

State champs fill Classic field

BY DAVID DORSEY • DDORSEY@NEWS-PRESS.COM • JUNE 17, 2010

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Entering its 38th year, the pre-Christmas high school basketball tournament that has become a staple of the area's sports scene has a new title sponsor and a field of teams that's already nearly full.



The State Farm City of Palms Classic will take place Dec. 17-22 at Bishop Verot High School.

Tournament organizers Ron Riley and Donnie Wilkie announced 15 of the tournament's 16 teams at a news conference Wednesday at Shoeless Joe's Sports Cafe in Fort Myers.

Nine of the 15 announced teams are defending state champions, including reigning Class 4A Florida champion Fort Myers High.

Seven teams from Florida and one each from California, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Nevada, New York, North Carolina and Tennessee make up the field.

North Port, which went 21-4 last season, will be the only other Southwest Florida school.

"The event is incredible," said Brian Chapman, a State Farm insurance agent based in Port Charlotte and a tournament fan since 1996. "It's No. 1. Being a legacy company, we don't get to where we are without reaching the next generation."

Although Classic Basketball Inc. will continue looking for sponsorship deals, State Farm will serve as the title sponsor for at least the next three years.

Negotiations are under way to televise the tournament for a third consecutive year on ESPNU.

Winter Park, which has played in the past two Classics and won last season's Class 6A state championship, will return to try to finally win a Classic title. Guard Austin Rivers, the son of Boston Celtics coach Doc Rivers - who will try to win an NBA title tonight against the Los Angeles Lakers - will be a senior and can try to win an unprecedented third tournament Most Valuable Player Award.

"If we're consistently among the top three tournaments in the country, we have accomplished our goal at the end of the day," Wilkie said. "We wanted to create a mix, a blend that will wind up being interesting."

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CITY OF PALMS CLASSIC

The 38th State Farm City of Palms Classic

When: Dec. 17-22

Where: Bishop Verot's John Nevins Gymnasium

Ticket information: Ron Riley, 671-9347

Online:

cityofpalmsclassic.com

A quick look at the 15 of 16 announced teams, with one spot still open:

Alpharetta (Ga.) Milton: Went 29-4 and won Georgia's Class 5A state title last season. Returns juniors Dai-Jon Parker, Julian Royal and Shannon Scott, who all played in the 2009 Classic.

Arden (N.C.) Christ School: Went 37-2 and won its state title for Class 3A in the private-school division. The team, nicknamed the Greenies, has won four consecutive titles under coach David Gaines. Top players include 7-foot center Marshall Plumlee, 6-6 Tony Kimbro Jr. and 6-5 DeMarcus Harrison.

Chicago Whitney Young: Went 23-7 last year and finished second in Illinois' Class 4A tournament. Making its first Classic appearance.

Fort Myers: Went 28-5 and won the Class 4A state title. Junior guard Evin Graham, the reigning Player of The Year for The News-Press, returns.

Las Vegas (Nev.) Bishop Gorman: Went 30-2 and won Nevada's Class 4A state title last season. Shabazz Muhammad, a 6-6 junior, projects to be one of college basketball's next big stars.

Memphis (Tenn.) Melrose: Went 36-4 and won Tennessee's Class 3A state title. Junior Adonis Thomas, a 6-6 guard/forward, leads this team.

Miami Dr. Krop: Went 24-5 and made it to the Class 6A state semifinals. Junior guard Angel Rodriguez and sophomore center Tyrone Haughton lead this team.

Miami Monsignor Pace: Went 17-10 last season. New coach Derek Heard coached in the Class 4A state final last season for Orlando Oak Ridge, which lost to Fort Myers.

Middle Village (N.Y.) Christ the King: Went 28-5 last season,

winning the Class 2A state title, the New York City Catholic championship and the New York Federation championship. Omar Calhoun is the team's top player.

North Port: Went 21-4 last season and returns 6-7 senior Kasey Wilson, who averaged 20.5 points, 11.3 rebounds and 3.0 blocks per game.

Orlando Christian Prep: Went 26-6 last season and clinched the Class A state title. Coach Reggie Kohn coached in the Classic with Lake Howell in 2005.

Palm Beach Gardens Dwyer: Finished 25-4 last year and reached the Class 5A semifinals. Jacoby Brissett leads the team in scoring.

Reserve Riverside Academy (La.): Went 38-6 last season and won its state's Class 2A title. Coach Tim Byrd and 13 players moved from Reserve Christian, which closed, to Riverside Academy.

Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei: Went 32-2 last season and reached the state Division I semifinals. Xavier Johnson (6-7) and Wes Mitter (5-8) lead this team.

Winter Park: Two-time Classic Most Valuable Player Austin Rivers can shoot for a third consecutive award and a first title. His team finished 29-6 last season and won the Class 6A state title.

- information provided by Donnie Wilkie of Classic Basketball Inc.

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