

PLAYOFF PARADE

Michael Boytim presents the Mirror's annual District 6 basketball tournament preview and analysis



Coming Monday:
The District 5
playoff preview

6A BOYS

6-1 State College (12-9)	
6-2 Altoona (8-13)	

Lions learn at least a pair of victories

THE SCOOP: The District 6 boys champion may not be headed to the state playoffs.

Even if Altoona upsets a State College team that defeated it twice in the regular season, the Mountain Lions will have to defeat a team from District 8 or District 10 in a four-team subregional tournament to make the PIAA tournament.

On the bright side, Altoona has been playing its best basketball recently, and its zone defense forces teams to make outside shots.

DEFENDING CHAMPION: State College

PLAYERS TO WATCH: State College sr. GF Tommy Friberg; State College jr. G Johnny Friberg; State College sr. PG Cam Villaroel; Altoona sr. G Nate Cherry; Altoona jr. F P.J. Charles; Kennedy Catholic sr. G Oscar Tshabwe; Kennedy Catholic sr. G Maceo Austin; Alderidge sr. G Bobby Clifford; McDowell so. F William Jeffress

MOST INTRIGUING POSSIBLE MATCHUP: Altoona vs. Kennedy Catholic in subregional

SLEEPER: Altoona

MIRROR'S TEAM TO BEAT: State College in District 6

NUMBER OF TEAMS ADVANCING: Two from subregional

WHO THEY'LL PLAY IN INTERDISTRICTS: 6-8-10 No. 1 vs. 7-5; 6-8-10 No. 2 vs. 7-3.

ANALYSIS: State College beat Altoona by 17 in the Mountain Lions' first game of 2019, but the game at the Fieldhouse was much closer and came down to the final possessions.

The Mountain Lions have also beaten rival Hollidaysburg and Cumberland Valley on the road since that second State College game.

There are times where Charles has completely taken over games this season, and if Altoona gets hot with its outside shooting, it can be dangerous to State College.

The bigger issue, as if beating State College isn't a tall enough task already, will be getting through the subregional.

Kennedy Catholic will almost assuredly be the top District 10 team in the field and has 6-foot-10 West Virginia commit Tshabwe, who may be a one-and-done at WVU on his way to an NBA career. If the Lions lose to State College, they'll have to win a play-in game AND a first-round subregional game, likely against Kennedy Catholic, to make the state playoffs.

This is a change from last year in which, as it is in the girls 6A bracket, the District 6 champion automatically advanced to the state playoffs and the losing team played the winner of District 8 and District 10 for the right to move on.



NATE CHERRY
ALTOONA

3A BOYS

1 Ligonier Valley (19-2)	Richland (17-6)	2
8 Mount Union (10-11)	Cambria Heights (12-10)	7
9 Central Cambria (8-13)		
4 West Shamokin (16-7)	Forest Hills (14-8)	3
5 Bellwood-Antis (15-7)	Penns Valley (12-9)	6

Area teams facing long odds

THE SCOOP: Cambria Heights and Bellwood-Antis will have to win a road game, and Central Cambria would have to win two away from home, to make the state playoffs.

The challenge grows when you consider their opponents. The Highlanders have to topple Richland, which made it all the way to the PIAA championship game last year, and the Blue Devils must endure a long trip to Rural Valley before playing a West Shamokin team that did well in a good Heritage Conference.

