

## High School Preview: Preseason Top 50

By Clint Longenecker – *Baseball America*

*Although some of the Top 50 teams have started playing regular season games, all records posted are 2013 records. A team's performance so far in 2014 has not influenced the rankings, as this preseason top 50 was compiled before any team started playing games.*

### 1. Venice (Fla.) HS 29-3 (2)

The Indians have a core of players capable of winning their third consecutive state championship. Pitching will be the key to their season, as they lost several key arms to graduation. [See Clint Longenecker's feature on Venice here.](#)

### 2. St. Francis HS, Mountain View, CA 30-4 (6)

The Lancers lost a strong senior class from a team that won the Central Coast Section Division 1 title and return two starting position players. But this year's senior class has depth with 16 seniors and five Division One commits, headlined by strong-armed catcher Tim Susnara (.299/.408/.379; Oregon). John Gavin (1.28 ERA; Cal State Fullerton) fronts the rotation and threw a one-hitter in the title game. Righthander Richard Boe (Arizona State), first baseman/righthander Blake Billinger (Florida International) and Ryan McSwain (Arkansas-Little Rock) are seniors stepping into larger roles.

### 3. Rancho Bernardo HS, San Diego, CA 30-5 (NR)

Last year's 30 wins was the second-most in school history at "The Factory," which won its third San Diego Section Division title in four years. It returns top prospect Alex Jackson (.343/.479/.805; Oregon) and key pieces of its infield: seniors Casey Henderson (.252/.338/.441), Niko Holm (.356/.485/.514) and emerging junior Drew Finley. Rancho returns starting pitchers Henderson and Alex Homick.

### 4. Owasso (Okla.) HS 36-0 (4)

Seven starters return from Owasso's undefeated team that won the Rams' ninth state title in the last 17 years. Owasso has a well-rounded team that returns its top two pitchers, senior righthander Braden Webb (1.98 ERA; South Carolina) and lefthander Jeb Bargfeldt (1.29 ERA; Wichita State). First baseman Mason O'Brien (.357/.397/.658; Oklahoma State) will lead a deep lineup that returns the entire outfield, catcher Garrett Hall and middle infielder Jonah Bride.

### 5. Milton (Ga.) HS 29-9-1 (20)

A year after winning a state title, Milton returns 10 starters, a senior class that includes six D-I commits and a first-team All-American in righthander Dylan Cease (0.68 ERA; Vanderbilt). The strengths of the team are pitching, as every starting pitcher returns, including lefthander Alex Schnell (0.50 ERA; Clemson), and experience, as nearly every starter has at least two full seasons on varsity. Senior middle infielder Ryan Gridley (Mississippi State), first baseman Jack Thompson (Georgia State), infielder Dalon Farkas (Kansas State) and outfielder Dalton Ewing lead the offense.

### 6. Barbe HS, St. Charles, LA 36-4 (NR)

Barbe won the state championship in 2012 and is well positioned to challenge for another title with seven returning starters and one of the deepest lineups in the country. Shortstop Kennon Fontenot (Oklahoma State) threw for 10,000 career yards in football and captains the infield. Twin brothers Beau (outfielder) and Bryce Jordan (catcher) are committed to Louisiana State. Juniors Branden Comeaux (Texas Christian) and Shane Selman (Mississippi State) will be big offensive contributors, as will senior third baseman Braedon Barrett (Northwestern State). The pitching staff is talented and deep with righthander Erin Baldwin (Houston) and lefthander Gunner Leger (Louisiana-Lafayette).

### 7. Archbishop McCarthy HS, Southwest Ranches, FL 27-5 (14)

With 13 seniors returning on a team that lost only two seniors, the Mavericks are poised to challenge for their fifth-straight state championship. The pitching staff will be an asset and ace lefthander Brian Gonzalez (1.04 ERA; Miami) could win his fourth ring. Seniors Andres Nunez (1.64 ERA; Florida International) and Aaron Soto (1.09 ERA; Tennessee) round out the rotation. The lineup returns seven starters who hit higher than .300 last year.

