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NCP Staff

The state playoffs open tonight around Northern California with plenty of quality teams and prospects set to try and continue their seasons. We take a look at who has the best chance to bring home a title, including picking the winners in all five regional divisions.

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Which teams have the best chance of winning a state title?

Douglas Benton: Northern California won two state titles last year with St. Mary's-Stockton (Division II) and Pinewood (Division V) and could bring home two more this year. St. Mary's is looking for another state title after capturing the Sac-Joaquin Section Division II title over McNair. The No. 2 ranked Dragons put together an impressive performance to beat Miramonte in the North Coast Section Division III title game and more performances like that could mean a state title this year for the state runner-ups last season. A third team to watch is Brookside Christian in Division V, though it will have to get through plenty of programs with past success on the way.



Breanna Brown is part of Bishop O'Dowd's 'Big 3' frontline

Chris Roemer: Popular belief is we will have one solid chance and maybe one or two other possibilities who could claim a championship. When thinking of the team or teams with the best chance of winning a state championship one should stop and look no further than St Mary's Stockton. The nationally ranked Rams are the most talented, deepest, and battle tested team in Northern California primed to capture yet another championship. Their path up north should be tougher than anyone they may face in the state title game. With all of this said they must still win three games in a row up north and a fourth championship weekend to make it happen, but odds are they will do it again.

Eli-Sean Smith: St. Mary's (Stockton). Who can handle that pressure? Plus, [Courtney Range](#) is gifted enough to bring back the trophy. Div. III-O'Dowd, like their boy's team, they have the size to win it all and the guards are the question.

What are some under the radar teams regardless of division?

Douglas Benton: Throughout the season, the upper echelon in each division have been fairly consistent. So, under the radar teams making a run to the NorCal finals could be hard to come by. Two teams to watch for are Oak Ridge in Division I and Turlock Christian in Division V. Oak Ridge has a state championship coach in Stephen White and a good combination of perimeter talent and solid post play from [Lauren Sende](#). In Division V, Turlock Christian boasts talented junior guard Halie Bergman, who is averaging 24 points, eight rebounds, four assists and four steals.

Eli-Sean Smith: Div. I-Oak Ridge could get to the semi-finals and a game vs. Berkeley. Div. III-Sacramento is a tough, defensive bunch. They can give O'Dowd big problems with their pressure. Div. IV-Not under the radar in either case, but LJCD is a monster, so between Salesian and St.Mary's-Berkeley, either can get to state, and I think they will meet to settle the matter. After that, who knows. Anything can happen. Div. V-Pinewood has had a sub-par season, but Scheppler will have them ready, they have been here before and they can hit that three. Dangerous team in a one-and-done scenario.

Who are the top players to watch?

Douglas Benton: Taking the top players from each division, it starts in Division I with [Elisha Davis](#) of Berkeley. Davis has continued her development as a point guard and consistent quality games from her will make Berkeley nearly unbeatable in the NorCal playoffs. Division II is the deepest field and thusly has a slew of players to watch. Carondelet senior [Hannah Huffman](#) will need big games, especially if it meets St. Mary's-Stockton in a rematch, for the Cougars to win a NorCal title. Also St. Mary's junior [Courtney Range](#) will look to further bolster her stock while Mitty sophomore [Kelli Hayes](#) is coming off of a tremendous game in the Central Coast Section finals against St. Ignatius. Division III will feature the strong frontline of Bishop O'Dowd with [Kendall Waters](#), [Oderah Chidom](#) and [Breanna Brown](#) opposite of Division I bound seniors in [Jasmine Ware](#) (UC Santa Barbara) and [Jehiah Cook](#) (UNLV) at Sacramento. Division IV is led by strong sophomore play in [Mariya Moore](#) at Salesian and [Gabby Green](#) and [Mikayla Cowling](#) at St. Mary's-Berkeley. Also in the mix is Pride freshman MaAne' Mosley. Division V will see a pair

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of scoring guards with Bergman at Turlock Christian and Tiara Tucker at Brookside Christian. Also look inside to Eastside Prep forward [Hashima Carothers](#) and Hamilton forward Aubrey Bekendam, who is averaging 20 points and 12 rebounds.