DEFENDING CHAMPION: Ligonier Valley

PLAYERS TO WATCH: Central Cambria sr. G-F Tanner Melnyk; West Shamokin sr. F Ethan Libengood; Bellwood-Antis sr. G Mason Yingling; Bellwood-Antis sr. F Nathan Wolfe; Ligonier Valley sr. C Marrek Paola; Richland sr. F Collin Instone; Cambria Heights sr. G Liam Wholaver; Forest Hills sr. F Adam Ceceer; Forest Hills sr. F Quinn Spangler; Penns Valley sr. F Cameron Shaffer; Richland sr. G Joe Hauser

MOST INTRIGUING POSSIBLE MATCHUP: Richland vs. Ligonier Valley

SLEEPER: Forest Hills

MIRROR'S TEAM TO BEAT: Ligonier Valley

NUMBER OF TEAMS ADVANCING: Four

WHO THEY'LL PLAY IN INTERDISTRICTS: 6-1 vs. 4-3; 6-2 vs. 7-5; 6-3 vs. 7-2; 6-4 vs. 7-1

ANALYSIS: Bellwood-Antis certainly has a chance against West Shamokin. The Blue Devils actually eliminated the Wolves in the District 6 football playoffs. B-A has been playing its best ball at the end of the season with a pair of wins over Juniata Valley to clinch the Inter-County Conference's North Division.

That said, Wolfe will have to come up big against some of the Wolves' size inside for Bellwood to earn a trip to the state playoffs, something that seemed extremely unlikely when it opened the season with a 63-18 loss at Tyone.

Forest Hills also went through a hot streak toward the end of the season before losing an overtime game to Bishop Guilfoyle and falling at Cambria Heights.

The Rangers handed Johnstown its only regular-season loss near the end of January right after beating Bishop McCort.

Forest Hills did lose its only game against Richland by six and lost to Ligonier Valley, 78-70. Both of those games were earlier in the season, and Ceceer and Spangler have shown they can match up inside against anyone.

Ligonier beat Richland by four in last year's final, but if those teams meet again this year, Richland will be sorely missing graduated star Tyler Zimmerman.

MASON YINGLING
BELLWOOD-ANTIS

5A BOYS

2 Bellefonte (14-7)	
3 Hollidaysburg (11-10)	

1 Johnstown (18-2)

Golden Tigers face tough road

THE SCOOP: Hollidaysburg has endured an up-and-down season and will have to hit its stride once the playoffs begin in order to have a chance to defend its district championship.

Central Mountain chose not to enter the playoffs, thus giving top-seeded Johnstown a bye into the championship game. The Trojans played for the Class 4A title last year but have moved up in classification.

Hollidaysburg finished just below Bellefonte in the race for the No. 2 seed, so the Golden Tigers will need to win a true road game in order to get a shot at the Trojans.

DEFENDING CHAMPION: Hollidaysburg

PLAYERS TO WATCH: Johnstown sr. F DWayne Jones; Johnstown sr. G Keyon Gause; Johnstown jr. G Anderson Franklin; Hollidaysburg sr. G Sam Servello; Hollidaysburg jr. G Jaden Delmer; Bellefonte jr. GF Ben McCartney

MOST INTRIGUING POSSIBLE MATCHUP: Hollidaysburg vs. Johnstown

SLEEPER: Hollidaysburg

MIRROR'S TEAM TO BEAT: Johnstown

NUMBER OF TEAMS ADVANCING: One

WHO THEY'LL PLAY IN INTERDISTRICTS: 6-1 vs. 3-6

ANALYSIS: Winning at Bellefonte is no easy task for Hollidaysburg in the semifinals. The Red Raiders beat Tyone at home earlier this season and lost to undefeated Huntington by just 10 at home. Bellefonte also beat Clearfield by 22 at home.

Servello has had some outstanding games this year after returning from a pair of fractured vertebrae that cost him last season. When he gets hot from the outside, the Golden Tigers can be a real threat.

Johnstown has lost just two games this year, to Forest Hills and Richland. The Rangers and Rams are teams that have the size inside to match the Trojans' plethora of athletes. Whichever team wins the Hollidaysburg-Bellefonte game will have a very hard time getting through that formula.

Just one team will advance out of this bracket, and it's hard to imagine a scenario in which that team is not Johnstown. The Trojans ripped through the Laurel Highlands Athletic Conference's best teams and have plenty of experience returning from last year's state playoff team.

That said, Brad Lear has always gotten the most out of his Hollidaysburg squads, and it wouldn't be a shock to see the Golden Tigers put up a fight if they make it to the championship game.



