

2015 Baseball America/NHSBCA Pre-Season Top 25 Team Capsules

by Hutson Belinsky- Baseball America

No. 1 — College Park HS, Pleasant Hill, Calif., 27-3

After winning the North Coast Section Championship in 2014, the Falcons have established themselves as a force to be reckoned with in the Golden State. With seven D1 commits returning, including elite pitching prospect Joe DeMers, College Park is as well-rounded as any team in the country. As a junior, DeMers went 12-2 and posted a superb 0.65 ERA, while striking out 94 and walking only nine. He will lead the Falcons' pitching staff as they embark on a difficult high school schedule that includes a trip to Cary, N.C. for USA Baseball's National High School Invitational (NHSI).

No. 2 — Hamilton HS, Chandler, Ariz., 30-3

The Huskies lose some of the offensive punch that guided them to a Arizona Division 1 State Championship in 2014, but there is plenty of talent returning on the mound. Yavapai JC commit Zach Pederson will look to build off of his 12-0 junior campaign as he anchors a rotation full of college-bound arms. Behind the plate, junior Logan Boyer will quarterback the defense with his physical 6-foot-3 frame and outstanding throwing arm. The San Diego State commit batted .429 last year, and made tremendous strides this past summer. Hamilton will have a target on its back in 2015, and its rising senior class will quickly show the country what it's made of.

No. 3 — Marcus Flower Mound (Texas) HS, 32-10

With eight starters returning, the Marauders will look to build on an outstanding 32-win season in the ultra-competitive 6A division in Texas. Maturity is a common theme throughout Marcus's roster. Senior starting pitchers Jack Cushing (Georgetown) and Ethan Nichols (Air Force) will refine their mid-80s stuff and pitchability as they prepare for the next level and allow the Marauders to compete in any situation. In catcher Matt Bernstein, Marcus has a strong defensive presence that should also fit in the middle of their lineup.

No. 4 — Coral Gables HS, Miami, Fla., 20-9

Elih Marrero has big league bloodlines and big time upside behind the plate for Coral Gables, and he will be a huge part of the Cavaliers' squad again in 2015. Marrero (Mississippi State) is one of 11 Coral Gables seniors committed to play college baseball. In 2014, the Cavaliers took an early exit in the Class 8A State Championships with a tough, 6-5 loss to Killian, and if the returning class of seniors can learn from previous experience, Coral Gables could find themselves playing deep into the postseason in 2015.

No. 5 — Huntington Beach (Calif.) HS, 22-5

With one of the toughest schedules in the country, Huntington Beach will rely on a strong core of seven D1 commits, including powerful arms in sophomore Hagen Danner, junior Logan Pouelsen, and senior Noah Davis. Dan Amaral can impact the game on both sides of the ball, and will provide veteran leadership along with Davis. With strong performances at NHSI and the Boras Classic, Huntington Beach should establish itself as one of the best teams in the country.

No. 6 — Lambert (Ga.) HS, 36-2

An entrant in this year's National High School Invitational, Lambert brings a new coach, Rick Howard, and a star player in Seth Beer into the upcoming season. Beer, a Clemson commit and a selection for this year's Under Armour All-America Game, hit .589 last year with 10 home runs and 56 RBIs and sported an 0.53 ERA on the mound in leading Lambert to the Class AAAAAA state championship. The Longhorns also return righthander J.D. Dutka, who is committed to Florida Southwestern and sported an 11-1 record last season. Also returning are Tucker Maxwell, a Georgia commit, and Kyle McCann, both of whom hit .404 last season. Outfielder Jeremy Johnson, an Auburn recruit, is also returning.

No. 7 — Bishop Gorman HS, Las Vegas, 25-5

New head coach Gino DiMaria inherits an embarrassment of riches, including nine starters from last year's state championship team. Shortstop and Oregon State-commit Cadyn Greiner leads the way, and he's followed closely by outfielder Brandon Wulff (a Stanford signee), who hit .473 with 12 homers and 44 RBIs last year. Also returning is senior first baseman Austin Cram, who will head to Santa Clara next year, who hit .455 with a pair of homers last season with the Gaels.

No. 8 — JSerra Catholic HS, San Juan Capistrano, Calif., 22-8

Scheduled to participate in both the National High School Invitational and the Boras Classic, traditional California power JSerra looks loaded once again. The rotation features senior lefthander Quentin Longrie (a USC signee) and lefty Jack Owen, a sophomore who is already committed to Mississippi State. Their lineup is strengthened by shortstop Chase Strumpf, who hit .487 with five homers and was a perfect 6-6 in stolen bases during the 15U National Team's 11-0 run in 2013.