Chris Roemer: DI: Elisha Davis (Berkeley), [Dejza James](#) (Pleasant Grove), Lynette Johnson Kennedy Sacramento, Monique Mulder (Deer Valley) DII: Courtney Range St Mary's Stockton, Hannah Huffman Carondelet, Kelli Hayes Mitty, Maria Kemiji-McDonald St. Ignatius DIII: Oderah Chidom Bishop O'Dowd, Ivonne Cook Taylor Terra Nova, Jasmine Ware Sacramento. Devon McDonald Miramonte DIV: Mariya Moore Salesian, Gabby Green Saint Mary's Berkeley, [Emily Easom](#) Marin Catholic, Nikki Gleason Calaveras DV: Tiara Tucker Brookside Christian, [Hashima Carothers](#) Eastside Prep, Haile Bergman Turlock Christian, Audra Jones Hamilton.

EII-Sean Smith: Elisha Davis of Berkley, [Lynette Johnson](#) of JFK-Sac, Range, Huffman, Moore and Mariah Williams of Salesian and Ware of Sacramento.

Which players are in line for breakout performances?

Douglas Benton: [Cat Perez](#) is Top 20 ranked in the 2012 class and headed to Seattle, but has still kind of been a hidden secret at Gunn. The senior helped lead her team to the CCS Division I title and a No. 7 seed in the Division I field. If it can move past Mission San Jose at home on Wednesday, it will get a rematch with Lowell for a shot at the regional semi-finals. Fellow senior [Regina Camera](#) has had a very solid senior year for St. Mary's-Stockton in looking to cap her career with a state title. Camera has stepped into the senior leadership role this year and opened eyes with her game developing outside of being a sharpshooter. She was a key performer in a win over Bishop O'Dowd last month.

Chris Roemer: In DV, Brookside's Tiara Tucker will have to be on her game down the stretch to help get the Knights into the state title game. She is primed for this opportunity as she has the green light and confidence from her coach to get it done. Look for her to be a playmaker creating for her teammates and scoring in bunches. If the Knights are to get to the championship weekend they will need big outings from Tucker.

EII-Sean Smith: Jenn Hoffman at Oak Ridge, yeah, you all are saying "who?" but anyone who shoots in an arena the way she did last Saturday night must be taken seriously. Only 5-foot-4, but she moves well without the ball and has an effortless stroke.

What potential match-ups are the most intriguing?

Douglas Benton: A potential Mitty-Carondelet semi-final in Division II would revive a game with strong history and pit two of the best programs in the area year in and year out. The winner could face St. Mary's-Stockton for a shot at a state title. Another potential semi-final is Sacramento-Miramonte in Division III featuring two teams who want to play up tempo and should put together an entertaining game. Others to watch for are Salesian-St. Mary's (Berkeley) in a Division IV NorCal final for the team's fourth meeting this year. In Division V, Brookside Christian against Pinewood would test the scoring ability of Tucker and be a challenge for Brookside to overcome if it wants to win a regional title.

Chris Roemer: DI: Berkeley vs. Pleasant Grove, DII: Mitty vs. Carondelet, DIII: Sacramento vs. Miramonte, DIV. Salesian vs. Saint Mary's Berkeley, DV: Brookside Christian vs. Pinewood

EII-Sean Smith: Sac and O'Dowd. Sacramento is in a defensive groove and they have the personnel to bother O'Dowd's guards enough that the Oakland school's bigs may not see the ball as much as required. Salesian-St. Mary's, Berkeley should meet again. More than familiar with each other, the real issue is who will make the correct adjustment in order to get over the hump? Mitty-Carondelet...two top programs and two great coaches....always a great game.

Prediction time: Which teams win a NorCal title?