SAM SERVELLO
HOLLIDAYSBURG

2A BOYS

1 Bishop Guilfoyle (20-2)	West Branch (16-6)	2
8 Northern Cambria (9-13)	Homer-Center (8-13)	10
9 Claysburg-Kimmel (10-12)	United (10-10)	7
4 Glendale (14-8)	Purchase Line (14-8)	3
5 Penns Manor (13-9)	Bishop McCort (10-11)	6

Marauders, then everybody else

THE SCOOP: Bishop Guilfoyle Catholic was expected to struggle a bit out of the gate this year with just one returning starter, though that one starter was Saint Francis commit Luke Ruggery. When Ruggery suffered an injury that forced him to miss the start of the season, this bracket looked like it could be wide open.

It isn't.

The Marauders came together during Ruggery's absence and can shoot any team out of the gym in the span of a few minutes with their combination of shooting skills and defense. Now that Ruggery is back to 100 percent, it's hard to see anyone in this field knocking off the Marauders.

DEFENDING CHAMPION: Bishop Guilfoyle Catholic

PLAYERS TO WATCH: Bishop Guilfoyle sr. PG Luke Ruggery; Bishop Guilfoyle jr. GF Michael Montecalvo; Bishop Guilfoyle jr. G Kyle Ruggery; Bishop Guilfoyle jr. G Jessiah Witherspoon; Glendale sr. G Josh Potutshing; Claysburg-Kimmel sr. G Alex Kulick; Northern Cambria so. PG Tyler Bearer; Penns Manor sr. C Brandon Baird; West Branch sr. F Larry Dowdie; Bishop McCort sr. G Ben Seidel; Purchase Line sr. G Dominic Campbell; United jr. G Kyle Silk

MOST INTRIGUING POSSIBLE MATCHUP: Bishop Guilfoyle vs. Purchase Line

SLEEPER: None

MIRROR'S TEAM TO BEAT: Bishop Guilfoyle Catholic

NUMBER OF TEAMS ADVANCING: Four

WHO THEY'LL PLAY IN INTERDISTRICTS: 6-1 vs. 7-6; 6-2 vs. 10-3; 6-3 vs. 5-1; 6-4 vs. 7-2

ANALYSIS: Bishop Guilfoyle's path to the district championship game includes games against either Northern Cambria or Claysburg-Kimmel and either Glendale or Penns Manor. Nothing against those teams, and the Vikings have a great shot at making the state playoffs with a home game against a mediocre Comets team, but none of them is in the Marauders' league.

BG will likely play the winner of the quarterfinal game between Purchase Line and Bishop McCort in the final. Both of those teams are likely to get the best of No. 2 seed West Branch.

Purchase Line made it to the finals last year and actually led Bishop Guilfoyle for parts of that championship game, but this isn't the same Red Dragons team.

If Glendale gets past Penns Manor and plays West Branch in the consolation round, it's worth noting the Vikings have lost twice to the Warriors this year, but only by nine and five points. If the Warriors aren't up for playing in a consolation game, Glendale could claim the 6-3 spot.

LUKE RUGGERY
BISHOP GUILFOYLE

4A BOYS

1 Huntingdon (22-0)	Central (17-5)	2
4 Juniata (10-12)	Tyrone (14-8)	3

Rivals set sights on unbeaten Bearcats

THE SCOOP: One thing undefeated Huntington has going for it is that Johnstown, which has lost only two games, has moved up in classification to 5A, and there will be no rematch of last year's heated district title game that the Bearcats won surprisingly easily, 65-48.

The bad news? That 22-0 regular season could mean next to nothing if the Bearcats slip up in the championship game, where they will play one of their biggest rivals, thanks to the fact that just one team will advance out of this bracket to the state playoffs this season — a change from a year ago.

Of course, those two rivals are Tyrone and Central, two of the teams that have given Huntington its biggest challenges of the regular season.