No. 9 — St. Thomas More (La.) HS, 31-5

The defending 4A state champions, St. Thomas More is buoyed by returning lefthander Hogan Harris, whose fastball topped at 94 mph at Perfect Game National last year and is committed to Louisiana-Lafayette. Also returning is senior outfielder O'Neal Lochridge, an LSU signee who hit .383 with seven home runs last season for the Cougars. Rounding out the returnees is junior righthander and third baseman Mason Templet—an LSU commit like Lochridge—who hit .442 and drove in 37 runs last season.

No. 10 — College Station (Texas) HS, 35-6, 3A State Champions

With a boatload of talent returning, the Cougars and head coach Scott Holder should once again make noise. Among the team's top returnees is righthander Ryan Johnson (Texas Christian), who checks in at No. 41 on BA's High School Top 100, and has run his fastball up as high 94 mph. He's a two-time Area Code Games participant, and produced the top exit velocity (102.6 mph) at last year's Perfect Game National. He'll be joined by several other Division I commits, including righty MacGregor Hines (Florida), catcher Baylor Rowlett (Oklahoma State) and outfielder Cody Staab (Rice).

No. 11 — Archbishop Moeller HS, Cincinnati, OH, 24-5

The state runners-up from a year ago, Archbishop Moeller returns 12 starters and will look to finish the job this season. Their rotation is fronted by projectable lefty Nick Bennett, a Louisville commit who brings a fastball that bumps the upper 80s as well as a changeup and a curveball.

Senior shortstop Josh Hollander and righthander Joe Vranesic, Kent State signees both, are two other key cogs for the historic Moeller program.

No. 12 — Horizon HS, Scottsdale, AZ, 27-7

Coach Eric Kibler, a member of this year's 18U National Team staff, will give his squad a taste of Team USA life in late March when the Huskies join the 16-team field at the National High School Invitational. Leading the charge will be Matt Kroon (Oregon), who hit .385 last season with three homers, five doubles and 25 RBIs over 29 games. He is joined by RHP Chris Isbell (Arizona State), who went 5-2, 1.72 with 45 strikeouts in 44 2/3 innings last season and brings his fastball into the high-80s.

No. 13 — Farragut HS, Knoxville, TN, 34-13

Another National High School Invitational participant, the Admirals, led by head coach Matt Buckner, sport a trio of D-I commits in junior shortstop Duncan Pence (Tennessee), senior second baseman Chase Fullington (North Carolina) and senior righthander Patrick Raby (Vanderbilt). Pence, an all-state selection, hit .377 with nine homers and 38 RBIs. His double play partner, Fullington hit .344 and drove in 24 runs, and Raby was 8-3, 0.92 with 92 punchouts in 76 innings.

No. 14 — De Soto Central, Southaven, MS, 28-10

An entrant in this year's National High School Invitational, the Jaguars are led by senior Austin Riley (Mississippi State), a big-bodied righthander who's brought his fastball up to 94 mph and went 8-3, 1.51 last year with 79 strikeouts in 60 1/3 innings. When he's not pitching, Riley, who also plays third base, is a threat in the middle of the DeSoto order. He hit .465 last season with 10 doubles, nine home runs and 35 RBIs. He is joined by outfielder Brant Blaylock (Mississippi State), who hit .372 with two homers and 28 RBIs and stole 14 bases.

No. 15 — St. Thomas Aquinas HS, Overland, KS, 21-4

The top team in the Midwest region, the defending 5A state champion Saints will get a boost from junior Garrett Houston, a transfer from Starrs Mill, Ga., who plays catcher, outfield and first base. He'll add to a group of talented juniors that includes lefty Blake Lillis (Arkansas), who fronts a three-pitch mix with a fastball that sits in the mid-80s. The team's jewel however, is righty Riley Pint (LSU), who has touched as high as 98 mph with his fastball. He couples the heater with a low-to-mid-80s curve and a low-70s changeup.

