

MEDIA RELEASE

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Date: Saturday, January 5, 2019.**

Re: 31st Annual Saints Invitational Basketball Tournament (Fri & Sat, Jan11/12)

The **31st Annual Saints' Invitational High School Basketball Tournament** will tip off Friday morning (Jan 11) at St. Benedict CSS and 30ther gyms in Cambridge and Kitchener. The tournament has 32 teams competing (24 senior and 8 junior teams). This tournament has become very highly regarded across the province and some of the best teams from their areas will be making the trip to Cambridge to lay claim to the championship. Action will continue all day Friday (Jan 11) and throughout Saturday (Jan 12).

The tournament concludes with "Championship Night" on Saturday at St. Benedict with game times as follows:

Jr Championship Game - 5:30pm
Sr Championship Game - 8:30pm

The consolation side of the bracket will be as follows:

Jr Consolation Championship - 2:30pm at Monsignor Doyle
Sr Consolation Championship - 7pm at St. Benedict

At the conclusion of the tournament championship game, an awards ceremony will feature the recognition of the championship and finalist teams and the selection of the tournament all-star teams and tournament MVPs.

Tournament passes are good for all games over the weekend including championship night. They can be purchased at the door for \$5.00 for adults and \$3.00 for students. They are good at all sites (St Benedict, Monsignor Doyle, Conestoga College and St. Mary's).

Tournament organizers are predicting another great weekend of basketball this year. The Saints' Invitational 31 will feature high level hoop action with 42 games being played over the two days. Teams competing come from all over Ontario making for some interesting match-ups that are not usually seen except in Provincial Competitions. This event has grown to be one of the premier tournaments in the province with an extensive waiting list to get in.

Tournament Overview

Senior Division

Any team wanting to lay claim to this year's tournament championship will have their work cut out for them. Not only will they have to win five games over two days, the tournament committee has assembled a twenty-four team field, which is strong from top to bottom. Tough squads from Windsor, Toronto, Brantford, Kitchener, Timmins and London make-up the draw and will be battling to become tournament champions. As a result, fans should expect to see quality, competitive games from the opening rounds through to the finals. An overview of the host school and some of the tournament favourites are below.

St. Benedict, Cambridge (Host School):

St. Benedict returns to the Saints Invitational as three-time defending champions. They are striving to become the first team in tournament history to win four in a row. After winning the “AAA” OFSAA Silver Medal in 2017, the rebuild in 2017/18 went well as they had six grade tens and elevens help guide the team to a 39-10 record. With all the team back this year except for one starter, the team has jumped out to a 20-5 record, winning the University of Windsor tournament and being finalists at both the Heinbuch Classic and University of Victoria tournament. They were also semi-finalists at both the Vic Juzenas Invitational at Holy Trinity in Oakville and the Mark Walton Invitational at Cathedral High School. They are a perfect 7 and 0 in league play and in sole possession of first place. The Saints have also beat Pine Ridge, Pickering, who are last year’s OFSAA gold medalist and are currently ranked 18th in the country (High School and Prep) on North Pole Hoops Scouting Service. The Saints want to be playing their best basketball in February when it counts most. A continued focus on defense, team discipline and limiting offensive mistakes will be key for the Saints in the second half of their season. They are also hoping this focus will lead to a chance to play for the tournament crown on Saturday night. Look for Raf Llorin, Justin Ching, Jaylen Ackie and Sebastian Llorin to lead the perimeter attack for the Saints while Trent Johnson, Jaxson Davis, Aidan Whalen, Ramir Headley and Nick Jack dominate the area around the glass. The outside shooting of Ben Mascarenhas, Jeremiah Sackey and Jaylen Honeyghan enables balanced scoring and a team-orientated offensive attack. No one player does it all for the Saints as all players contribute on the score sheet.

North Park Collegiate, Brantford

The Trojans enter the 2018/2019 as three-time undefeated BCSSAA champions. In CWOSSA last season they lost in a hard fought “AAA” final in OT. So far this season the Trojans have captured the Brantford Expositor Tip-Off Tournament and struck gold at the prestigious Heinbuch Classic. Other key events this season include a trip to Edmonton for the REB Invitational and the Silver Fox in Hamilton. Players to watch include athletic guard Judah Stewart a CCAA top prospect and USPORTS prospects Ethan Andrew & Cal Hager (Western commit). All three of these players play club basketball together for Hawks Canada an elite AAU style basketball team. North Park is an experienced team looking to build on their early season success and compete for the title in Cambridge this weekend.