Mark your calendar for this district final at Penn State Altoona on Friday.

DEFENDING CHAMPION: Huntington

PLAYERS TO WATCH: Huntington sr. GF Nick Rigby; Huntington sr. F Will Sulesky; Huntington jr. F Jackson Ritchey; Central sr. G Noah Muthler; Central jr. F Braden Kitt; Tyrone so. G Damon Gripp

MOST INTRIGUING POSSIBLE MATCHUP: Huntington vs. Central

SLEEPER: Tyrone

MIRROR'S TEAM TO BEAT: Huntington

NUMBER OF TEAMS ADVANCING: One

WHO THEY'LL PLAY IN INTERDISTRICTS: 6-1 vs. 7-3

ANALYSIS: Before we delve too deep into Huntington, which should have absolutely no problem with semifinal opponent Juniata, let's dedicate some space to the two teams playing in the other semifinal.

Tyrone and Central have split a pair of meetings, with each one winning on the other's home court. Both games have had extremely low scoring first halves, but no one has put up many points in the Scarlet Dragons' remodeled gym.

Both teams' best players are probably underclassmen, and both teams can play any pace. It's a shame that if the seeds hold, neither of these teams will get a chance to play in the state playoffs. It's also tough to imagine either of these teams will be at 100 percent after playing this likely highly-contested semifinal game on Wednesday and then turning around and playing in the district final just two days later.

Now to the Bearcats.

With Rigby, who needs just seven points to become Huntington's all-time leading scorer, leading the way, Huntington is a well-oiled machine that won a pair of state playoff games last year and has its eyes on more this year. This well-coached and senior-led team should take care of business, even if it won't be easy.



NICK RIGBY
HUNTINGDON

1A BOYS

1 Bishop Carroll (18-4)	Saint Joseph's (17-4)	2
4 Blacklick Valley (14-7)	Juniata Valley (15-5)	3
5 Saltsburg (8-13)	Williamsburg (3-18)	6

Carroll must avenge loss

THE SCOOP: Bishop Carroll Catholic lost its season opener at Saint Joseph's Catholic by 10 in overtime. The Huskies haven't lost much since, and unless Juniata Valley has something to do with it, they'll need to avenge that loss in the district finals.

Bishop Carroll is trying to win its seventh district title since 2004 and beat the Wolves in last year's final.

Juniata Valley has a great senior class with plenty of playoff experience and certainly could give Saint Joes a challenge in the semifinals.

DEFENDING CHAMPION: Bishop Carroll

PLAYERS TO WATCH: Bishop Carroll sr. G Carson Ertter; Bishop Carroll jr. G Tristan McDannell; Bishop Carroll sr. G Alex Karlheim; Saint Joseph's sr. F Jack Mangene; Blacklick Valley sr. G Jude Gdula; Blacklick Valley sr. F Corey Simmons; Williamsburg so. G Josiah Dowey; Juniata Valley sr. PG Cameron Collins; Juniata Valley sr. F Quinn Zinoble; Juniata Valley sr. GF Jaxson Rand

MOST INTRIGUING POSSIBLE MATCHUP: Bishop Carroll vs. Juniata Valley

SLEEPER: Juniata Valley

MIRROR'S TEAM TO BEAT: Bishop Carroll

NUMBER OF TEAMS ADVANCING: Three

WHO THEY'LL PLAY IN INTERDISTRICTS: 6-1 vs. 9-3; 6-2 vs. 9-2; 6-3 vs. 7-2

ANALYSIS: The Huskies will likely play Blacklick Valley in the semifinals, a team that has two players (Gdula, Simmons) that average more than 15 points per game. Those averages will be put to the test against a stingy Huskies defense.

Juniata Valley should ease past Williamsburg, but the Blue Pirates actually led the Green Hornets after one quarter the last time they met.

That will set up a rematch for JV from last year's semifinal when Saint Joseph's surprised the top-seeded Hornets. Juniata Valley never recovered from the loss and dropped the consolation game to Blacklick Valley and saw its season end.

