

Coach Storm's Pre-Season EMass Top 25

Written by Tom Hellen

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Somerville, MA – Last year was a beauty for EMass girl's hoops as we had the state Champs in D1 with Central Catholic...D2 to Notre Dame Academy of Hingham...D3 to the Big Blue of Swampscott....and D4 went to Millis, a club that got red hot down the stretch all the way to the state title.

But then the inevitable happens; seniors graduate while others move up a class. Who lost the least then and who has that young class moving up and ready to stake their claim to the 2009-2010 league titles and state championships? I've tried to do my homework by going to some AAU tourneys and also those high school events at places like Stonehill and Assumption in the summer, the DOT House fall league and our recent Turkey Tipoff Tourney at Babson College. That way I can get a firsthand look at what this year's picture might look like.

I like a few teams to be very tough at the top but then everything gets cloudy. Seems like most of the top clubs have some good talent returning but then some question marks in the form of injuries in the off season or whether a team can replace what a graduated senior(s) gave to last year's team. Below is my first attempt to give you some semblance of what I'm talking about. I know some places just start with last year's top teams and figure they must be strong again. I don't like doing that as you know...that doesn't mean I will be any closer to guessing than they are...you are...or some other folks might be in predicting who the top clubs will or will not be this year. Anyways, remember it's only "pre-season" so nothing is set in stone. I guess it also means you are more than welcome to send me e-mails with any tidbits you have on some local club you follow.

I want to again thank Doug Lindland for his help with our website this year. Doug does great work and can be reached at doug@easternhoopleague.com or check out his site at www.delci.com.

I hope you enjoy the rankings shown below and again always feel to e-mail me at coachstorm5@comcast.net with any comments. I will also be releasing soon the annual pre-season Cream-of-the-Crop Club where I "try" and list the Top 175 or so players in our part of the state so you can look for them when you attend games this winter. I also want to apologize in advance for any team or player deserving of mention that I miss...I do this as a hobby and for fun so please don't take it personal. Just let me know so I can correct things down the road. Thanks again for checking this site out and I hope you all get out to root for your local teams this winter as girl's high school basketball is a terrific night out at a small cost. I wish every player good health and much success on and off the court.

Pre-Season Top 25 Rankings with Last Year's Record

Now Last Year

#1.	#1.	<p>Central Catholic (D1 N) – 22 – 3 Yep...I know...I said I won't just start with last year's top teams but this rank is well deserved. Let's start with having the best player in the state back in BC bound Katie Zenevitch...then add in a top notch point guard in junior Gabie Polce...and junior forward Melissa Miller who looks much stronger physically this year. I think Miller has a big year this winter. This trio is high quality so I think you get the picture of why they are the top ranked club. Coach Sue Downer does a terrific job coaching and obviously knows what it takes to win a title. Her key is replacing the overall game that Gia O'Connor gave them and the spark that Ashley Evangelista gave every night. 5'8 Senior Bianca Sacco is a strong kid who will be a key while 5'7 Sophomore Alex Borelli could get some quality minutes as she can handle and showed 3 point range at Babson. Also look for junior guards Brianna Martin and Courtney Williams to contribute a lot. 5'10 Frosh Casey McLaughlin could help inside as well. Schedule is always tough with the MVC plus the Greater Lawrence Xmas Tourney and they will try to defend their Comcast Tourney title in February with Westford, the Archie's, and Durfee also involved.</p>
"#1A."	#11.	<p>Oliver Ames (D2 S) – 20 – 2 OA looked terrific when I've seen them play in the off season and that's why it's "1A." Start with the star in future Bentley Falcon Lauren Battista, one of the best ever to play at the school. Love "LB's" all-around game as she can score outside and in, rebound and also throw a terrific outlet pass, play "D," and best of all she sees the floor and shares the ball so well. 6'1 Tessa Dern gives them great size inside while Taylor Horne is a very athletic 5'10 kid who can do a lot on the floor. Jackie Bliss will run the point with co-captain and defensive stalwart Lauren Vatalaro at the other guard. The common denominator?...all are seniors and I love senior laden teams. Junior Nicole Bostic will give great depth at guard and also look for sophs Candice Steadman and Emily Romans to help as well. Talented frosh Asia Minet Mitchell might not even make this deep and talented varsity. Coach Laney Clement-Holbrook has won the title before and she might recall that the last time OA had such a deep and talented senior class they ended up D2 state champs....hmmm.</p>
#3.	#6.	<p>Andover (D1 N) – 18 – 5 – Big surprise last year to me but just shows the Andover program is deep and Jim Tildsley knows how to coach. They return their dynamic guard duo of Natalie Gomez and Nicole Boudreau, 2 super talents who both are really point guards who can pass and also REALLY can score. They also return Ally Fazio and Alex Alois plus I think Diana Bill will contribute more this year as well. Look for frosh Devan Caveny to possibly play more of a role as the season rolls on. Question for them will be rebounding as size is again an issue though Alois is tough on the boards for her height. One unexpected loss was Marisa Cataldo who moved back to Stoneham...good break for Stoneham but Cataldo is a tough kid who played some very good defense for the Warriors. Tough MVC schedule as usual plus the Greater Lawrence Xmas Tourney and also the St. Mary's Tourney. Interesting non-league road game at Wachusett, probably the tallest team in the state...sort of a "David vs. Goliath" game.</p>

