

Syracuse girls leading the way in 5A hoops

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It's no secret who leads the top-ranked and undefeated Syracuse Titans.

Yet, knowing that junior Brittney Martin can score and actually stopping her are two very different things. One reason for that is when teams focus on her, she looks to her teammates.

"She's one of the most unselfish players I've ever coached," said Syracuse head coach Rob Reisbeck. "She's seen a lot of double-teams this year, but she does a great job of finding the open teammate. She'd rather get her teammates involved."

The ability to play as a team with a superstar on the floor makes the Titans this year's favorite to repeat as 5A state champions.

In addition to Martin, who is averaging 23.3 points per game, Syracuse will rely on Makenlee Williams, who is averaging 16.3 points per game. Hailee Parry, Kiana Fonua and Hailey Judd can score and give the team depth.

The Titans have already won five region games, as Region 1 started region play earlier than any other because it has nine teams. Syracuse entered a critical January stretch with a 9-0 record and some wins over the state's best programs.



Brooke Blonquist's screen on Brittney Martin allows Summer Yack to get past.

While there are a number of teams that can compete with Syracuse, the team voted No. 2 in the preseason poll was Lone Peak. The Knights have already shown toughness and talent in wins over Mountain View and defending 4A state champion, Springville.

"We have six seniors, including two who are in their fourth year playing for us," said

head coach Keith Flood. "The last couple of years we've been young. Last year we only had one senior. We've sort of been setting up towards this year."

Instead of feeling pressure, however, the coach said the team is just enjoying their undefeated (so far) season.

"They're just excited,"

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Coach Rand Rasmussen's team was predicted to finish second.

5A region predictions

Note: Projections were picked by Deseret News staff, with input from coaches.

Region 1

1. Syracuse
2. Weber
3. Fremont
4. Layton
5. Clearfield
6. Roy
7. Viewmont
8. Davis
9. Northridge

Region 3

1. Taylorsville
2. **BINGHAM**
3. Riverton
4. West Jordan
5. Kearns
6. Herriman
7. Copper Hills

Region 2

1. Skyline
2. Cottonwood
3. Hunter
4. Granger
5. Murray
6. Cyprus
7. West

Region 4

1. Lone Peak
2. American Fork
3. Alta
4. Pleasant Grove
5. Brighton
6. Jordan
7. Hillcrest

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he said. "They're just having fun with the year and playing really well as a team."

He said they have goals, including competing for a region title in the deep Region 4.

"It's always an advantage to play good competition," he said. "I like the fact that we play good basketball every night."

The Knights are led by Whitney Johnson, who signed with New Mexico and averages 16.4 points per game, Marquelle Funk (17.0 ppg), and Mikail Burningham (6.13 ppg), who has committed to Northwest College in Wyoming.

Region rival American Fork was voted No. 3 in the preseason poll and looks capable of giving the Knights a battle. The Cavemen are led by Cassidy Fraughton (15.3 ppg), Grace Farnsworth (9.0 ppg), who committed to Utah, Shelby Carson (10.0 ppg), and Hayley Sua-Filo (8.0 ppg).

The strength of the squad is definitely its balanced scoring ability.

Alta wasn't voted into the top five in the pre-season poll, but could contend for a region title thanks to Makenzie Morrison, who averages nearly 20 points per game, and Erin Foster (17.0 ppg).

Skyline was voted No. 4 and is finding

consistency with a very young team. Abbie Brickley (12.0 ppg) and Miquelle Askew (13.4 ppg) will lead the team. Guards Julie Caputo and Ashley Aberton provide quickness and intelligence.

Taylorsville rounds out the top 5 in the preseason poll, and while the Warriors finished the preseason 4-4, they have the makings of a contender. Led by Katie Greenberg (9 ppg), Whitney Mitchell (10.2 ppg) and Brooke Slade (7.0 ppg), the team will make the region race a dog-fight.

Perennial power Bingham has already made its way into the top 5 thanks to solid preseason play against tough opponents. The Miners beat Layton and Alta, among other, in the preseason. The Miners are led by Summer Yack, who averages 16.2 points per game, but like all Bingham teams, it is notable for the balance and depth of its scoring ability.

Brighton, Riverton, Kearns, Hunter, Weber, Layton and Clearfield are all teams that have or will make their way into the rankings. The fight for region titles will be fierce in all four regions, and the state tournament should be the deepest, most competitive it has been in years.