Mangene, who is also an excellent golfer, will be a tough matchup inside for whomever the Wolves play, but BC's Nolan Burk can help offset that.

Erter missed some time with a shoulder injury this year but returned late in the season and scored 19 points for the Huskies in a victory over Somerset. That's good news for Bishop Carroll and bad news for the rest of this bracket. McDannell, who already has scored more than 1,000 points as a junior, can score against anybody and gained even more confidence while Erter was out.

CARSON ERTTER
BISHOP CARROLL

6A GIRLS

6-1 State College (16-5)	
6-2 Altoona (15-7)	

Rubber match will decide district title

THE SCOOP: The Altoona girls have been one of the area's most intriguing teams this season. When the Lady Lions are at their best, they can beat anyone, but they haven't always played at their peak as they've battled injuries and playing in a new league.

Altoona split a pair of meetings with State College this season, winning by nine at home and losing by 17 on the road.

State College shocked Altoona in the finals last season, and the Lady Lions have also beaten several times that the loss is still on their minds.

DEFENDING CHAMPION: State College

PLAYERS TO WATCH: State College jr. G-F Maya Bokunewicz; State College jr. G Isabelle Leazier; Altoona sr. F Bridgit Fox; Altoona sr. PG Olivia Hudson; Altoona jr. G Caranda Perea; McDowell jr. F Julia Miller; Alderidge jr. G Sophia North

MOST INTRIGUING POSSIBLE MATCHUP: Altoona vs. State College

SLEEPER: State College

MIRROR'S TEAM TO BEAT: Altoona

NUMBER OF TEAMS ADVANCING: Two from subregional

WHO THEY'LL PLAY IN INTERDISTRICTS: 6-1 vs. 7-4; 6-2, 8-1 or 10-1 vs. 7-3.

ANALYSIS: When Altoona is at its best, Hudson is playing like she did as a junior before she suffered a torn ACL last summer. Hudson has shown flashes of that ability lately, especially when the Lady Lions handed Cumberland Valley its first conference loss on Altoona's senior night.

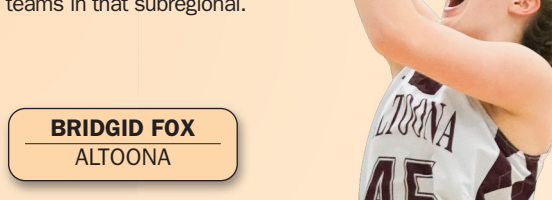
Another key matchup will be Bokunewicz against Perea. The State College junior, who has an offer from Division I DePaul, has neutralized Perea for the most part in the first two games. State College has also used a double-team collapse on Fox, something Altoona will have to adjust to better than it did in the teams' matchup in State College.

State College has a deeper roster, but Altoona may have more top-tier talent if Hudson is playing like her normal self.

Lexi Risha, who comes off the bench for State College, scored 16 points in last year's District 6 title victory, including a key 3-point shot in the final minutes.

Mifflin County opted not to enter the playoffs, thus allowing Altoona to advance directly into the championship game.

The loser of the game will play a team from District 8 or 10 and have a chance to advance to the state playoffs by winning that game. Both State College and Altoona seem to have more talent than any of the other teams in that subregional.



BRIDGIT FOX
ALTOONA

3A GIRLS

1 Penns Valley (17-5)	Tyrone (17-5)	2
8 Central (11-11)	United (13-8)	7
9 Phillipsburg-Osceola (10-11)	Westmont Hilltop (9-11)	10
4 Central Cambria (15-6)	Penn Cambria (17-6)	3
5 Cambria Heights (13-8)	Marion Center (14-8)	6

Field wide open with top contenders

THE SCOOP: The strongest teams in his field come from the Mountain League and Laurel Highlands Athletic Conference. Both leagues are well respected, but don't play each other often, so it's always hard to predict what they'll do when they meet.