#4. #14.	Brockton (D1 S) – 19 – 6 Boxers got to the Garden again before losing to Central Catholic. They lost Sabree Rodriguez and Beatrice Atkinson but 6’ 2” Morgan Thatcher returns and she had an excellent game at the Garden against Katie Z. She could get help inside with 5’10 junior Jenn Rafuse. And then you have a star in the making at point guard in 5’4 soph Tianna Johnson. This kid little southpaw can flat out play as she can beat you off the dribble and set up her mates really well. Coach Dibiase has kids who will play hard, run and get in your face on defense. The schedule always includes Big 3 league foes New Bedford and Durfee but the 2 most interesting games may be the home and home battles with tough Mansfield.
#5. #8.	Wellesley (D1 S) – 21 – 1 This team mirrors Andover...fabulous guards but lacking size and experience up front...wish they played Andover as it would be a really fun game to watch. Will they rebound the basketball without Jess Miller under the hoop? Can 6’ senior Maddie Carens be the answer? How do they handle being in D1 now? Those are key questions. No questions at guard...none. With Mary Louise Dixon (Stonehill) back for her final go-around and junior 3 sport star Blake Dietrick also back Coach Cieri has no backcourt worries. These 2 girls are fun to watch because they play the game the way it’s supposed to be played...they see the floor 1st, they shoot it when open...they defend...they lead...and play super hard all the time. They play L-S in a home-and-home series this winter and those games should be fun with 2 teams moving up to D1. State champs 2 years ago now and the mental aspect of that will help this year.
#6. #12.	Westford (D1 N) 20 – 3 – This club is always talented and deep and this year is no exception and they’ll need it as they move up to D1. Coach Russ Coward returns 9 seniors including Stonehill bound Asia Ewing who is a 5’11 force inside the paint. Nice to see Lauren Gallant back hitting 3’s at Babson as this poor kid has had 2 knee injuries so love to see her have a super senior year. 6’ Erica Wright is a tough match-up for any club with her guard skills. Suzanne Parker and Aly Boyle also look strong. The Grey Ghosts will need this depth as the DCL is very tough this year plus they head to the Comcast Tourney in February so their seeding this year may not be as high as in the past with such a tough schedule.
#7. #25.	Melrose (D2 N) – 16 - 5 Losing 5 games last season is probably considered a “down year” in Melrose but I don’t think that happens this winter. Look for 5 seniors to start including Siena Mamayek in the middle, Colleen Hanscom at the point, Hannah Brickley banging inside, Laura Irwin ...all 4 started last year. Not enough seniors for you? Then how about Nicole Meuse, Annmarie Wiesen, and Amanda Peters coming off the bench...also all seniors. Senior dominated teams win and they have some good ones. Love their Xmas Tourney as they travel up to my favorite getaway spot in York Beach, Maine. They better watch out for York’s 6’ star Nikki Taylor as she’s a good one.

