

CITY OF PALMS CLASSIC: Nation's elite basketball talent descends on Southwest Florida

By **ADAM FISHER**
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During the fourth period of Thursday afternoon's game between American Heritage and Word of God at the Bank of America City of Palms Tournament at Bishop Verot High School in Ft Myers, Kenny Boynton of American Heritage guards Word of God's John Wall. Wall is ranked No. 1 in the country by Rivals.com, while Boynton is ranked No. 2 by HoopScoop. Both were named among 10 finalists for the national Player of the Year award earlier this week. Boynton scored 61 points against Dunbar in last year's City of Palms tournament and is committed to the University of Florida. Jennifer Whitney's staff

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Austin Rivers, Winter Park

Rivers made a name for himself as a sophomore in 2008 with a 46-point performance in the third-place game. Now ESPN's No. 1 senior in the country, the 6-foot-4 guard is fourth on the City of Palms' all-time scoring list. The Duke recruit, son of Boston Celtics head coach Doc Rivers, has averaged 29 points a game the past two tournaments.

Michael Gilchrist, St. Patrick (Elizabeth, N.J.)

The 6-foot-7 small forward averaged 16 points, 12 rebounds and three blocks a game last year while earning a scholarship to Kentucky. Gilchrist helped the United States win a gold medal in the U17 World Championships this summer by averaging 15 points and seven rounds a game in the event. He is ranked the No. 1 senior in the country by MaxPreps and No. 3 by ESPN and Rivals.com.

Quincy Miller, Westchester Country Day (High Point, N.C.)

Standing 6-9, Miller is considered a top five player in the Class of 2011 by most recruiting services. Already committed to Baylor, Miller is in his first year at Westchester after transferring from Quality-Education Academy in Winston-Salem, N.C. Westchester, ranked No. 32 in the country by ESPN, is playing in the City of Palms' new Signature Series.

James McAdoo, Norfolk Christian (Norfolk, Va.)

McAdoo was a Parade magazine fourth-team All-American last season. ESPN's fifth-ranked senior, he averaged 23 points and 10 rebounds to lead Norfolk to a state championship as a junior. The 6-8 power forward is committed to North Carolina and is a second cousin to NBA legend Bob McAdoo.

Adonis Thomas, Melrose (Memphis, Tenn.)

The 6-6 small forward began the year ranked No. 1 in the Class of 2011 by the Sporting News. Committed to Memphis, Thomas was tabbed No. 2 on MaxPreps' preseason Player of the Year poll, behind only Rivers. He is the No. 8 senior overall according to ESPN.

Rakeem Christmas, Academy of the New Church (Bryn Athyn, Pa.)

Aside from having the best name in this year's field, Christmas is ranked the best center in the Class of 2011 by Scout.com. Standing 6-9, he is committed to Syracuse. Christmas leads New Church into the event's Signature Series.

Shabazz Muhammad, Bishop Gorman (Las Vegas)

Muhammad might be the best junior in the country. According to ESPN, he's the best guard in the Class of 2012. At 6-5, Muhammad can play multiple positions. He grabbed 10 rebounds a game last year to go along with his 19 points, and Scout.com ranks him as the best small forward in his class.

Shannon Scott, Milton (Alpharetta, Ga.)

Scott is just one of a handful of future Division I players on the Eagles, USA Today's top-ranked team. The 6-1 Ohio State recruit is listed as the sixth best point guard in the country by Scout.com. He's also ESPN's No. 42 senior at any position.

Marshall Plumlee, Christ School (Arden, N.C.)

Plumlee, a towering 7-footer, might be the tallest player in this year's field. He averaged eight points, eight rebounds and three blocks last year while helping Christ School win its fourth state title in a row. Next season Plumlee will join his brothers Miles and Mason at Duke.

Ricardo Gathers, Riverside (Reserve, La.)