Then again, it's hard enough predicting what teams that have already played twice and are from the same conference in this bracket will do.

Central Cambria might have the best team in the tournament, but the Lady Devils just lost to first-round opponent Cambria Heights earlier this month.

DEFENDING CHAMPION: Penns Valley

PLAYERS TO WATCH: Penns Valley sr. PG Paige Kubalak; Penns Valley sr. F Isabella Culver; Central sr. F Maddi Metzler; Phillipsburg-Osceola sr. PG Halle Herrington; Central Cambria sr. G McKenna Hayward; Central Cambria sr. F Jenna Bauer; Cambria Heights jr. G Chloe Kleckland; Cambria Heights so. G Kirsten Weekland; Tyrone sr. G Sydney Shaw; Tyrone fr. PG Stephanie Ramsey; Tyrone fr. G Jaida Parker; United so. F Maizee Fry; Westmont Hilltop sr. F Riley Shriver; Penn Cambria sr. G Makalyn Clapper; Penn Cambria sr. G Emmy Harvey; Marion Center sr. F Jackie Fetsko

MOST INTRIGUING POSSIBLE MATCHUP: Tyrone vs. Penn Cambria

SLEEPER: Central Cambria

MIRROR'S TEAM TO BEAT: Central Cambria

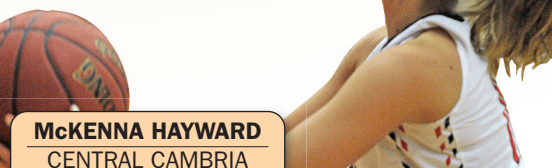
NUMBER OF TEAMS ADVANCING: Four

WHO THEY'LL PLAY IN INTERDISTRICTS: 6-1 vs. 7-5; 6-2 vs. 7-4; 6-3 vs. 9-1; 6-4 vs. 7-1

ANALYSIS: Top-seeded Penns Valley is the defending champion, but other than splitting a regular-season series with second-seeded Tyrone and a win over Class 2A No. 2 seed Blairsville, the Lady Rams don't really have many impressive wins or glaring losses.

Penns Valley, which has dominated both of its potential quarterfinal opponents in Central and Phillipsburg-Osceola, beat Central Cambria at home on its way to a title last year, but the Lady Devils seemed poised to avenge that loss — if they get that far. Central Cambria handed Penns Manor its only loss this season and has played a very tough schedule and handled it well, but it beat Cambria Heights by just two in the teams' first game and lost by 10 on Feb. 1.

On the other side of the bracket, Penn Cambria and Tyrone will have to guard against letdowns in the quarterfinals, but both should win to lock up state playoff appearances. The Lady Panthers' best players are seniors, but they haven't been in this position before, while Tyrone's star freshmen haven't allowed the pressure to bother them to this point.



McKENNA HAYWARD
CENTRAL CAMBRIA

5A GIRLS

1 Hollidaysburg (11-10)	Obama Academy (14-7)	2
4 DuBois (10-12)	Portage (15-7)	3
5 Bellefonte (9-13)		

Lady Tigers now the team to beat

THE SCOOP: Hollidaysburg has a chance to win back-to-back District 6 titles for the first time since 2012-13 after winning the title last year as the No. 3 seed.

The Lady Tigers have an easier road this year, as they'll host the winner of DuBois and Bellefonte. They beat both of those teams by 27 during the regular season.

A rematch of last year's district final with Obama Academy or against Class 5A newcomer Portage will follow, and the Lady Tigers have also already beaten both of those teams.

DEFENDING CHAMPION: Hollidaysburg

PLAYERS TO WATCH: Obama Academy's Samaree Perkins; Hollidaysburg sr. G Hannah Snyder; Hollidaysburg sr. G Sierra McClain; Hollidaysburg jr. G Allison Hileman; Hollidaysburg so. G-F Alyssa Bell; Portage jr. GF Kara Divodick; Bellefonte jr. G Malorie Smith