No. 16 — A. Crawford Mosley HS, Lynn Haven, FL, 24-6

A young but talented squad, Mosley is led by a pair of underclassmen who have scored commitments to Vanderbilt. Weston Bizzle, a sophomore righthander, has already touched the low-90s with his fastball and went 8-1, 0.50 with 83 strikeouts in 62 1/3 innings. Bleday, a junior transfer from Titusville (Pa.), has also committed to the Commodores utilizes a mix of fastball, curveball and changeup and typically sits in the mid-80s with his heat.

No. 17 — Loyalsock Township HS, Williamsport, PA, 23-5

The two-time defending state champions, Loyalsock returns five Division I players, including shortstop and three-sport athlete Kyle Datres (North Carolina), RHP Luke Glavin (Duke), and outfielder Jimmy Webb (Wake Forest). Datres plays shortstop and has run his fastball up as high as 89. He hit .392 with 17 RBIs and stole 22 bases, and went 5-1, 2.14 with 56 strikeouts in 43 2/3 innings. Glavin was 8-1, 2.11 with 50 Ks in 42 2/3 frames. Webb, an outfielder, has been clocked at 6.5 seconds in the 60-yard dash.

No. 18 — Cullman (AL) HS, 41-13

You don't often see a highly rated high school team led by a freshman, but that's just what happened last year for Cullman and stud outfielder Owen Lovell (Alabama). The 6-foot-4, 210-pound Lovell hit .424 for the Bearcats last season with 13 doubles, eight homers and 34 RBIs. Shortstop Kolby Robinson hit .342 with a double and 15 RBIs, and senior righthander Sam Huser (Southeastern Louisiana) was 5-0, 1.15 and permitted just 19 hits in a little more than 30 innings.

No. 19 — Cherry Creek HS, Greenwood Village, CO, 19-4

After falling in the state semis last year, Marc Johnson's squad is back to make another run at the title. The Bruins return nine lettermen and five starters from last year, including a trio of players who hold Division I commitments. Righthander Cody Wood (New Mexico), who also plays football at Cherry Creek, went 5-1, 3.29 last season. Third baseman Blake Goldsberry (Kansas) hit .355 with four doubles, and junior righthander Carter Van Gytenbrek (Army) pairs a mid-80s fastball with a sharp slider.

No. 20 — Fayetteville (AR) HS, 30-4

Armed with a trio of Division I signees, Fayetteville will look to avenge last year's loss in the Class 7A state championship. Vance Arnold's squad is fronted by senior righthander Andy Pagnozzi (Mississippi), who's bumped his fastball into the low-90s and went 11-0, 0.67 last year with 97 strikeouts. Joining Pagnozzi are senior MIF Drew Tyler (Arkansas), who hit .296 with four home runs and senior righty Cody Davenport (Central Arkansas), who has a fastball that will touch 90 mph.

No. 21 — Rock Bridge HS, Columbia, MO, 24-14

The defending 5A state champions have plenty returning from last year's team, including senior outfielder Connor Brumfield (Missouri), a projectable outfielder NEED MORE INFO

No. 22 — Brandon (Miss.) HS, 25-9

After falling in the semi-finals of the Mississippi 6A State Playoffs, Brandon returns eight starters from its powerful 2014 offense, including Erick Hoard, who batted .360 and swatted nine home runs as a junior. The Bulldogs also bring back their top three starters from last year's squad.

No. 23 — Killian HS, Miami, Fla., 26-5

Killian returns a lethal starting rotation, anchored by senior lefthander Ryan Granda (10-0, 76.2 IP, 72 SO). Behind Granda, Vladimir Nunez's power arm and Keith Stevens' experience will make the Cougars extremely difficult to score against. Junior Eddy Demurias should have an impact in the bullpen and in the middle of Killian's lineup. Demurias, a Florida commit, pitches in the mid-80s and batted over .300 as a sophomore in 2014.

No. 24 — Elk Grove (Calif.) HS, 26-6

Second Team Pre-Season All-American shortstop Nick Madrigal will lead the way for the Elk Grove, as they look to build on a North Coast section final appearance in 2014. They lost 2014 first round pick Derek Hill, but most of the roster returns, and junior Dylan Carlson's power bat gives the Thundering Herd an imposing presence in the middle of the lineup.

No. 25 — Joliet (Ill.) Catholic HS, 29-8

Nick Dalesandro is among the top high school prospects in Illinois this year, with upside on the mound and behind the plate. When Dalesandro isn't pitching, he'll serve as a battery-mate for junior, Vanderbilt commit Drake Fellows, whose low-90s fastball will give fitters hits all spring.