Another highly touted junior, Gathers is ranked in the top five in his class by ESPN, MaxPreps and Scout.com. The 6-6, 240-pound power forward averaged 19 points and 15 rebounds a game last season. He is considering LSU, Cal, Baylor and Ohio State.

FORT MYERS — Two years ago, City of Palms Classic organizers unabashedly referred to the annual event as the most talented field ever assembled for a high school basketball tournament.

Sounds a bit boastful, but the numbers — and the national media — supported the claim. The 2008 City of Palms featured six teams ranked in the top 10 nationally by ESPN or USA Today and 29 Division I college recruits.

The field two years ago was thought to be the pinnacle of the nearly four-decade old tournament, but the City of Palms Classic, now sponsored by State Farm, might have outdone itself this year. The 38th annual event, which runs Dec. 17 through 22 at Bishop Verot in Fort Myers, has seven top 10 teams and 12 ranked in ESPN's top 50.

The individual talent also could surpass that of 2008, which included John Wall, the No. 1 pick in June's NBA Draft. This year's tournament will have 13 players ranked in the top 10 in the country by various recruiting services, including four of ESPN's top five and six of the sports network's top 10.

"I'm not sure looking at this year's field versus (2008's) field that this one isn't better," said Donnie Wilkie, vice president of Classic Basketball Inc., which organizes the tournament. "I definitely think this year is deeper. We have three or four teams in the middle of the field that would be the star attractions at any other holiday tournament."

The 16-team field includes 10 state champions from last season and four other teams that made it to the final four of their respective state tournaments. The two teams that didn't make the state semifinals combined to lose just seven games last year.

While the City of Palms always stocks up on some of the best players in America, tournament organizers are proud this year to have some of the strongest teams they've ever had.

"I'm really excited," tournament director Ron Riley said. "The field has challenged to be as good as it was two years ago."

For the third straight year, ESPN will air the City of Palms third-place and championship games live. For the second year in a row, the games will be on primetime starting at 7 and 9 p.m., respectively.

This year's field is headed up by Alpharetta (Ga.)-Milton, ranked No. 1 by USA Today and a consensus top three team in the nation. The Eagles finished ranked fifth in the country last year without a single senior on their roster. They have three seniors committed to Division I programs this year.

Winter Park returns for a third straight year with shooting guard Austin Rivers, tabbed as the best player in the country by ESPN and recruiting sites Rivals.com and Scout.com.

The Wildcats, from a northeast Orlando suburb, have delighted local fans the past two years with deep runs in the tournament. Winter Park upset three nationally ranked programs in 2008 to place third before finishing runner-up last year.

Rivers, son of Boston Celtics coach Doc Rivers and a Duke recruit, is the reigning two-time City of Palms MVP despite having never won the tournament title. He has had games of 46 and 45 points at Bishop Verot and is fourth all-time in scoring at the event.

Fort Myers High makes its ninth straight appearance after advancing to the consolation finals last year. North Port, with 6-foot-7 Central Florida recruit Kasey Wilson, also is in the field.

The City of Palms is something Fort Myers coach Scott Guttery looks forward to all year. His father helped found the tournament in the 1970s, and Guttery even played in the event when he was in high school at Bishop Verot.

Last year the Green Wave upset Huntsville (Ala.)-Butler, then ESPN's No. 15 team in the country, then beat Weston-Sagemont and its three Division I seniors. The City of Palms gave Fort Myers enough momentum going into the second half of the season that it won the Class 4A championship, the first boys basketball team in Southwest Florida to win a title.

"I've watched (the City of Palms) grow from a local high school basketball tournament to now one of the best tournaments in the nation," Guttery said. "It's always been a dream of mine to win it. I hope at some point in my career I'll have a chance to do that. Who knows, maybe this year I'll have that chance."

TEAMS TO WATCH

Milton (Alpharetta, Ga.)

