

TOP OBSERVERLAND BASKETBALL PLAYERS

Here is the Observer's preseason list of the Top 20 girls basketball players as selected by staff member Steve Kowalski.

1. **Allyssa Smith, 6-1 junior center, Redford Bishop Borgess:** Smith is a mobile inside player who played like a senior as a sophomore last year, averaging 12 points and 10 rebounds per game. Nice touch up to 15 feet. A starter since her freshman year, she is a tireless defender that can guard perimeter players and post players. She'll be a Miss Basketball candidate and a nationally-recruited player if she keeps up her current progress.

2. **Yolanda Holt, 5-11 senior guard, Wayne:** Now that Redford Bishop Borgess Miss Basketball winner Maxine Reese has graduated, Holt is the undisputed most exciting player in the area. Her height at the point guard position makes it tough for opponents to match up in the open court. She has three-point shooting range and good court awareness, although she has a tendency to be out of control.

3. **Amanda Abraham, 6-3 junior guard, Plymouth Salem:** Abraham is already a seasoned veteran with

two full years of high school eligibility remaining. She adjusted well to the perimeter last year, scoring about 10 points per game en route to earning second-team All-Observer honors. She runs the floor well and can finish in transition with either hand. Coach Fred Thomann expects her to be a threat from three-point range after not making any treys in 1995.

4. **Angie Sillimon, 5-10 sophomore, Salem:** Sillimon creates offense with her outstanding defensive play. She has a nice pull-up jumper from about 15 feet and ability to shoot from three-point range.

5. **Amanda Porter, 5-7 senior guard, Farmington:** A three-year starter, Porter puts up impressive numbers despite all the attention she draws from opposing defenses. She has good shooting range and can finish her drives in the lane against taller players. She averaged 14 points per game to go with four rebounds, four steals and three assists. She also is a clutch free throw shooter.

6. **Kristi Florenz, 5-10 senior guard-forward, Plymouth Canton:** A veteran starter for the Chiefs who averaged 11.5 points per game as a junior. She uses screens and

picks well and can hit a 15-foot jump shot consistently. A good inside shooter who has improved her range.

7. **Amy Robie, 5-9 junior guard, Farmington Hills Harrison:** A stand-out since her freshman year, Robie is a tough, versatile guard. She averaged 10 points a year ago after scoring eight per game as a freshman. She also has improved her low post moves.

8. **Mary Jane Valade, 5-8 senior forward, Mercy:** Valade had a strong junior campaign, earning second-team All-Observer honors. She does her work mostly on the interior against taller players.

9. **Rica Bargo, 5-8 senior forward, Wayne:** Bargo is a nice complement to Holt, and does most of the dirty work for the Zebra's. She is a scorer first who can beat defenders off the dribble on the baseline.

10. **Candice Finley, 6-0 senior center, Borgess:** The returning starter averaged eight points and eight rebounds per game. A strong rebounder and aggressive post player, she is being recruited by Division II schools.

The second 10 are in alphabetical order.

Christina Anderson, 5-4 junior guard, Borgess: Anderson had her moments as a sophomore, and with Reese and Adriane Bryant off to Michigan State and Toledo, respectively, her talents will be on more display. Anderson has good range on her jump shot and is fast to end. Her ballhandling will be crucial to the Sports' hopes in '96.

Mary Anderson, 6-4 senior guard, Canton: An outstanding defender with good command of what coach Bob Bloom wants accomplished from the point-guard position. An all-around player in track, Anderson uses her speed to her advantage.

Jessie Brennan, 5-8 sophomore guard, Mercy: Starting as a freshman on the

Knutson's 18 points paces Harrison win

Junior guard Kristine Knutson scored a career-high 18 points Tuesday to lead Farmington Harrison to victory in its 1996 girls basketball debut.

The Hawks defeated host Waterford Kettering in the season opener for the third consecutive year, 49-39.

Knutson's point total included three three-point field goals. "She's a very steady, smart player, and she takes all the right shots," Harrison coach Pete Mantyla said.

"She had some scoring bursts in summer games and preseason scrimmages. I was excited to see it, but I wasn't surprised."

Junior guard Amy Robie scored 16 points, including 11 in the fourth quarter when the Hawks outscored Kettering 16-9 to secure the victory.

Autumn Gaines, another junior guard, scored 12 points for the Captains, who had only one player in double figures.

The Hawks trailed 15-12 after one quarter and 24-22 at halftime, but they held Kettering to six points in the third period and took a 33-30 lead into the finale.