### 8. Harvard-Westlake HS, Studio City, CA 28-4 (1)

Last year's Baseball America Team of the Year returns six starters from its Southern Section championship squad. All-American Jack Flaherty is the team's ace (112 SO, 10 BB, 0.63 ERA; North Carolina) and run producer

(.360/.505/.500). The defense will be strong with returners at every infield spot including Brian Ginsberg (.337/.414/.445; Brown), Tyler Urbach (.273/.311/.272; Fordham) and junior Ezra Steinberg (.376/.424/.440).

#### **9. Cypress Ranch (Texas) HS 31-6 (NR)**

Eight starters and 13 seniors return for the Mustangs, who have a formidable lineup. Bryce Johnson (.434/.514/.548), Derek Dickerson (.407/.504/.787; Houston) and Corbin Martin (.321/.417/.576; Texas A&M) are a dynamic trio. The pitching staff lost three of its five most experienced arms, save for its ace, Martin (0.97 ERA).

#### **10. Moody HS, Corpus Christi, Texas, 33-7-1 (NR)**

The Trojans return eight starting position players and three starting pitchers from a team that won the school's third state title in a decade. The pitching staff is headlined by senior lefthander Kenny Saenz (0.53 ERA), righthander Johnny Gonzalez (1.09 ERA) and Aaron Hernandez. Catcher Michael Cantu (Texas) provides offensive thump and is a key arm.

#### **11. Dyer County, Newbern, TN 28-13 (NR)**

After finishing third in the state last year, Dyer County returns every starter. Pitching is the strength of the Choctaws, as a pair of lefthanders—senior Paxton Stover (Mississippi State) and junior Tristan Barlow (Mississippi—combined to strikeout nearly 200 hitters last year with a 0.53 ERA. First baseman Cody Purvis (.299/.441/.495) and infielder Tyler Brown (Tennessee Tech) are key offensive contributors.

#### **12. JSerra Catholic HS, San Juan Capistrano, CA 10-16 (NR)**

The only top 25 team with a losing record last year, JSerra has a depth of young returning talent and eight D-I commits. The Lions have a potentially potent offense with junior outfielder Jake Pries (UCLA), sophomore shortstop Chase Strumpf (UCLA) and Brady Shockey (Southern California). Junior lefthander Quentin Longrie (UCLA) and senior righthander Parker Joe Robinson (Texas) lead a deep pitching staff.

#### **13. Bishop Gorman HS, Las Vegas, NV 30-8 (NR)**

The Gaels had their seven-year championship streak broken last year in the state finals, but return six starting position players. The lineup has depth and could outslug opponents, led by junior shortstop Cadyn Grenier (.560/.628/.901; Oregon State), senior outfielder Cole Krzmarzick (.456/.520/.728; Nevada) and catcher Michael Blakso (.443/.509/.679; Nevada). Their pitching staff lacks experience but will be deep.

#### **14. Greenway HS, Phoenix, AZ 31-3 (NR)**

The Demons tied an Arizona state record last year with 27 consecutive wins and bring back nine starters. Greenway has a high-octane offense that hit .382/.456/.554. Infielders Payton Squier (.523/.581/.752; UNLV) and Alejo Lopez (.510/.597/.824; Arizona) are a dynamic duo, and are supplemented by outfielder Tyler Frost (.404/.500/.725; Gonzaga) and the versatile Cody Wescott (.413/.477/.505).

#### **15. Broken Arrow (Okla.) HS 24-9 (NR)**

Back from last year's state semifinalists are 10 starters and 14 seniors. The Tigers will be a defense- and pitching-oriented squad with most of its key arms back with first baseman/righthander Coleman Key (Colorado State for football), Ryan Lemoine (Northern Oklahoma), Cole Wheaton and Ryan McCullough.

#### **16. Walton HS, Marietta, GA 26-11 (NR)**

Seven starting position players return from the state final four team, and these hitters should make Walton an offensive-minded club. Outfielder Henry Rowling (Georgia) paced the Eagles with 15 home runs, and first baseman Chase Burks provides additional pop. Staff ace Will White (Georgia State) is the only returning starting pitcher.