<p>#8. Cusp</p>	<p>Mansfield (D2 S) – 14 – 8 Big jump for this team into the limelight here but they return their top 7 players including seniors Colleen Hooper a 5’11 point guard (12PPG & 4 assists), Jess Eason in the post who is a “double-double” girl, and Briena Walker at the other guard. Great depth plus this team is very well coached by Mike Redding...must be that football mentality as they all play “D” and rarely beat themselves. Very streaky last year so need to have more peaks and less valleys...playing Brockton home and home will be interesting plus I would love to see their February Tourney end up with them playing L-S...that would be fun to watch. Question here is do they have enough to get by OA in the Hock and in the D2 states?</p>
<p>#9. Missed</p>	<p>Newton North (D1 S) 12 – 10 – Gotta’ give Coach DeSantis’ club some props this year as they only graduated 1 key player and have some excellent young talent back. This club seems to be maturing as we speak...beat Central Catholic at Babson so they can play. The guards are smallish but very quick and both juniors really have game. Briana Hunt is a slender 5’6 but she has skills...handle, hit the 3, take it to the hoop, see the floor...ditto for Djaidah Wynn as this kid epitomizes the maturity factor here...she is about 5’6 but has lightning moves and dribbles so low it will be rare for anyone to turn her over. The middle is manned by 6’ senior Monet Lowe and she is strong and tough. She is assisted by 5’10 senior Lucy Abbott and 6’ junior Megan Gentile who will also be tough in the paint. I like 5’10 junior Ella Scheuerehall’s athleticism and offensive game. 10 of their 1st 13 games are at home. Played really well in scrimmages involving Central, Westford, Brockton and more. They bring in Springfield Central and Newton South to their Xmas Tourney and play Wellesley in early February in the league and possibly again in their own February Tourney.</p>
<p>#10. #7.</p>	<p>Arlington Catholic (D2 N) – 23 – 3 Great run to the Garden last winter but that comes with a price losing stars Kelsey Roberson (Bentley) and Merri Soper (Bryant), both 1,000 point scorers to graduation. Shed few tears for Coach Brady as the torch is now passed to quality seniors Cara Paladino and Lindsey Roche (Assumption) and they will carry it proudly. Paladino is a force inside but at 5’8 is not your prototypical power player. Cara does have range though and this could come out this year. Lindsey Roche is a pure guard with a beautiful shooting stroke and excellent handle. I love that the “game is very important to her.” Teresa Busiek is another rugged senior who does a little of everything and always at 100 miles an hour. With these seniors, there is no issue with leadership for the Cougars. Will they have that presence inside to rebound and block a shot?...Will the younger kids step up? Those are the questions. Sophomore guards Emma Roberson and Nicole Catizone got lots of good minutes last year that will pay off big this season for them and the club. 6’ frosh Alison Mignault could be that answer in the paint later in the year. The Catholic league is brutal again and they hit the Masco Tourney at Xmas where they get Londonderry, NH in round 1 and then St. Mary’s to face Wilmington in February so the schedule is rock solid. #7</p>