Ranked No. 1 by USA Today and third by ESPN, the Eagles won Georgia's Class 5A championship last season without a single senior on the team. Milton has three Division I commitments in point guard Shannon Scott (Ohio State), guard Dai-Jon Parker (Vanderbilt) and forward Julian Royal (Georgia Tech), not to mention 6-foot-7 Evan Nolte, ranked among the best juniors in the country.

Melrose (Memphis, Tenn.)

The Golden Wildcats, Class 3A champs last year in Tennessee, started the year ranked No. 1 by Rivals.com and in ESPN and USA Today's top 10. Melrose's Division I duo of Adonis Thomas (Memphis) and Cedric McAfee (Auburn) led the team to a 36-4 record last season.

St. Patrick (Elizabeth, N.J.)

The Celtics are making their record 10th tournament appearance. They have five runner-up finishes, including their last trip to the City of Palms in 2008. St. Patrick, ranked No. 4 in the country by ESPN, is led by 6-7 forward Michael Gilchrist. Gilchrist averaged a double-double last year is committed to Kentucky.

Winter Park

The Wildcats have gone from underdogs in this tournament two years ago to title contender. Winter Park and then-sophomore Austin Rivers burst onto the national scene by taking third place in 2008. Guided by Rivers' second straight MVP performance, the Wildcats finished runner-up last year. The defending Class 6A champs, ranked No. 4 by USA Today, have even bigger expectations this season.

Christ the King (Middle Village, N.Y.)

The Royals are a top 10 team in the nation according to ESPN and USA Today. Christ the King went 28-5 last season, winning the New York Federation and Class 2A championships. The Royals also were Catholic league champs in one of the world's top basketball meccas, New York City.

Mater Dei (Santa Ana, Calif.)

They might lack the star-power and national ranking of other teams here, but the Monarchs are the only former City of Palms champion in the field. Mater Dei has won the title its past two trips to Fort Myers in 2006 and 2008. Gary McKnight is one of California's winningest coaches with an 860-78 record in 29 seasons with the Monarchs.

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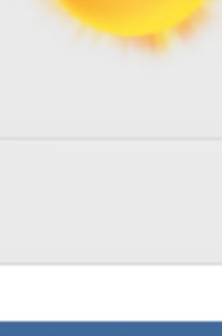
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Calendar

