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Top high school picks for 2014-15 basketball season

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BRET HARTMAN / FOR THE TIMES

Mater Dei sophomore M.J. Cage, left, is guarded by Mayfair junior Kendall Smith during a Southern Section Open Division playoff game in February. Cage will continue to play a key role for Mater Dei next season.

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Now that a seemingly never-ending high school basketball season is over, the next season can begin. That would be travel ball. And let the transfer season begin too.

If you think one-and-done is popular in college, then get ready for one-and-done in high

school basketball. Those are the players who spend one year at a high school, then move on to the next best deal. The CIF doesn't seem to mind. Its approach is, we'll send you to the Open Division to compete against the other schools who want to win badly.

And don't forget about the foreign invasion. Exchange students keep coming to Southern California, and everybody wants one.

Look what they did for Montebello Cantwell-Sacred Heart, L.A. Cathedral and Altadena Renaissance, among others.

All this makes it challenging to project the top teams for 2014-15, but when the dust clears, the transfers finally declare their destinations and the incoming freshmen get wooed and dined to full content, these teams figure to be prominent:

1. Santa Ana Mater Dei. Yes, Stanley Johnson will be gone after leading the Monarchs to four consecutive state championships. But 6-foot-10 M.J. Cage will be a junior and is on the fast track to becoming a dominant player. With guards Rex Pflueger and La'Vette Parker, plus the expected top newcomer to be named later, the Monarchs should be as strong as ever.
2. Chatsworth Sierra Canyon. Any team with point guard Devearl Ramsey and forward Cody Riley to build around will be awfully good. And Sierra Canyon is just getting started, with more incoming freshmen set to arrive and maybe a center transfer, too.
3. Torrance Bishop Montgomery. The Knights won a Division IV state title and lose just one player to graduation. The Thompson brothers, Stephen Jr. and Ethan, will be firing up threes and making lots of them.
4. Corona Centennial. With Sedrick Barefield leading the way and Kyle Hamilton jumping toward the ceiling, the Huskies will be running and gunning and winning.
5. Chino Hills. The Ball brothers, Lonzo and LiAngelo, will be practicing so hard and so long to make up for not winning a championship, that their father might have to order them to put down the basketball. Wait until you see their improvement.
6. West Hills Chaminade. With Michael Oguine and Trevor Stanback, the Division III state champion Eagles are just beginning their rise. Remy Martin, a point guard who had to sit out his freshman season, becomes eligible, too.
7. Fairfax. If you want to see good guards, the Lions will be loaded with them. Lindsey Drew and Lorne Currie are back, and the Lions are getting a top freshman. The early City Section title favorite.
8. Redondo. Reggie Morris Jr. is building a top program near the beach. Lessons learned from the Open Division, plus the return of Leland Green, will have Redondo in the mix.

9. Windward. The battle tested Wildcats are loaded with top returnees, from Jalen Harris to Roman Davis. All signs point toward a team that will be able to play against anyone.

10. Mission Hills Alemany. Daron Henson and Shacquelle Dawkins had terrific sophomore seasons. With steady improvement, they'll lead the Warriors to success.

Other teams have the potential for big seasons, such as Bellflower St. John Bosco, Orange Lutheran, Encino Crespi, San Juan Capistrano JSerra, Anaheim Canyon, Santa Margarita, Santa Monica and Oak Park.

Lots of people will be waiting to see where incoming freshman guard Spencer Freedman ends up. He lives on the Westside and decided to delay his entrance into high school until this fall. He'll be an impact player.

Now it's time to take a brief breather; but in basketball, no one rests very long.

eric.sondheimer@latimes.com

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