<p>#11. Cusp</p>	<p>Lincoln-Sudbury (D1 N) – 13 – 9 Young team that got better and better last year. They lost 3 games by 1 point and that shouldn't happen now. Club will be led by senior shooter Liz Newman who is the last remaining member from their D2 state title team 4 years ago. Coach Feldman has to answer questions about being D1 now and also their lack of size. 2 frosh may help with the latter as Ashley Lutz and Mandy Sifferlen are both 6' and very athletic. 5'9 junior Lindsey Jones is a kid who I like the way she plays...110% all the time and works at all aspects of the game. Junior Bridget Mahoney should man the point again and she now has 2 solid years of varsity experience under her belt. Ali Murray is another 5'9 junior who played well at Babson and should have an excellent season. Nyah Berg will also be a backcourt factor. The DCL is rugged this year plus playing 2 with Wellesley will be fun and they are in the Mansfield Tourney in February and that could also be a real good one if they get to play Mansfield.</p>
<p>#12. #13.</p>	<p>Lynn English (D1 N) – 20 – 4 Last season was simply the best in school history but they lost their inside star Jeanette Anderson (broke 1,000 points AND 1,000 rebounds) to graduation. They do return star guard Jenicia Duggins and the Hogan's, Miranda and Lashaunda, are back plus Kayla Murkison so there is plenty...and I mean plenty...of backcourt talent. This club is very unselfish and looks like Coach Hogan will be pressing all over the court as these kids all come to play every night. Who will be the rebounders is the big question here. They play RI power Bayview Academy in the St. Mary's Tourney and possibly Andover plus they could get St. Mary's in the other Lynn Tourney and Somerville is again on the schedule....challenges all.</p>
<p>#13. Cusp</p>	<p>Newton South (D1 S) 15 – 8 – Young team that will be tough this season and even better next year. Coach Sam Doner returns a talented junior class led by 5'11 Sophie Bikofsky an athletic kid with guard skills including 3 point range and may also be their best rebounder. 5'7 Kendall Burton is another quick girl who has added some good outside range to her repertoire. 5'7 guard Chloe Rothman has an excellent handle and can score while Nicole Butera will give some valuable guard depth and Burton's younger sister might get some varsity time as a frosh. The key will be the boards. Can 5'10 senior Allison Leipzig and 5'11 junior Julia Sloan-Cullen give them that needed presence inside? I think they can and that this club gives Westford and L-S a run for their money in the DCL. They could also see Springfield Central and cross-town rival Newton North at Xmas.</p>
<p>#14. Cusp</p>	<p>Archbishop Williams (D3 S) – 15 – 12 – Coach Bancroft played a lot of frosh last year and it should pay dividends now. Start with 6'4 senior Val Driscoll (Michigan) and you've got a great presence in the paint. Fellow seniors Christine Mahoney at guard, Colleen Downing a forward and Erica Knowles at power forward have lots of experience. . Then the sophs...5'7 Aiden Duquette played real well at Babson knocking down 3's. Mari Barry will start at the point. 5'10 Kayla Papazian will give Driscoll good support down low and Michaela Flanagan will add depth at guard. Another soph who started a lot last year is Alexandra Dean but she has a torn ACL and will miss the season. 5'9 frosh guard Sara Ryan will be a factor before long. The Catholic league is always tough and they are in the Big Apple Xmas Tourney in New York plus the February Comcast Tourney so as usual, Coach Bancroft has a schedule that will toughen all these kids up for the state tournament.</p>

<p>#15. #4.</p>	<p>Pentucket (D3 N) – 22 – 3 Maybe best year in school history last winter but losing 6’3 Kirsten Daamen (Central Conn.) and Andrea Attenasio up front hurts a lot. The cupboard is hardly bare as Coach McNamara returns 3 excellent seniors in point guard Erin McNamara, scorer Ashley Viselli, and combo guard Holly Jakobsons. Now if someone like 6’ Vanessa Cahill can step up on the inside...that’s the question here. The Haverhill Xmas Tourney will be challenging again plus a non-league battle with St. Mary’s at Emmanuel College then you have the usual rivalries with Masco and Wilmington.</p>
<p>#16. Cusp</p>	<p>St. Mary’s of Lynn (D3 N) – 18 – 7 Dramatic improvement from 9 to 18 wins the last 2 years has this team ready for a tough schedule this winter. Coach Newhall returns hard working and talented 6’ 2” Tory Faieta and 5’ 10” Cassi Amenta up front plus high scoring Bria Tiro at guard. Look for junior Kirsten Ferrari to handle the point and Molly Carey to give some depth at guard. Anne-Marie Idusyi, a 5’11 soph played well in the off season should get a bigger role this year. I like this club but matching 18 wins will be difficult with the schedule they face. The Catholic league causes problems plus they added 2 with Cambridge, Pentucket at Emmanuel, possibly Lynn English in their own February tourney and some “weakling” named Central Catholic...tough schedule means a tough out in the state tourney this year.</p>
<p>#17. Missed</p>	<p>Methuen (D1 N) – 14 – 8 When you return the size they have you must respect the Rangers. BU bound Ashley Agboola is a 6’1 stud who needs only 89 points to reach 1,000 and 6’2 junior Ashley LeBlanc is very good also. 6’ juniors Catherine Cloutier and Courtney Murach give them depth up front. Can they get the guard play they need? Senior names like Ortiz, Newell, Dolbeare, Sessa, and Adams will all get their shot to answer that question. The schedule got tougher as they move up to the MVC large bracket so they get 2 chances against the Central’s, Andover’s, and Lowell’s of the world and maybe another at the Greater Lawrence Xmas Tourney.</p>
<p>#18. #19.</p>	<p>Coyle Cassidy (D3 S) – 17 – 4 – They graduated 7 so the experience will be lacking but do return star junior Brenna Gonsalves and she has a chance to be maybe the best ever to play at Coyle. Coach O’Brien also has EAC all star Kelsey Dermody back to man the point so that’s not an issue. 5’11 soph Tricia Quinn also started last year so she should be solid up front. Fellow sophs Andreyra DeSousa to play tough with 5’9 Delaney Adams and Missy Perry to all contribute. I saw them at Stonehill and Assumption last summer and these kids seemed to really jell. Look for this team to get better as the year goes on. Schedule is tough with Feehan and Stang in the league plus Taunton, ORR and the Spellman Xmas Tourney.</p>
<p>#19. #20.</p>	<p>Cohasset (D4 S) -- 22 – 2 What a year run! Probably would have been back-to-back state titles if a super hot and eventual state titlist Millis hadn’t beaten them by 2 late in the state tourney. 6’1 senior Tori Lehr returns and she can board, block shots and face the hoop and knock down the 15 foot “J.” Add in fellow seniors 5’11 Samantha Crough up front, 5’8 Meredith Kelly, 5’8 junior Lindsey Davis, and 5’5 soph Anna Seraikas and this team has all the pieces to the puzzle...size...senior leadership...and great state tourney experience...this group has a recipe for many wins this year...</p>

