

Area teams set to play in holiday basketball tournaments

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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Andy Williams was right about one thing – it’s the most wonderful time of the year. He probably wasn’t thinking about basketball when he recorded his popular Holiday song.

But for local high school fans, it’s that time of year again, when post-Christmas boys and girls basketball tournaments get underway, some as early as on Boxing Day on Christmas, and in the case of one tournament, having started this past Saturday.

Here's a look at where area teams are playing for the Holidays:

BOYS TOURNAMENTS

COLUMBIA-FREEBURG HOLIDAY TOURNAMENT: Marquette Catholic, Civic Memorial and Triad are playing in this traditional tournament, being held in Freeburg this season.

The Explorers are in Group A along with the co-host Midgets, Waterloo Gibault Catholic, Valmeyer and Waterloo, while both the Eagles and Knights are in Group B, playing with Columbia, Dupo and Brooklyn Lovejoy.

Marquette goes into the tournament with a 12-1 record, winning the Metro-East Lutheran Turkey Tip-Off tournament over Thanksgiving week. Their only loss was to Madison. It's a young team, but has improved with each day.

"I like our team," Explorer coach Steve Medford said. "We've gotten better, and we're building up our confidence. We've won this tournament the last two years, and we want to win it again this year."

Seniors Nick Hemann and Chris Hartrich have been the leaders for Marquette thus far, but a trio of sophomores in Nate Hall, Cortez Harris and Davin Thompson has give the Explorers a lift. Add in juniors Spencer Cox and Jack Rice, and Marquette has been playing well.

In addition, the Explorers have a signature win on Dec. 20 at Belleville Althoff Catholic 55-49 on the road.

"The Althoff win's given us a lot of confidence," Medford said. "It was a really nice win."

The sophomores have been improving each day, and it's definitely a good sign for the team.

"The sophomores are progressing along the way we want them to," Medford said, "and it's been really good. Nick's been doing well, and Chris is doing really well."

Play begins Wednesday with the Explorers going against Waterloo at 1 p.m., followed by Triad against Lovejoy at 2:30 p.m. CM plays against Columbia at 7 p.m. to round out the opening day.

On day two on Thursday, Marquette plays against Gibault at 11:30 a.m., the Eagles and Knights squaring off at 1 p.m., the Explorers against Freeburg at 5:30 p.m., and the final game of the day being CM against Dupo at 7 p.m.

Friday marks the final day of group play, and it starts with Triad against Dupo, tipping off at 11:30 a.m. The Explorers meet Valmeyer at 2:30 p.m., Lovejoy playing against the Eagles at 4 p.m., and Columbia and Triad meeting at 5:30 p.m.

As every year, Medford has high expectations going into the tournament, and also knows that his team is very capable of winning the tournament again.

“If we compete and play the right way, we have a chance to win,” Medford said.

The finals are set for Dec. 29, with the fifth-place teams in each group going against each other at 12:30 p.m., the fourth place teams playing at 2 p.m., the third-place teams playing for fifth and sixth place at 3:30 p.m., the third place game between the two second-place teams at 5 p.m., and the tournament final, pitting the two first-place teams in each group tipping off at 6:30 p.m.

BREESE MATER DEI HOLIDAY TOURNAMENT: Metro-East Lutheran is the only area team to be entered into the annual tournament at Breese Mater Dei Catholic, and the Knights will be in Group A, along with the hosts, Nashville, Red Bay, Ala., and Mascoutah.

Group B will consist of Briarcrest Christian of Eads, Tenn., Breese Central, Carlyle, Okawville and Highland.

Metro-East opens play with two games on Wednesday. The Knights will start against Nashville at 10:30 a.m., then take on Red Bay in the final game of the day, tipping off at 9:30 p.m. Metro-East then plays on Thursday against Mascoutah at 12 noon, and finishes group play on Friday against Mater Dei, again tipping off at 12 noon.

The championship game between the two first-place teams in Groups A and B will take place Dec. 29 at 7:30 p.m.

76TH CENTRALIA HOLIDAY TOURNAMENT: The Alton Redbirds will play once again in the Centralia Holiday Tournament, one of the oldest in the state.

The field consists of many Chicagoland schools, along with defending IHSA Class 4A champions Belleville West, Cahokia and a number of schools from Tennessee.

Alton opens play against Lausanne Collegiate of Memphis Thursday afternoon at 3:30 p.m. A win puts them in the quarterfinals against the winner of Mundelein Carmel of Chicagoland and St. Louis Confluence at 6:15 p.m. on Friday. The final is set for 9 p.m. on Dec. 29.

47TH ANNUAL VANDALIA HOLIDAY TOURNAMENT: Father McGivney Catholic will be playing in the Vandalia Holiday Tournament, and will compete in Group B with Mounds Meridian, the host Vandals, South Central and Okaw Valley. Group A will consist of Shelbyville, Cumberland, Pana, Flora and Patoka.

The Griffins will start play on Wednesday against Meridian in a 6:30 tip-off, then play against the Vandals on Thursday at 5 p.m. McGivney will play twice on Friday, the first game against South Central at 12:30 p.m., and conclude group play against Okaw Valley at 5 p.m.

The final is set for Dec. 29 at 8 p.m.

