

Postseason preview

Baseball: Northern Region District Tournaments

Compiled by
John Keim

Concorde District

Top seeds: Oakton (15-4) and Westfield (16-4). The Cougars' offense cooled off a bit late in the season, but they still have the Northern Region's most potent attack. Senior Bryan Kidwell has emerged as a clutch player for the Cougars, on the mound and at the plate.

Meanwhile, defending champ Westfield has received better pitching performances of late. The Bulldogs haven't hit as well as hoped, though senior Brandon Snyder, the district player of the year, is hitting .546 with three home runs and 29 RBIs.

Key factors: The pitching of Oakton's Evan Frederickson and Westfield's defense. If Frederickson is on, the Cougars are very tough to beat. But many hitters in the district have faced him often. In three of the Bulldogs' four losses, defense has played a factor. It helps having Snyder behind the plate, where he's been for most of the second half of the season.

Scary team: Herndon (12-5). The Hornets have the pitching to beat either of the top two. Indeed, they beat Oakton. But they're inconsistent at the plate and that could make it tough to win.

The rest:

Don't be fooled by the records of Centreville (5-13), Chantilly (7-11) and Jefferson (10-10). All three played numerous close games against the top half. Centreville closed with four straight one-run losses. Chantilly beat Herndon, 1-0, on Friday. And Jefferson, with ace Shane Warren, can do more than scare Herndon in the first round. Remember, the Colonials went 8-2 outside the district.

Liberty District

Top seeds: W.T. Woodson (15-5) and Langley (17-3). They arrived at these spots in different ways. Woodson has the best hitting lineup in the district, with five players batting over .330, led by district player of the year Mike Bianucci (.490 BA, 7 HR, 21 RBIs) and fellow seniors Jon Quigley (.450) and Jim Gibbons (.375, 5, 21). Five Cavaliers have homered at least three times.

Meanwhile, Langley has better pitching depth with the emergence of junior Bryce Morrison to pair with Jimmy Saris. Junior Brendan DiBari and sophomore Dan Hochberg have pitched well enough to provide options. While Saris (.462, 20 RBIs) senior Chuck Eller (.491, 17 RBI) and junior Danny Brown (.442) are offensive stalwarts, it's the defense of senior catcher Nick Zahra that is often overlooked. He handles pitchers well and usually calls the pitches.

other key. For the Cavaliers to win, he must continue to pitch well, giving them a solid pairing with ace Bianucci.

Scary team:

Third-seeded McLean (12-5), because of its experience, and defending champion

Key factors:

How Langley uses Saris (4-0, 1.35 ERA). He's pitched mostly in relief, limiting his innings. If he relieves, Langley can bring him in at the first sign of real trouble — and do so in a couple games a week. Or they can save him for one game and let him shut down an opponent. It's a terrific option. Also, if Langley fields well, they'll be successful. Woodson senior Ross Taranto (6-0) is an-

Madison (10-10) because of its past. The Highlanders usually start seven seniors, many with three years on the varsity. Senior Kevin Clinton leads the offense with a .468 average while pitcher Andrew Burton is 6-1 with a 2.24 ERA.

The fifth-seeded Warhawks, possibly still a year away, split with McLean and Lee and lost two close games to Langley. They've won three straight district tournaments.

The rest: Fourth-seeded Lee (12-7), with ace Kevin Moreland, can beat most teams — he already beat Madison, a likely quarterfinal opponent. South Lakes (6-14) and Fairfax (4-14) have posted a couple upsets, but this district is top heavy and the tournament probably will reflect that.

National District

Top seeds: Edison (13-4) and Mount Vernon (17-3). The Eagles, winners of 10 straight, won with power (three players have hit at least six homers) and pitching (their top two pitchers have sub 2.00 ERAs). Sophomore Seth Williams (13 homers, 21 RBI) and junior John Barrett (eight homers, 17 RBI) lead the power. Sophomore Josh Miller (5-0, 0.65 ERA) leads the pitching. Defending champ Mount Vernon is well-balanced and capable of shutting teams down with ace Chad Eagerton.

Key factors: Edison's youth. It can both help and hurt this time of

the year. Hungry teams win and sometimes young players know they always have next year. Then again, they can be oblivious to the pressure of knowing it is their last chance. Most of the lineup is underclassmen, but senior Thomas Gibbs is a huge help. He's 5-2 with a 1.88 ERA and has six homers and 24 RBIs. Also, junior Mike Kirik's return after a finger injury will bolster the mound depth. But Mount Vernon has excellent tournament experience, having won three of the last four. That matters.

Scary team: Washington-Lee (12-7). The Generals split two games with Mount Vernon, winning 3-0, and losing 3-2. But Edison beat them handily twice. Fortunately for the Generals, they would avoid Edison until the final. Three Generals are batting over .400, led by senior Chris Bangs (.462).

The rest: It would be a monumental upset if one of the above three teams didn't win the tourney. Stuart has played well to earn the No. 4 seed. Their season would be made by advancing to the region tournament.

Patriot District

Top seeds: Lake Braddock and Robinson. The Bruins won the top seed with a coin flip. Toss another coin to determine the favorite. The Bruins are senior-laden, led on the mound by pitcher Dan Seymour (6-1, 2.00 ERA) and at the plate by Brett Garner (.475 BA, five HR, 24 RBI). Another senior, Greg Hoyt, has 26 RBIs. The Rams have two top players in seniors Spencer Wiggins and Brad

Kledzik, who has pitched well of late. Robinson beat Lake Braddock the second time around.

Key factors: Robinson's health. If the Rams' Spencer Wiggins is over his ankle and thigh injuries, they'll be tough to beat. Few are better big-game players than Wiggins, on the mound and at the plate. But Lake Braddock is the defending champion and don't wilt under pressure, a necessary postseason trait.

Scary team: Third-seeded West Springfield (11-8) is a pesky group and could make life difficult for one of the top seeds. The Spartans lost one-run games to both top seeds. They don't have the pitching to win it all, but they do have the hitting and, seemingly, the attitude.

The rest: It's hard to imagine anyone but Lake Braddock or Robinson winning this tourney. Third-seeded Hayfield (10-10) has talent and played three close games against the top two seeds. But the Hawks also lost 13-2 to fifth-seeded T.C. Williams (6-11) on Friday. Their pitchers allow too many baserunners. T.C. has improved greatly, and earning a region berth would be a major accomplishment. West Potomac played Annandale Monday night in the play-in game.

W.T. Woodson and All-Examiner senior Mike Bianucci are one of the favorites to win the Liberty District Tournament. —Jeff Mankie/Examiner