#20. Missed	Hull (D4 S) -- 15 – 10 Club lost in OT to Cohasset but returns some excellent pieces to the puzzle. Start with an outstanding guard who I really like in Ashleigh Condon, a 5'8 do-it-all player and then look inside to 6' Julie Manning who can score and board. Her younger sister Katy will also be a help and fellow soph Lauren Geary has some good upside to her game. Marisa Johnson will also get some good minutes here. D4 South will be fun come the state tourney with Hull, Cohasset and Millis battling it out.
#21. Missed	Cambridge (D1 N) – 11 – 9 Coach Dana Elcock's crew gave Central Catholic a good tussle in the state tourney last year before losing by 10. He returns a solid nucleus and serious size. The Cantabs are led by junior guard Dyamond Gardner and she's about a 2 carat "diamond"...this kid can really play. The size is in the form of 6'1 senior Mykaliah Best who will be pounding inside plus 5'11 Aubrey Andres who can score as well. 5'9 senior Georgia Pingue is an athletic all-around presence on the floor. They have the GBL rivalry with Somerville plus they are at New Bedford and play Lowell and they usually go to the Haverhill Xmas Tourney each year. Could be a solid club this winter and surprise some people including me and move even further up the charts here.
#22. #23.	Somerville (D1 N) – 16 – 6 Coach Harris graduated 11 but does return dynamo guard Kelsey Garrity and 6' 3" Keisha Jean-Louis so he has an outside/inside game coming back. Look for some talented frosh to be key contributors for the Highlanders including Indira Evora (kid can play) along with Cheyenne Miles and Shykela McAndrew. Soph Ashley Auciello flies on the court and will give them a spark. 5'11 junior Lindsey Rimpel will help inside. Junior Marie Silva can shoot the "3" while classmate Danielle Cremona gives them added toughness and Karlee Popken some solid senior experience. Schedule is always tough with league foe Cambridge then add their good rivalry with Lynn English, 2 with tough AC, Marshfield and Billerica and this will be no easy task.
#23. Cusp	New Mission (D4 N) – 19 – 3 Winning City title is always their priority and they return almost everyone including the dynamic duo of Mieshia Reynolds and Niesha Kelley in the backcourt with Chreese Hall at one forward. D4 Coach of the Year Greg Barry has a lot of pieces here and I think he puts them altogether. State title is still a fresh memory from a few years back for these kids and they should be the favorite in D4 North again this year.
#24. Tie Cusp	Fontbonne (D2 S) – 13 – 8 When you have 5 senior starters you gotta' like this club's chances to have a real good season. They have the scorer in Alexis Peters who is getting some scholarship looks...the playmakers in Ari Renwick and Katie King...good size and post play from 5'10 Nicole Derba and 6' Amy Connolly...note the other 4 are getting lots of D3 college looks as well. The question is depth off the bench. The schedule includes the Somerville Xmas Tourney along with the Archie's, Spellman, Feehan, Marshfield, and NDA of Hingham. Club was D1 last year but is now D2. Coach Murphy took the Ducks to the D2 state title game the last time they played at this level so she knows how to put the pieces together. The tough schedule should toughen them up come state tourney time.