"Our focus has been playing hard for 32 minutes, and I think we did that," Mantyla said. "We're trying to establish that early."

Both teams had a "ton" of turnovers, he added.

"I was disappointed with how we took care of the ball, but when two teams press that hard early in the year that can be

expected."

The Hawks made eight of 29 free throws, Kettering 13 of 25.

W. BLOOMFIELD #7, NORTH #8: Even though North Farmington began its season on a losing note, the game proved to be an impressive opener for Katie Vitell.

Vitell, a sophomore forward playing in her first game for the Raiders after transferring, scored a game-high 27 points. The next closest was Melissa Graiz with six.

"Katie impressed everybody," coach Linda Perkins said. "She's a good, strong post player; she looked very good."

The Raiders also looked good early, jumping to an 19-10, first-quarter lead. The Lakers rallied to take a 25-25 halftime lead and gradually pulled away in the second half.

"We pressed early and ran out of gas," Perkins said. "Foul trouble also hurt us in the first half."

"We played hard but didn't have enough staying power. We did do a good job of securing and getting the ball to our big girl, however."

Kim Kipela led West Bloomfield with 15 points. North made just 13 of 31 free throws, the Lakers eight of 20.

ATHENS #8, FARMINGTON #3: The Falcons threw away their season opener Tuesday at Troy Athletic, committing 26 turnovers.

"We went into the game knowing they were going to trap us and rebound, and they did," Farmington coach John Verduca said. "At the same time, we turned the ball over way too much."

"They were the more aggressive team and rebounded well. That was the game. I expect better of the team, but it's a long season."

The Red Hawks jumped to a 13-4 lead after one quarter and extended the margin to 26-11 at halftime. They put the game out of reach with an 18-7 difference in the fourth quarter.

Senior guard Amanda Porter led Farmington with 10 points. The Falcons made only 11 of 27 free throws, while Athens converted 19 of 29.

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Marlins from page 1C

the team is one of the best defensive players Baker has ever coached.

She averaged eight points and 7.8 rebounds, but her forte might be defense. Brooks led the Marlins with 49 steals.

"She's our most effective defensive player, taking the other team's point guard," Baker said. "She can defend just like a demon away from the basket and is a very physical player around the basket."

Brooks is the last of three sisters to play for Mercy, which has had a member of the Brooks family on the team for eight straight years. Marshelle and Felicia Brooks also played basketball.

Kluksa, an All-Catholic and All-Observer forward in soccer, returns as the starting point guard. She also played in 14 varsity games as a sophomore.

"Jena has worked very hard on her ball handling and is a true court leader at the point," Baker said. "She's not out there to score points, but certainly will help

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Heather Davis and Kelly Moug. Davis is a post player, good rebounder and good scorer around the basket, Baker said. Moug can play the off guard or small forward positions.

"We might best use (Moug) coming off the bench, because she can play a number of positions," Baker said. "All three played quite a bit as sophomores and do different things for us. Whether they start or not, they'll be part of the first group."

The Marlins also return Gina Tuliao and Katie Nelson, a pair of 5-7 senior wings. Tuliao might be the best three-point shooter on the team, according to Baker, who rates Nelson "the one most likely to be a coach herself one day."

The roster also includes 5-6 freshman Susie Robie, who will provide backup at point guard, and 6-2 senior post Shawntika Farr, an All-Catholic thrower in track and field who didn't play basketball last year to rest her knees.

"I'm very hopeful (Farr) can counter some of the height we'll be facing this year," Baker said. "She gives me more flexibility as a coach."

"We'll be playing some big teams, so we have to get after people on defense and try to out-

work some teams.

"We are a year older and stronger. The time spent on defense last year seems to be paying off."

The Marlins play another rugged schedule that begins tonight at Walled Lake Central, the defending Western Lakes Activities Association champion and Class A finalist.

The Mercy Hoops Classic will be Sept. 5 and 7 with Stevensville Lakeshore, Plymouth Canton and Rochester Adams participating again.

"I have every reason to think we're going to be able to compete with stronger teams," Baker said, "but we can't just trot out there on a given evening and mop the floor down."

"How successful we are depends on the kind of attitude the kids maintain during the season and how confident they become as we move through it."

Baker added the Marlins played well early last season but didn't continue to progress at the same rate.

"We didn't come together and make the run we would have liked to, but maybe we've only seen part of the product with this group," he said. "Maybe now we'll reap the reward from our toil over two seasons."

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