Eastwood Collegiate Institute, Kitchener:

Last year’s WCSSAA champions and CWOSSA semi-finalists lost four veteran starters to graduation but retained their starting guard, Trev Lewis. Lewis will lock down shooters on defense and will rebound better than most guards out there. He can also knock down open shots. After being ineligible last year due to transferring, Ladera Ujullu Obang and J.J. Adigun join the Rebels this year. Obang will pass and score equally well on offense and defend and rebound as well. Adigun’s length on defense will cause teams problems, and he can also finish around the rim and at the 3-point line. This team has all five starters from the 2016-17 Junior WCSSAA champs, including Muktar Mohamed, Abdulazeez Jasim, and Warren Edwards. All three scored 30+ points in a single game more than once in that season and all three are looking to rebound from injuries sustained last year. The Rebels are a team that have the talent to be playing late into this year’s draw and are one of the regions favourites to be representing CWOSSA at “AAA” OFSAA in Stoney Creek this year.

St. Mary’s Catholic High School, Kitchener:

St. Mary’s has seven players back from last year’s District 8 Championship team, as well as a strong contingent of Grade 10s and 11s who went undefeated as Juniors. They were back to back Junior CWOSSA Champions. Although they are young, the Eagles have wins against Grand River, Huron Heights, and Upper Canada College on this year’s resume. From last year’s squad they return strong pieces including Paolo Malacad, Michael Carali and Eric Martin. The Eagles are looking to defend their current District 8 Championship title against a strong D8 league this year. Look out for the high-flying Eagles this weekend!

Mother Teresa Catholic Secondary School, London:

The Spartans are coming off a very successful 2017-18 season. The team won the AA London District Athletic Championship, WOSSAA Championship and the coveted OFSAA "AA" Gold Medal. At a 10-1 record to date, the Spartans are continuing their winning ways in 2018/19. The Spartans' are led by team captains Peyton Campbell and Oren Rusagara along with returning starter Lorenzo Hakizimana. Other returning impact players in last years' OFSAA run are Kyle Chea and Josh Lawrence. The Spartans' exhibition schedule includes six weekends of competition with Championships already won at the Windsor Freed's Tournament and the London Paul Furfaro Tournament. The Spartans' are hoping to keep the momentum going from last year and make some noise this weekend in Cambridge!

Crescent School, Toronto:

Despite losing two outstanding starters from last years' #2 ranked "AA" OFSAA team, as well as their 6'7" sixth man, Crescent returns a strong core of veteran players. This includes Chris Kaputo, Ryan McKay, Logan Centner, Charlie Knapp Dick and Nathan Beber. The team is led by 2017 U15 Provincial player Sebastian Campbell and is supported by a young core of grade ten athletes who have made an immediate impact. This year's team has played a very tough early schedule and losses include competitive contests against some of the top AAA talent in the Province. Of note, an 18 point loss to Pine Ridge, a 17 point loss to North Park, and a 1 point loss to D'Youville. The Coyotes have also posted strong wins against AAA competition, including a 10-point win over St. Mary's Kitchener, a 1 point win over Northern Sarnia, and an 8 point win over John Paul II. Crescent prides itself on being an AA school that will play anyone, anywhere and their robust tournament profile is a testament to this belief (this includes the Newman Early Bird in Scarborough, The Preston Thorne Memorial, and the Silverfox). This is Crescent's first time in the Saints Invitational and they are setting their sites on the championship.

H.B. Beal Secondary School, London:

In 2017-18, the Raiders were the London District Athletics Champions (Thames Valley Regional Athletics). Once again, they were undefeated in league and WOSSA play. This year, under a new coaching staff, they are looking to have another exciting season. The team has four of their five starters back and have added several young players who were part of their 40-1 Junior team. The program looks strong, and the team is setting some lofty goals. Look out for the Raiders! Although they are young, they are looking to make some noise this weekend in Cambridge.

St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School, Oakville:

After graduating several veterans, including two starters, the 2018-19 Raiders look to rebuild their roster with a number of new faces. Despite the high turnover rate, the Raiders retained their starting point guard, Chris Sagl, and guards Michael Juricic, Louie Taguba and Brennan Konopa-Nurdin. The roster also adds a new starting guard in Riley Curtis who moved to Oakville from Australia last spring. Much of the remaining players have moved up from the junior team and are looking to gain some experience at the senior level. The team co-hosted the 24 team Vic Juzenas Invitational in November and lost in the semi-final to a talented Eastwood CI by a final score of 68-61. They also competed in the Father Fogarty Tip Off at Notre Dame College-Welland in November and lost to St. Patrick (Ottawa) in the Championship despite taking a 4 point lead in the final minutes. The Raiders have also gotten off to a solid start in their HCAA league play with a 4-1 record. Chris Sagl is a talented point guard who is sure to attract attention this season with his high IQ, vision and scoring touch. Riley Curtis is also a strong guard with the ability to get to the rim as well as hit from deep. Both of these players will be playing at the next level in years to come and will be key pieces to the Raiders' success this weekend in Cambridge.