Douglas Benton: Division I is Berkeley's to lose and the Yellowjackets capture their second straight NorCal title with a win over Gunn. Division II is a fun field to look at, but St. Mary's-Stockton makes it through by beating Carondelet in a close game on March 17. Division III seems destined for a Bishop O'Dowd-Sacramento rematch and while Sacramento will be able to force tempo with its perimeter play, Bishop O'Dowd will have too much inside in winning their second straight regional championship. Salesian and St. Mary's-Berkeley will meet in a rematch in Division IV with the Panthers avenging a section final loss from this past weekend. Finally in Division V, Brookside Christian holds off an improving Eastside Prep squad to stay as the top ranked team in Division V.

Chris Roemer: DI Berkeley vs. Deer Valley: These two familiar schools will meet again and with a similar outcome. Again, Berkeley will have too much depth and talent for Deer Valley to counter. The bevy of guards and experienced players at Berkeley are hungry for another trip to Power Balance Arena and a crack at a state title.

DII St Mary's Stockton vs. Carondelet: For the second time this season these two teams will meet again and this time a berth to the state title on the line. Unfortunately for the Cougars of Carondelet they will face a similar outcome. The Rams are still a match up nightmare for the Cougars and their depth will be an issue for them again. Carondelet will be able to keep the game close two and a half quarters before their stars get worn down and the Rams pressure takes over. St Mary's in a double digit win heading to their 4th straight state title game.

DIII Bishop O'Dowd vs. Sacramento High School: These two are both really talented teams with a handful of their own division one players throughout their roster. I think the Dragons of Sacramento keep the game competitive with their toughness and urgency, but come up on the short end to the Dragons from Oakland. If Bishop O'Dowd's quartet of guards and trio of post players are all on the same page clicking, working together, and Waters and Chidom stay out of foul trouble they shouldn't have any problem getting by, advancing to the state title game. However, if Waters and Chidom do get into early foul trouble and turnovers become an issue this game could play into Sacramento's favor and go either way. I believe Bishop O'Dowd advances for the second consecutive year to the state championship weekend.

DIV Salesian vs. Saint Mary's Berkeley: Everyone expects these two to be in the championship game and playing each other for the 4th time this year. The Panthers came away victorious in the first two meetings

while it was Mariya Moore's led Salesian squad who came up big to capture the NCS DIV crown. I believe Salesian put a scare in the Panthers that they can beat them and are up to the challenge in future meetings. If the Panthers are to be victorious they will need production from senior [Shannon Mauldin](#), a solid all around game from sophomore Gabby Green, and some sharp shooting from 2014 [Mikayla Cowling](#). The game will be competitive and close, but in the end Saint Mary's will wake up and get it done capturing yet another DIV title.

DV Brookside Christian vs. Eastside Prep: Brookside will make its first appearance in the NorCal title game. The Knight's have had a good season with a quality record and picked up some good wins along the way. They will get tested along the way and the path won't be easy. Eastside Prep will serve as a formidable opponent and match up fairly well I believe. At the end of the day the small school from the CCS will be victorious in a close margin pushing themselves to the following weekend.

Ell-Sean Smith: BHS-Deer Valley. DV should take down Lowell with speed. This division has been thin since teams were made to remain in their enrollment division beginning in 2004-2005. Since that point, and beforehand, Berkeley has been the dominant team. They've won the NorCal crown with a sub-par team and some very good ones. This one is small, but good. It's for the Yellowjackets to lose.

Div. II St. Mary's-Stockton-Carondelet. Huffman leads the Cougars past Mitty, but runs into the buzz saw from Stockton.

Div. III Sacramento-Bishop O'Dowd. O'Dowd's guards are the key. As with almost every team in the country, the Dragons of Sac can't match-up inch by inch with the Dragons of Oakland, but Sacramento is in a defensive groove. Dragons in a close one, O'Dowd, that is.

Div. IV Who else but Salesian-St. Mary's? Salesian is good and young, and that is scary. What is more frightening is that they are young and now have the confidence they need to advance to the big game after finally beating the Panthers. The question is will they? I think so.

Div. V Brookside Christian-SJND. St. Joseph's will advance to play Brookside Christian, but that's where the fun ends for the Alameda school. Who can stop Tiara Tucker's 26 points a game? Not to mention the balanced scoring from her supporting cast. Difficult mix to beat at any level.

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