DEC **DEC** **DEC** **BROWSE**

21 **22** **23** 

TUESDAY **WEDNESDAY** **THURSDAY** **MORE**

Winter Camp, Wondrow Wildlife 9 a.m.
 The Conservancy of Southwest Florida

Guided Hike 9 a.m.
 Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed

Children's Crafts 10 a.m.
 Rookery Bay Environmental Learning Center

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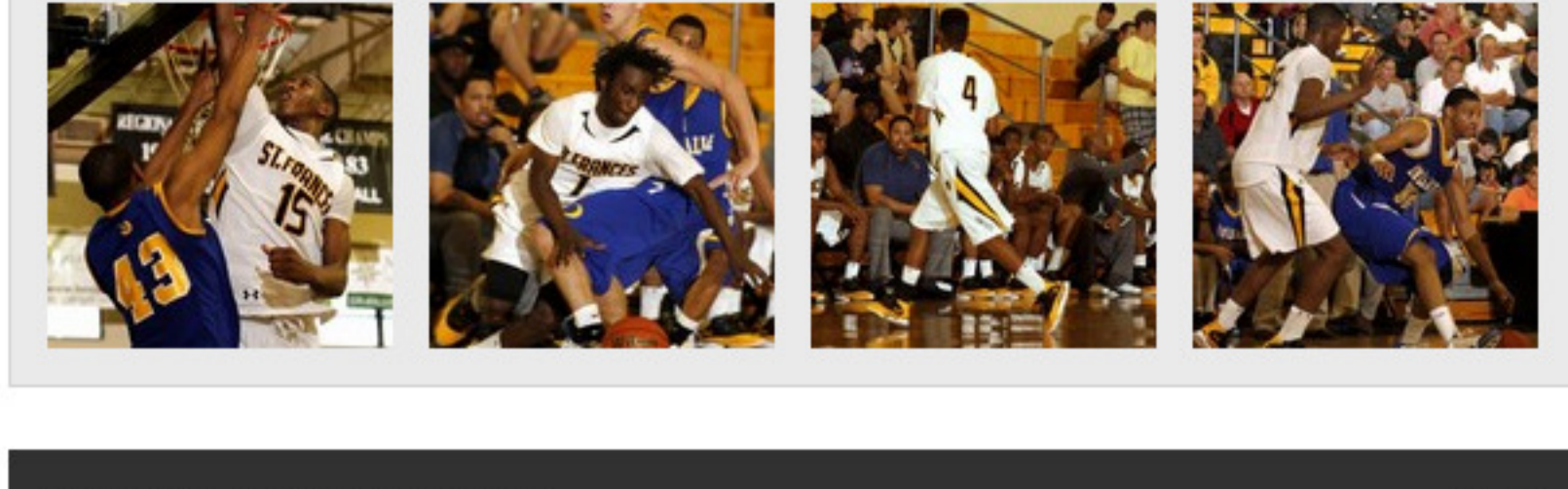
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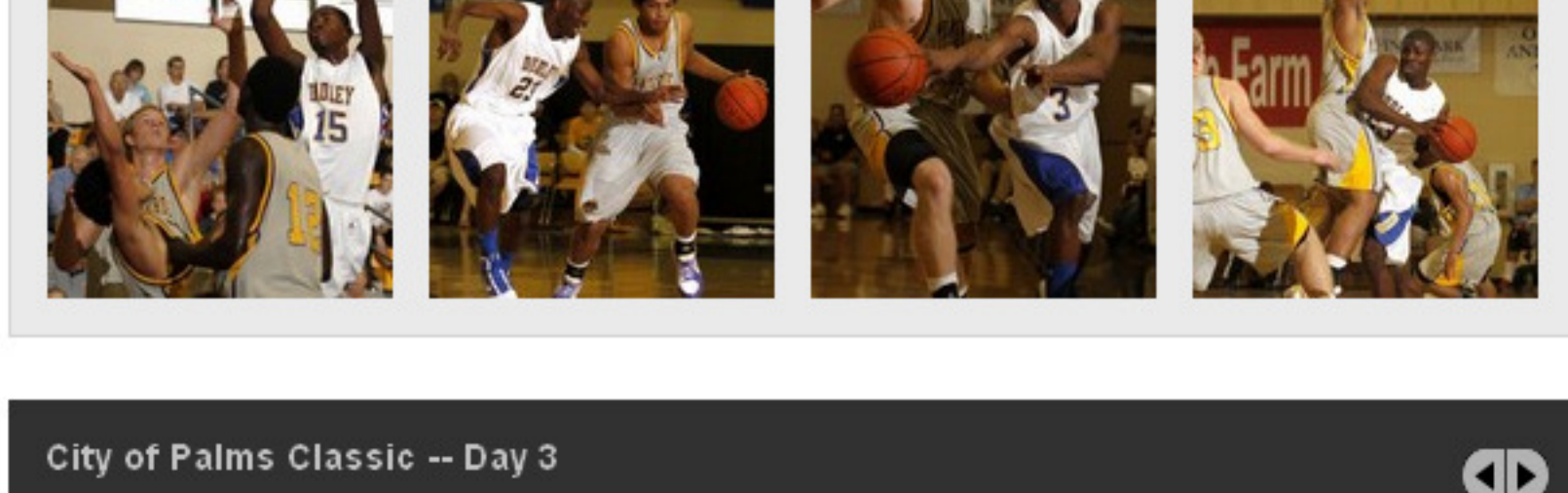
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City of Palms Classic -- Day 1



City of Palms Classic -- Day 2



City of Palms Classic -- Day 3