#24. #15.	Bishop Feehan (D2 S) – 15 – 6 This team has a great tradition and looks to continue that trend again. Club lost some phenomenal players in all time great Amy Lepley (Holy Cross) and the multitalented Jenna Roncarati. They do return all star senior Morgan Lindberg at guard and junior Kaitlin Hill, a 6’ kid with a very high upside. Soph guard Marissa Cicchetti got some great experience last winter as a frosh and look for incoming frosh Julia Wood to be a factor early this season. Mike Deady is an excellent coach and needs to be this year to develop this young talent as the year progresses but I think they will be real tough come tourney time. League is tough with Coyle and Stang plus 2 with the Archie’s and the Bridgewater State February Tourney.
#24. Missed	Westwood (D3 S) – 13 – 9 – They return the “Bobsey Twins” (yep...dating myself again) with clever 5’5 point guard Molly McLaughlin running the show and her “twin” at the shooting guard in 5’5 Erin Young. McLaughlin is a pass 1 st point that can also score while Young is a deadly 3 point shooter who can handle. Both kids love the game and give 110% all 32 minutes. The key question here is the health of Kelly Casey who was last seen with her foot in one of those boots that you don’t want to see anyone in. Casey is a good one who gives them that senior experience and at 5’11 some valuable size and scoring up front. The Rich girls (not the town but 2 players named Kelly and Kate) also played well at Babson. Junior 6’ Leah Lessard will also help up front. Tri Valley games with Millis and Hopkinton will be tests plus they play King Philip and either Canton or Norwood in their own February Tourney.
#25. Tie #23.	Foxborough (D2 S) – 17 – 4 – Club lost a lot to graduation in Samantha Briggs, Rehema Strouble, and Michelle Cameron. But they do return 5’10 Kristen Hoffman at the point and she is very, very good. Rachel Jamieson is back for some strong “D” and Kayleen Whall is a kid who has game and that I personally like. I’m not sure if Paula Alvarez returns or if she moved back to Spain but if she is playing, watch out for this club. They are well coached and it will need to be as you have Hock League games with OA and Mansfield while Franklin is no slouch...those will be brutal plus the Milton Xmas Tourney and the Winter Classic in February.
#25 Tie Cusp	New Bedford (D1 S) – 16 – 6 Started out 9 and 0 last year but then the schedule got tougher and most were on the road. I don’t have any team contacts here so not much info but I do know that Alyssa Roach can really shoot it and play so she is an excellent building block.

“On the Cusp”

Marshfield (D1 S) 17 – 7 – Nicole Beresford is outstanding and had a brilliant sophomore year scoring over 20 a game. She has over 900 points in 2 years of high school which is an incredible feat...Kendra Kerr is another wing player and was also an all star. Then add in 6’ soph Erin Doherty who has a big upside and this club could move up quickly this year.

Wilmington (D2 N) – 12 – 10 Coach Keane has some good returning talent in 2 time CAL All League senior Amy Fahey who can flat out score. Then add in 6’1 soph Maggie Brown gives them size and more scoring. Look for hard working 5’11 junior Amanda Keane to have a solid season as she goes into it 100% healthy this time. Soph guard Emily Crannell has shown a very good touch from behind the arc. Need to solve the point guard situation and that is a question right now.

Masconomet (D1 N) – 16 – 6 Coach Romeo always does a great coaching job here and he has an interesting group to work with this year. 5’10 Senior Carly Kiernan was a CAL all star and can play and I look for her to have an excellent final year there. She is flanked up front by 5’11 classmate Julie Galvin with 5’11 while sophs Danielle Davis and Brooke Stewart have excellent potential. Courtney Allison should man one of the guard spots. Senior Emily Winskowicz should round out the starting 5.

Bishop Fenwick (D2 N) – 16 – 7 Lost some talent and much of their size up front. They do return a kid who can really play in junior Amy Pelletier at one guard and shooter Lizzy Trainor at the other. Those 2 are very good but can 5’10 junior forwards Kayle Murphy and Sarah James step up and be ready to battle the likes of 6’4 Val Driscoll and 6’2 Tori Faieta and other “biggs” in the tough Catholic league plus they added 2 games with Methuen and 6’1 Agboola and 6’2 LeBlanc and Cambridge with 6’1 Best...gonna’ be tough so we’ll see.