The rest of the teams in this weekend's field cannot be overlooked. All are capable of making it to the finals. It will be a great weekend of basketball!

Junior Division

The action in the junior bracket will be just as intense as in the senior draw. An overview of the host school and some of the tournament favourites are below.

St. Benedict, Cambridge (Host School):

This year's Saints have a lot of new faces. William Buffong, Liam Truss, and Tiago Pissarra return as veterans from last year's team. The Saints are bolstered with talent from many positions and their hard-working, no quit attitude has brought them success at Southwood basketball tournament, bringing home a consolation finals victory. In District 8, they are viewed as one of the top teams and are looking forward to having a shot at bringing home a D8 championship this year.

Ursuline College, Chatham:

Last year's team was led by a strong cast of grade nine's who have started this year winning their first three tournaments. They have beat some of the best teams in Windsor. Last year's group finished 4th in Lambton Kent league play and competed in tournaments in Guelph and Brampton. This year's team relies on their maturity and depth to be successful and are led by point guard Darion Basik-Hadden on both ends of the floor. Ten members of the team have grown up playing in the Chatham Kent Wildcats program and grade 9 wing, Nathan Hanson, has also taken part in local CP programs and is currently on the University of Windsor's AAU team, the Junior Lancers. The Lancers are excited to travel to Cambridge to play against some of the best competition in the province.

Assumption Catholic Secondary School, Burlington:

Last year's Halton Catholic District School Board Junior Champions lost three veteran starters to their senior program and prep schools. The team has five returning players as well as three players from last year's Bantam team. David Colterman, Anthony Fuca, Ruther Garcia, Quincey Sterling and Andrew Dietrich return from last year's team to provide leadership and experience for this year's squad. The addition of Isaiah McCrae, Adrian Pajor and Pat Tortis from the Bantam team round out the grade 10 depth. Our grade 9's provide strong support led by Ben Dietrich and Liam Cole. The Crusaders are undefeated in league play. The team participated in the Junior Crusader Classic and the Vaughn Junior Classic, showing well against some of the top Junior teams in the province. The team won the Bill Wren in Ottawa by an average margin of 20 points. This team is characterized by strong defense and outstanding shooting. This combination will make the Crusaders a tough matchup for any team this weekend.

St Anne Catholic High School, Lakeshore

Coming off a year where the Saints were 22-1 and were the winners of the WECSSAA, SWOSSAA, and Saints Invitational championships, St Anne will be rebuilding. The lone returning starter is the super athletic Jacob Grainger. He will be counted on to take a leadership role for this inexperienced team. Also returning from last year's team are Brandon Levac and Dante Bachetti. They will have big shoes to fill and will need to step up for this team to be successful. With an influx of talented grade nines like Luka Vukac, Devin Fikes, Liam Broderick, and Kurt Barr, the hope is that as the season goes on, the Saints can get back to and compete for another city title.

Sarnia Northern Collegiate, Sarnia

The Northern Vikings return to the St. Benedicts' Tournament as the 2018 Lambton Kent league finalists. The team is bringing back six players from last year's team, as well as a big influx of new talent to fill the roster. The team prides itself on defense and will go deep into the bench to maintain their defensive effort. Their well-balanced offensive attack combines size in the middle with speedy guards that aren't afraid to shoot the long ball. The Vikings are hopeful that their combination of team-oriented style of basketball and defensive pressure can take them deep into the tournament this year

The rest of the teams in this weekend's field cannot be overlooked. All are capable of making it to the finals. It will be a great weekend of basketball!

FURTHER INFORMATION

We have attached the tournament draws and tournament poster. If you plan to come to any of the sites to report on the games, just show your media credentials at the door and you will be let in. Any pre-tournament coverage would be greatly appreciated.

You can access our tournament website at

<http://saintsinvitational.crolinks.com>

It will be up and running by Wednesday Jan 9 before the tournament. Game results, high scorers, copies of the draws, maps, etc will all be found on there and we will try to provide up-to- date information as quickly as possible. You can also follow along on Twitter at **@SBCSSBasketball**.

If you would like things reported in a different way, please let us know the best way to do this and who to contact.

Should you require further information please email me at John.Malnerich@wcdsb.ca.

Thanks so much for your support and hope to see you in the gym.

John Malnerich , Joe Vale, Kevin Fratarcangeli, Ron Martinello, Andy Reitzel (Convenors)