#### **17. T.C. Roberson HS, Asheville, NC 21-10 (NR)**

Roberson advanced to the final four of the state tournament and six starters are back. The Rams' lineup is their strongest asset with All-American first baseman Braxton Davidson (North Carolina), strong-bodied catcher Dominick Cammarata (Tennessee) and third baseman Connor Lind (Northwestern). Roberson will miss All-state righthander Parker Johnson, who led the pitching staff last season before graduating, and Logan Allen, who transferred to IMG Academy.

#### **18. Hanover HS, Mechanicsville, VA 23-4 (NR)**

Nearly every key pitcher and six starters return for the Hawks' state title team. Senior righthander Derek Casey (0.77; Virginia) is the staff ace and a top 100 high school prospect. Timothy Renfro (1.17 ERA), Matthew Corley (2.12 ERA) and Trevor Denton (4.05 ERA) provide depth. A strong sophomore class with infielders Cayman Richardson (Virginia) and John Gregory (Richmond) adds speed and additional arms.

**19. Mountain Pointe HS, Phoenix, AZ 23-9 (NR)**

With seven returning starters, Mountain Pointe is built to contend this year with nine seniors starting. Four-year starting shortstop Cole Tucker (Arizona) and speedy outfielder Ernie De La Trinidad (Arizona) headline the offensive charge. Junior lefthander Garvin Alston Jr. (Arizona) will be a key arm.

**20. Loyola HS, Los Angeles, CA 22-11 (NR)**

Loyola shared the 2013 Mission League title with Harvard-Westlake and has a deep roster with eight D-I commits in the senior class. Pitching will carry Loyola as the Cubs return their top five pitchers and have four Pac-12 commits on the mound, with lefthander Quinn Brodey (Stanford) and Nathan Hadley (UCLA) leading the staff. Middle infielders Angelo Armenta and Stephen Dubb are headed to Southern Cal.

**21. ThunderRidge HS, Highlands Ranch, CO 21-5 (22)**

The Grizzlies return six starters from a club that won the state title in 2013. Pitching and defense will carry ThunderRidge behind ace AJ Jones (2.56 ERA; Brigham Young) and closer Tyler Loptein (0.00 ERA; San Diego State). Senior shortstop Brody Westmoreland (.457/.519/.891; San Diego State), second baseman Josh Brown (.435/.500/.611) and center fielder Aaron Germani (.382/.500/.470) will provide strong defense and offense up the middle.

**22. DeSoto Central HS, Southaven, MS 27-10 (NR)**

The state runner-ups have six starting position players returning and all seven pitchers that logged more than 10 innings last year. The lineup featuring junior Austin Riley (.438/.517/.697; Mississippi State) and senior Kyle Watson (Mississippi) is bolstered by transfer outfielder Clay Casey, a Top 100 prospect. Seniors Keegan James (Mississippi State) and Drew Cosby (Memphis) and juniors Dallas Woolfolk and Brant Blaylock solidify the pitching staff.

**23. Parkview HS, Lilburn, GA 27-9 (NR)**

Parkview fell to Milton in the state semifinal, finishing two wins shy of its third-straight state championship. Pitching will carry the Panthers as all but one key arm is back on a team that returns seven starters. All-American Mac Marshall (Louisiana State) fronts the rotation ahead of Christian Vann and Jordan Kelly. A strong junior class offers another deep wave of players with corner infielder Isiah Gilliam headlining.

**24. American Heritage HS, Plantation, FL 25-4 (NR)**

The powerhouse reloading from last year's regional team will be aided by transfers. Incumbents David Villar (.346/.485/.538) and Magglio Ordonez (.299/.382/.343) are joined by newcomers Brandon Vicens (Florida Atlantic) and Milton Ramos (Florida Atlantic). Most of last year's pitchers graduated, but Louis Beck (Villanova) will serve as staff ace.

**25. Coral Springs (Fla.) Christian HS 22-7 (NR)**

The Crusaders return eight starters and one of the most talented pitching staffs in the country, led by All-American Touki Toussaint (Vanderbilt). Righthanders Jeremiah Muhammad (Miami Dade JC) and Eric Hepple (Central Florida) round out the rotation that lost Devin Meyer (Miami) to Tommy John surgery. Catcher Benito Santiago (Tennessee), a top 100 prospect, and Chris Bec (Tennessee) headline the offensive attack.