CARLINVILLE HOLIDAY TOURNAMENT: East Alton-Wood River, Piasa Southwestern, Bunker Hill and Hardin Calhoun will play at the Carlinville Holiday tournament, and it starts on Wednesday with the Minutemen playing against Gillespie at 3 p.m. The Warriors take on Staunton at 6 p.m, followed by the Oilers and Piasa Birds against each other in the final game of the day at 7:30 p.m.

Hillsboro meets the Bunker Hill-Gillespie winner on Thursday at 7:30 p.m., and the Calhoun, and the Calhoun-Staunton winner will meet either the host Cavaliers, Mt. Olive or Litchfield at 6 p.m. on Friday, with the Southwestern-EAWR winner playing Hillsboro, Bunker Hill or Gillespie at 8 p.m.

The final is set for Dec. 29 at 7:30 p.m.

DUSTER THOMAS HOOPS CLASSIC: Both Roxana and Jersey will play in the Duster Thomas Hoops Classic in Pinckneyville, starting on Thursday.

The Shells will open the tournament at 9 a.m. with a game against Benton, and the Panthers will play immediately after at 10:30 a.m against Du Quoin. If both teams win, they'll play each other In the quarterfinals on Friday.

The final of the tournament is set for Dec. 29.

68TH WAVERLY HOLIDAY TOURNAMENT: Carrollton and White Hall North Greene will play in the 68th annual Waverly Holiday Tournament, the oldest small school basketball tournament in the state.

The Hawks open the tournament against Jacksonville Routt Catholic on Wednesday at 10:30 a.m., while the Spartans open against Auburn at 7:30 p.m.

The final will be played Dec. 29 at 7:30 p.m.

GIRLS TOURNAMENTS

44TH ANNUAL VISITATION CHRISTMAS TOURNAMENT: Edwardsville opened defense of its Visitation Christmas Tournament title on Saturday with an 82-21 win over the host Vivettes. The Tigers will play Cor Jesu Academy of Affton, Mo., in the quarterfinals on Wednesday night at 8:30 p.m.

The final will be played at 8 p.m. on Friday.

JERSEY COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL HOLIDAY TOURNAMENT: The Panthers will play host to Alton, Carrollton, Triad, Hardin Calhoun and Marquette Catholic in their Holiday tournament, which gets underway Thursday at Havens Gym.

The tournament will be divided into two groups. Group A will be Alton, Carrollton, McCluer North of Florissant, Mo., and Triad, while Group B has Calhoun, Jersey, Marquette and Taylorville.

Group play starts on Thursday with Alton meeting Triad at 12 noon, followed by the Panthers and Warriors at 1:30 p.m. Marquette meets Taylorville at 3 p.m., followed by Triad against McCluer North at 4:30 p.m. The final two games on the day will pit Carrollton and Alton at 6 p.m., and Jersey against Marquette at 7:30 p.m.

Day two starts again at 12 noon with McCluer North against the Hawks, while the Explorers meet the Warriors at 1:30 p.m. It'll be the Tornados against the Panthers at 3 p.m., followed by Carrollton and the Knights at 4:30 p.m. The final two games of group play will be the Redbirds against the Stars at 6 p.m, and Calhoun and Taylorville at 7:30 p.m.

The final of the tournament will be played Dec. 29 at 7:30 p.m.

LEBANON HOLIDAY TOURNAMENT: Piasa Southwestern and Father McGivney Catholic will be playing at the Lebanon Holiday Tournament starting on Wednesday.

The Griffins will play Trenton Wesclin in the opening round at 12:30 p.m., while the Piasa Birds open against New Athens at 6:30 p.m.

Wins by both sides will put them into quarterfinal games on Friday, with the McGivney-Wesclin winner playing against the winner of Columbia and Sparta at 6:30 p.m., while the Southwestern-New Athens winner plays the Lebanon-Du Quoin winner at 3:30 p.m.

The championship game is set for Dec. 29 at 8 p.m.

40TH STATE FARM CLASSIC: Undefeated Civic Memorial will play in the 40th State Farm Classic at Bloomington High School, with the Eagles playing in the girls large school bracket.

The Eagles open their tournament accounts on Wednesday against Springfield at Bloomington High in a 1:30 p.m. tip-off. A win sends CM to the quarterfinals, where they'll play at Normal Community against the winner of Rock Island and Bloomington.

The final will be played Dec. 29 at 7 p.m. at the Shirk Center at Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington.

CARLINVILLE HOLIDAY TOURNAMENT: Bunker Hill will play in a four-team round-robin tournament at Carlinville, and the Minutemaids open against the host Cavvies at 12 noon on Wednesday. Their next game is Thursday against Waverly at Carlinville Middle School in a 1:30 p.m. tip-off. Bunker Hill will finish round-robin play against Litchfield at Carlinville Middle at 1:30 p.m.

The final is set for 6 p.m. Dec. 29 at Carlinville High.

DUCHESNE CATHOLIC HOLIDAY TOURNAMENT: Granite City will be playing in the Duchesne Catholic Holiday Tournament in St. Charles, Mo., with the Warriors opening against Tolton High at 3 p.m. on Thursday.

The final will be played on Dec. 29.

Note: Edwardsville's boys are playing in the Collinsville Tourney with host Collinsville. More on that in separate story.