances in 11 of the last 12 state finals. The Rams return five starters from last year's state championship, the seventh in that span. This year's team will be led by a pair of LHP/OFs both committed to Oklahoma: Austin Kirk (7-0, 1.45; .477-4-36) and Brandon Bargas (5-0, 0.68; .379-1-11). Junior OF/LHP Ryan Wilson (.483-1-7), one of the top underclassmen in the area, will hit in the heart of the lineup. The new infield will have to prove itself, but Owasso is still poised to run its streak to 12 of 13 seasons.

19 Flower Mound (Texas) HS 20-16 (NR)

Aside from the Jaguars' winning tradition, Flower Mound has six returning pitchers who logged innings in the 2008 playoffs. Senior RHPs Chris Asing (Gonzaga) and Logan Brunkenhoefer (Oklahoma State) should see significant innings while also getting support from LHP Noah Ringenberger and projectable junior RHP Shane Henderson. There is tough competition in Texas this year and Flower Mound's preseason No. 3 rank in the state's 5-A class will make them a target.

20 Notre Dame Prep, Scottsdale, Ariz.29-4 (NR)

This year will only be the Saints' fourth senior class, but already they've produced three draft picks and made noise in district tournaments. Senior RHP Casey Upperman (Arizona, 7-0, 0.58) brings his low-90s fastball back to the pitching staff and has three other D-I signees on the team. Upperman, LHP/1B Jordan Luvisi (UC Santa Barbara), OF Matt Ozanne (Santa Clara) and 3B Drew Ozanne (Santa Clara) will find themselves on a big stage when they compete in the National Classic.

21 Malvern (Pa.) Prep 40-3 (9)

The Friars shot up the 2008 rankings after being one of the few high school teams to reach 40 wins. Despite finishing the country ninth in the nation, the season's end was disappointing as Malvern Prep lost in the state finals. Eight seniors return for 2009, six of which are committed to D-I baseball programs and another two are slated to play D-I football. OF/3B Chris Gosik (East Carolina, .508-11-53) will lead the offense after breaking the school home run record in 2008. LHP Tim Cooney (7-1, 2.19) and C Mike Lubanski (.385-1-22, the younger brother of 2003 Royals first-rounder Chris) make up the main battery for the Friars and will both head to Wake Forest after graduating.

22 Capistrano Valley HS, Mission Viejo, CA20-9 (NR)

Leading the charge of eight returning seniors is LHP Tyler Matzek (4-2, 2.35), an Oregon signee and candidate to go in the first 10 picks of the draft. C Nolan Clark (UNLV) and 1B/LHP Kevin Chambers (Oklahoma State) add to the list of Cougars committed to D-I schools. Clark hit .345-3-29 in 2008 while Chambers went 4-2, 3.50 on the mound and .333-3-20 at the plate.

23 Ozark (Mo.) HS 24-5 (37)

The preseason No. 1 team in Missouri, Ozark will look to RHP and Arizona State signee Ethan Mather to help defend the Tigers' state title. Mather is the clear leader after logging almost 50 innings in 2008 and finishing with a 6-0, 1.27 record. The supporting cast includes C John Neill (.385-1-20), SS Chris Loveday (.283-1-7) and RHP Jayden Swain (3-0, 0.59). Junior 3B Drew Crain (.320-3-11) provides power.

24 La Cueva HS, Albuquerque 28-3 (29)

New Mexico isn't a traditional baseball state, but the Bears of La Cueva take it seriously enough. They have won the state title five times since 2003, missing only in 2007 when they were bounced in the first round. This year's team returns six starters and added 3B/RHP Abe Tarin, a transfer from Onate High (Las Cruces, N.M.), the team that beat La Cueva in the 2007 state tournament. Three New Mexico signees—Tarin, RHP Austin House (3-1, 1.81) and SS Tyler Black (.417-4-32)—will be at the center of the Bears' attempted repeat.

25 Cherry Creek HS, Greenwood Village, CO 22-2 (NR)

Cherry Creek is looking for redemption in 2009. These Bears went 20-0 in the 2008 regular season, but were bounced from the state tournament after four games. However, seven starters return including SS T.J. Shantz (Florida International, .386-0-22), 2B Duncan Satherlie (UNLV, .419-2-23), RHP Alex Blackford (Arizona State, 7-1, 1.14) and 1B Alec Mielnicki (Texas Tech, .378-0-20).

26 Oxford (Ala.) HS 25-5 (NR)

27 Florida Christian, Miami 21-7 (NR)

28 Desert Ridge HS, Mesa, Ariz. 27-8 (NR)

29 Plymouth (Mass.) North HS 22-0 (18)

30 Jesuit HS, Carmichael, Calif. 27-7 (NR)

31 Mater Dei HS, Santa Ana, Calif. 24-7 (NR)

32 Nequa Valley HS, Naperville, Ill. 33-7 (NR)

33 Walsh Jesuit HS, Stow, Ohio 30-3 (NR)

34	Calallen HS, Corpus Christi, Texas	41-1	(26)
35	Mamaroneck (N.Y.) HS	30-2	(NR)
36	Washington HS, New York City	45-2	(11)
37	Pleasure Ridge Park HS, Louisville	33-4	(7)
38	Carroll HS, South Lake, Texas	30-10	(NR)
39	Blue Valley HS, Stilwell, Kan.	19-6	(NR)
40	Hoover (Ala.) HS	32-18	(NR)
41	Cartersville (Ga.) HS	29-7	(NR)
42	Dorman HS, Roebuck, S.C.	19-12	(NR)
43	Troup County HS, LaGrange, Ga.	22-10	(NR)
44	Tupelo (Miss.) HS	32-7	(NR)
45	Brother Rice HS, Bloomfield Hills, MI	35-6	(NR)
46	Providence HS, Charlotte	21-10	(NR)
47	Wetumpka (Ala.) HS	26-11	(NR)
48	Yuba City (Calif.) HS	29-3	(NR)
49	Sarasota (Fla.) HS	25-3	(25)
50	St. Ignatius HS, Cleveland	28-6	(NR)