

# Highland Girls Tournament To Showcase Some Of State's Best Including Three Defending State Champs

by Bradley Piros, Reporter  
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**HIGHLAND** - The annual mid-season Highland girls basketball tournament always brings the best out of the teams that participate.

That's because the teams that participate are some of the best in the state.

Of the 16 teams, seven of them are currently ranked by the Associated Press.

Alton, the winners of last year's tournament, are back and declared a unanimous No. 1 seed in the tournament. The Redbirds are ranked No. 3 in Class 4A. Their fierce rivals O'Fallon are ranked No. 7 in 4A.

The Civic Memorial Eagles are ranked No. 7 in Class 3A, and the hosting Highland Bulldogs are looking stronger than ever and are surely soon to be ranked.

Breese Central and Mater Dei sit No. 1 and No. 2 in Class 2A while Nashville is No. 5. Teutopolis was ranked No. 9 in 2A but have since dropped out of the top-10.

Finally, Okawville, last year's runner-up, is No. 6 in 1A.

"I think it's a really stacked tournament in this area," Alton head coach Deserea Howard said. "It's run really well from hospitality all the way down to just how they put it on. We're excited to go."

The Redbirds beat the Rockets 54-38 in the final last season. It was Alton's 23rd win in a row to start the season.

Okawville later went on to win the Class 1A state title. As did Mater Dei in Class 2A and O'Fallon in Class 4A.

"Last year of course it was a little salty to win the tournament and then everybody from the tournament goes on to win state, but obviously we're hoping to get our chance at that this year," Howard said.

CM last won the tournament in 2022, beating Alton and Okawville along the way. That was the year they took a trip to the Class 3A state tournament and finished fourth.

Eagles head coach Mike Arbuthnot spoke highly of the upcoming tournament after a win over Teutopolis earlier this week on Jan. 8.

"Well, we're ranked sixth in the state, and we're 17-3, and we're ranked eighth in that tournament," Arbuthnot said. "That kind of goes to show you how tough it is. It's one of the top tournament's in the state."

"That's one of those tournaments where your goal is to go and play four games," he continued. "It's one game at a time, but last year there was three state champions in this thing. This year, there could easily be two or three state champions in there again."

The tournament is scheduled to tip off on Saturday, Jan. 13. All games will be played at Highland High School.

The complete first-round schedule goes as follows:

- Alton vs. Belleville West 10 a.m.
- CM vs. Okawville 11:30 a.m.
- O'Fallon vs. Hillsboro 1 p.m.
- Nashville vs. Triad 2:30 p.m.
- Mater Dei vs. Belleville East 4 p.m.
- Taylorville vs. Teutopolis 5:30 p.m.
- Breese Central vs. Waterloo 7 p.m.
- Highland vs. Collinsville 8:30 p.m.

The championship game is set for 2:30 p.m. on Saturday, Jan. 20.