

Utah teams aim to impress Calif.

By Bill Oram
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It's been easy to link together the teams traveling to Mission Viejo, Calif., this weekend for what is a first-of-its-kind prep football showcase for Utah teams.

In some ways, three games have become one Bingham-Alta-Timpview game. But the three Utah powerhouses headed this week to Southern California with different goals and expectations.

* - Bingham is king, shouldering the load of national expectations heading into its showdown with Orange Lutheran.

* - Alta is looking for validation against a talented and fast Crenshaw team after losing to Bingham last week.

* - Timpview, finally, is the great unknown: a championship-caliber team that doesn't know if it has a quarterback even now, in a third-week game against Bakersfield.

"We sat down the other day and asked, 'What's the purpose of this trip?' " Timpview coach Louis Wong said. "The first purpose is obviously winning a football game. Two, we're still in the process of evaluating football players. Number three is to make memories for this team."

Another thing these teams have in common? On this trip, they serve as emissaries from the state of Utah, considered a rising high school football power, to California, which this week had 10 teams ranked in the *RivalsHigh 100*.

Utah, this year, has none. This is the most significant national stage a Utah team has played on since Bingham played Eules Trinity (Texas) in 2010 in Cowboys Stadium.

There is a striking disparity between the respect for Utah football and the other states. Something Utah's players recognize.

"Everybody thinks California is so much better than Utah," Alta quarterback Tyson Blackner

California trip results

The Utah schools finished 1-2 against their California opponents.

BINGHAM lost 42-7 to Orange Lutheran.

ALTA defeated Crenshaw handily, 45-14

TIMPVIEW fell to Bakersfield, 38-13.

Orange Lutheran's game against Bingham was its season opener. The Lancers went on to win their first five games of the season, but fell apart afterward and finished 6-4. They ended in fifth place in their league and failed to make the post-season for the second straight year.

said. "We're going to prove them wrong."

RivalsHigh senior writer Dallas Jackson, who ranks the top 100 teams each week, said it's important that Utah's teams perform well against teams that are middle-of-the-pack in California.

"Are those the three best teams you could have gotten out of Southern California?" he said. "Probably not. But you have to go win those games and show you're at least at that level."

Orange Lutheran won the California State Bowl in 2006 and returns 16 starters from last year's team. A quality win could boost Bingham back into national rankings.

"Most people are looking at Orange Lutheran this year as being really a great team," Bingham coach Dave Peck said, "but the last couple of years they haven't been as good as they should have been."

Bingham was buoyed by its frenetic final-minute win over Alta last week, a loss the Hawks hope to bounce back from against Crenshaw, which won the Los Angeles City Section in 2009.

"It's exactly what this team needs just to push us to the best that we can be," Alta senior Ryan Jensen said.

Timpview is 1-1 like the Hawks, whom the Thunderbirds lost to in the season opener. They countered that with a blowout last week of rival Westlake, but several positions remain areas of concern for the Hawks, especially quarterback. Opening-night starter Marshall Nelson has been passed over by Jake Lloyd and Dax Raymond, who will split time against Bakersfield, which finished 9-3 last year.

Different teams, different focuses. But here's the pressure: If they lose, it will send a troubling message about high school football in the state, Jackson said.

"It would be easier to dismiss claims that they're a state on the rise," he said.