Durfee (D1 S) 12 – 8 – Brutal bad luck again as one of my “faves” is lost with an ACL for the year in Kate McDonald., the Hilltoppers superb senior point guard. They do have a stud star inside presence in 6’ 1” Lauren Fiola (UMass Lowell) who is a real tough matchup for all teams. I just wish once this team could avoid the injury bug as it has been like 5 years straight with season ending injuries to key starters.

Notre Dame of Hingham (D2 S) – 21 – 5 The defending D2 state champs lost all 5 starters to graduation...but Coach Barrett does return 6 seniors and you know me and seniors...they will be led by guard Kara Stefaniak who got serious minutes last year as well as 6’ 2” junior Michaela Cataldo who has a chance to be very good. Stir in 6’ Lauren McClelland at the “4,” Bridget Constantino for some scoring and Alicia Mosseso for some defense and this club could be a team you don’t want to face come March.

Stoneham (D3 N) 19 – 4 – Coach Angela Billings led Stoneham to one of their best seasons ever but that comes with a price in that they sneak up on nobody this year. They lost the tough inside presence of Gina Sicuso but do return senior shooter Cassie Liston and she’s a good one. Vanessa Bramante at 5’11 played real well at Babson and promising junior guards Arianna Tuccelli and Arianna Sicuso should be solid. They catch a nice break in having Marisa Cataldo move back to Stoneham from Andover and this kid is one of the better defenders around and learned a lot in her stay in Andover.

Lowell (D1 N) – 20 – 3 Team lost a ton to graduation in Kara Rogers (shooter), the Wilsons (boards and blocks), Brianna and Whitney, and Maggie Wallace (your point) so another Coach has his work cut out this year. Crowley has some good size returning in 6’ 2” Tess Cigliano plus starter Molly Desmond is back while soph Bridget Ravagli got good minutes as a frosh. The schedule is brutal with MVC foes Andover, Central, Methuen all twice and Billerica is no picnic then add in Cambridge twice and the Lawrence Xmas Tourney where they could see more of the dreaded MVC teams...whoa.

Swampscott (D3 N) – 23 - 2 Another state champ who got hurt badly by graduation losing stars like Allie Beaulieu, Tara Nimkar and Marissa Gambale who will be impossible to replace. The Big Blue does return 2 good starters in Kara Gilberg and 5'10 Tara Gallagher so Coach Hughes will have a good foundation to build around but the rest of the pieces need to come around fast as this club will have a bulls eye on its back and many teams will be sky high to play them this year.

Reading – (D2 N) -- 21 – 3 Great season winning the Middlesex League and winning 3 in the state tourney but...the graduation toll hits again and takes your entire starting 5. Coach Kim Penney does a terrific job and she does have 2 good ones back in 6' junior Carlene Kluge, a kid who stepped up big at the end and looked excellent at Babson plus a strong soph in 6' Melissa Dalpozzo who is relentless all over the floor. There is lots of senior experience here in Kamy Forlizzy, Rory Costigan, and more but many, many questions need answering.

Cardinal Spellman (D3 S) – 16 - 8 Growing pains early last year on for Pat Lamb's club but his kids matured and had a nice tourney run before losing to the Archie's. Reilly Poirier (Southern Connecticut) had a fabulous 4 year run here but she has graduated but they return the 6'3 Alexis Adoji and 6' soph point guard Molly Anderson but the Catholic league is so difficult that without Poirier last year's record could be hard to match.

Acton Boxborough (D1 N) -- 15 – 7 Lost a lot but do return Liz Belanger and she's a stud but their league is really tough plus they are in the Peabody Xmas Tourney and play Holy Name of Worcester 2 times with their star guard (love this kid) An Dho Tran...Coach Gallant has her work cut out this year. Liz Barnard may help with some scoring and Sarah Teebagy at 5'11 could be the answer inside.

Needham (D1 S) – 17 – 7 Excellent state tourney run getting to the D1 South finals but another team hurt by graduation especially losing Katie Ganser (Merrimack) plus 3 other starters. Talented Holy Cross bound Christine Ganser is back and she does have broad shoulders but are those shoulders broad enough and strong enough to carry the Rockets this year? She will also be seeing lots of double and triple teams so Coach Benzan needs to find ways to get her open. This kid can flat out score and will make it happen plus close guarding means she'll get fouled a lot and she is superb at the line.

