

VIDEO: PREP BASKETBALL: 2010 CITY OF PALMS TOURNAMENT WILL FEATURE ANOTHER FIELD OF NATION'S ELITE

By ADAM FISHER

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FORT MYERS — Variety is the spice of life, but it's also what keeps a tournament like the City of Palms Classic consistently entertaining for 38 years.

When piecing together the nationwide field for the annual high school basketball tournament, Donnie Wilkie tried to find teams with varying styles from an array of locales featuring different types of players and coaches. But the one constant with the 2010 field is success.

The past two years, the City of Palms has brought some of the best overall talent to Bishop Verot High School in December. While this year's event, Dec. 17 to 22 at the same venue, will have its share of individual stars, Wilkie has brought together some of the best overall teams in the country.

"You want a little bit of this style, a little bit of this style," said Wilkie, vice president of Classic Basketball Inc., which organizes the tournament. "My job is to create a mix, a blend that will wind up being interesting to our fans."

During a press conference at Shoeless Joe's Sports Cafe on Tuesday afternoon, Wilkie and tournament director Ron Riley announced 15 of the 16 teams in this year's field, with one team yet to be determined. A year after the event lost its title sponsor because of a bad economy, Riley announced the tournament found a new one and is now the State Farm City of Palms Classic.

The teams come from eight states, stretching from New York to California. Seven Florida teams will play in the tournament. The 38th City of Palms field includes eight state champions from last season, including three champs from Florida's six classifications.

"We're extremely proud of this field," Riley said. "This is one of the earliest (points in the year) that we've had the teams committed."

Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei returns for a sixth time. The school won the tournament championship the past two times it participated in Fort Myers, in 2006 and 2008. The Monarch finished ranked ninth in the nation by ESPN.

Led by the Monarchs, seven teams in the field were ranked nationally at the end of the 2009-10 season.

Las Vegas Bishop Gorman, the Nevada Class 4A winners, were ranked 10th by ESPN last season. Arden (N.C.) Christ School was ranked No. 17 by ESPN, while Alpharetta (Ga.) Milton, which played in last year's City of Palms, was ranked No. 19. Memphis Melrose (No. 15), and New York City's Christ the King (No. 35) also were ranked.

Leading the in-state schools are local staple Fort Myers and recent fan favorite Winter Park. The Green Wave won two games and advanced to the consolation championship last season before going on to a Class 4A title. Winter Park, led by University of Florida recruit Austin Rivers, finished runner-up at the City of Palms before winning the 6A state title.

Orlando Christian Prep, last year's 1A champ, will play in this year's tournament. Also from Florida are North Port, Miami-Monsignor Pace, Miami-Dr. Krop and Palm Beach Gardens-Dwyer.

Rounding out the 2010 State Farms City of Palms Classic field is Chicago-Whitney Young and Reserve (La.)-Riverside Academy.

Riley said Tuesday that tournament officials are in negotiations to have the City of Palms championship and third-place games shown on ESPNU. The network aired the games on its amateur sports channel for the first time in 2008, and last year the games were moved up to prime time.

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