Carver (D3 S) – 19 – 5 – Coach Pina does a superb job every year with this group and they have center Mari Meserve and classmate Ashley Fruzzetti back for their senior season so he has some very good talent to build on. Depth is always an issue here but Coach Pina always seems to find a way.

Millis (D4 S) 19 – 6 – Terrific stretch run gets them the D4 state title but they lose some great scoring in Amy Ingraham but the points should be all set as long as 6' senior Molly Breen (28 in the state title game and 16 a game last year) stays healthy.

Sharon (D2 S) – 13 – 8 I like the Daley sisters to be strong here...Liz is a 5'11 athletic senior and her sister is Emilee, a 6' soph with excellent potential. Araianna Castillo is another forward who had a good year and will be strong as well. Can they replace the scoring of Grace Rehnquist who pumped in over a 1,000 in her career? Can the guard play be strong enough?

Gloucester (D2 N) – 12 – 9 Any team with Hannah Cain as the point coming back as a junior next year has something to really build on though...plus younger sis Heather should be healthy this winter and that will help.

Franklin (D1 S) – 11 – 11 6' senior Ashley Meredith returns up front and she is a good one plus fellow senior Taylor Kale can hit the "3" ball but the Hock is soooo tough this winter.

Danvers (D2 N) – 12 – 9 Team has some very good young talent in 5'10 soph Sarah Palazola and fellow soph 6' Kellie MacDonald so look for them to keep improving.

Bishop Stang (D2 S) – 12 – 8 Team has junior forward Alyssa Aguiar back and she is very good.

Taunton (D1 S) – 2 – 15 Team struggled last year but some young talent is starting to mature so I think they might really improve their record this year. Junior guard Lauren Perra can flat out play and 6' sophs Taylor Pelote (played well at Babson) and Grace Harrigan give them some size. Soph Erica McGreevy had some good moments in the Turkey Tourney as well.

Peabody (D1 N) – 8 – 11 Tanners return star Janelle Rodriguez (Brandeis?) at one forward and then tough Ginny Fleming at the other so that spot is rock solid. Kerrie O'Shea played point last year but should slide to the 2 guard with others like Carissa Milley healthy again. Milley has had 2 ACL surgeries so I wish her so much good health this winter as she really deserves it.

Nauset (D1 S) – 9 – 11 Team returns rugged Maggie Whelan a 5'11 "double – double" kid who can bang and score so this club should improve and make the tourney.

Hopkinton (D2 S) – 14 – 7 Team beat D4 state champ Millis as the Hillies had a solid year so look for more from this group.

Salem (D2 N) – 15 – 6 Nice job by CAL Coach-of-the Year John Fortunato, an excellent tactician, with an excellent record but not sure what they have back.

Manchester Essex (D4 N) 16 – 6 – This team has developed a nice tradition there and returns a good one in the hard working Lizzy Ball but is she enough to keep their hot streak in D4 going?

Walpole (D2 S) -- 18 – 6 The Rebels had a great end of year run but that comes with the usual price of graduation losses like Lauren Baryski, Michaela Cosby, and captains Sarah Roof and Sydney Salvatore Lauren Baryski, Michaela Cosby, and captains Sarah Roof and Sydney Salvatore. Coach Stacey Bilodeau has sparkplug Brooke Waite back and also starter Molly Grimes but who will rebound and who will score? Bilodeau is another very good coach so she will be challenged this year.

Weston (D3 N) – 14 – 8 They lose all-time leading scorer Becca Kimball to graduation so no joy for the Wildcats but club played well at Babson with 5'9 juniors Allyson Pemberton and Brooke Brennan (six 3's one game) leading the way. DCL is so tough this year though.

Winchester (D2 N) – 10 – 11 Team has some stability now with Coach Jason Cacciapuoti and also some fairly tall talent in juniors Samantha Mangano at 5'11 and Shelby Santini at 5'10...club should build on last year and make the tourney again.

Things I Think...

Okay...I know I missed some team so feel free to let me know plus I'll be watching games and results and all of a sudden someone starts out winning 5 in a row and then they get on my radar screen. Looking forward to some fun games and hope you are also.

Gotta' run folks!...Remember...**“No ability without eligibility!”...and...“The ball stops bouncing for everyone at some point but a college degree lasts forever!”**