

It's time to get their kicks

Flintridge Sacred Heart earns No. 1 nod

By Keith Lair, Staff Writer

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Soccer players Left to right: Samantha Norton, Pip Harragin, Bianca Garoian, Sinead Fleming and Isabelle Johnson at Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy on Wednesday December 3, 2008, in La Canada. (Keith Birmingham SGVN/Staff)

They're back.

Some of the West San Gabriel Valley's best high school soccer players return for their senior seasons. Their junior and sophomore years, too.

It's a time of optimism and a time to build in preparation for the start of league play and the CIF-Southern Section playoffs.

Last year, the best playoff finish was made by La

Salle, which reached the quarterfinals.

A look at the Top 10:

NO. 1 FLINTRIDGE

SACRED HEART

It's about the young and old.

The Tologs return eight seniors. They also have eight incoming freshmen on the roster. Only one player from last season's JV team, which went 14-3, made it to the varsity squad this season.

"The best players play, regardless of class," co-coach Frank Pace said. "We have a lot of really good freshmen."

The Tologs, who went 12-7-4 but lost in the first round of the CIF-SS Division I playoffs last season, return a defense that has had 21 shutouts in the last two seasons. That includes Sinead Fleming and Pip Harragin. Fleming has signed a national letter of intent to play at New Mexico next season. Harragin has signed with UC Davis.

Senior Samantha Norton and sophomore Natalie Zeenni, who transferred from Arcadia, are also on defense. Junior Danielle Molina is back at defensive midfield. Junior Dominique Oro returns to goalie, but she is being pushed by two players. Senior Catherine Yonai was supposed to be the starter last season, but she had shoulder surgery and missed the season. Freshman Lindsey Espe is also challenging for playing time.

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"We really like competition at every position," Pace said. "It makes our team better."

Among the newcomers is freshman midfielder Tera Trujillo, who is a member of the U.S. Under-15 national team, and forwards Katie Johnson and Breena Koemans.

But they could be struggling to find playing time, even though the Tologs lost All-Area Player of the Year Carter Vettese. Senior Isabelle Johnson is back; she was the second-leading scorer behind Vettese. Senior Bianca Garoian also returns.

Pace shares the coaching duties with Kathy Desmond, who is entering her 14th year with the program.

NO. 2 ARCADIA

The Apaches will be fueled by returning All-CIF senior forward Anne Marie Tangorra.

The Apaches and Pasadena tied for the Pacific League title. Arcadia reached the second round of the CIF-SS playoffs, falling to Canyon of Anaheim on a last-minute goal.

NO. 3 MONROVIA

La Ca ada and South Pasadena have pretty well dominated the Rio Hondo League in recent history, but the Wildcats are ready to change that.

Monrovia returns eight starters from a team that

tied South Pasadena for second in league last season. Two of those did not play until late in the season because of eligibility issues. This season, grades should not be an issue.

"Last year we had a lot of one-goal games," coach Jamie Payne said.

"We don't want to lose or tie those games. We want to win them."

Lisa Kelley, Rachel Holmes, Grace Kennedy, Vania Ovando, Tyler Shirk, Shannon Brooks, Courtney Burney and goalkeeper Sarah Wallick return.

Kelly, Brooks and Holmes are seniors. The other five are juniors.

Payne also has a top freshman in Taylor Synold.

NO. 4 LA SALLE

The Lancers started slowly last season but knocked off powerful La Ca ada and reached the CIF-SS Division IV quarterfinals before losing in overtime in a driving rainstorm.

Most of those players return for new coach Edgar Manvel-yan.

"I have some new ideas," said Manvelyan, who has coached club soccer with Pasadena's Cherif Zein and coached the Burbank girls last season.

"We're going to play a more entertaining style of soccer."

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Four key returnees "and a lot of sophomores" highlight the Lancers, who went 10-11-4 last season. They include sisters Sam and Lori Cuerington, who both play forward. Sam is a senior and Lori a sophomore.

Junior Amy Kahr is switching from forward to defense, and sophomore Whitney Tashiro will anchor the middle of the field. Junior Caley Mauch also returns to the roster after missing last season.

Manvelyan is also waiting on the club season to end so that freshman Jenna Alper will be available.

La Salle and Monrovia played to a 1-1 tie on Monday.

NO. 5 LA CA ADA

The Spartans lost all but three starters from a team that had a world of potential last season but was upset by La Salle in the CIF-SS playoffs.

For coach Louie Bilowitz, that's a good thing.

"This may be the most fun team I will have had in a long time," the longtime Spartans coach said.

"They call this sport 'the beautiful game,' and because we don't have one outstanding player, I think we can play like that. Everyone touches the ball."

The Spartans lost forward Nancy Avesyan and defender Colleen Boyd to graduation. Sophomore

goalkeeper Eirene Kim decided to stick with volleyball and will not play this season. Another starter left the school and another is ineligible.

"This is going to be a fun team to watch develop," Bilowitz said.

"Maybe it will be the best team I've ever had that plays like a team."

Returning is Milly Beebee, who was the No. 2 scorer last season. She is moving to defender. Junior Rachel Ragusa and sophomore Lisa Lim also return.

Freshman Haley Austin is currently the goalkeeper and Kelly Clark decided to play soccer instead of basketball this season. She will also be on the defense.

NO. 6 PASADENA POLY

It's time to see if Chadwick is vulnerable.

The Dolphins have been the dominant Prep League team, but Poly coach Pat Gray said he thinks his Panthers have a shot at the league title this season.

"The Prep League has always been competitive, and I think it will be even more so this season," he said.

"For us, we're still putting the pieces together, and the question mark might be defense."

The Panthers have 12 returning players,

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including six starters, from a team that went to the second round of the CIF-SS Division IV playoffs.

Four seniors are back in the starting lineup: midfielder Abby Bogan, forward Megan Jackson, defender Lucy Ana-walt and forward Hannah Wear. Katie Gancedo and Zibby Boyer, who started as freshmen last season, also return.

NO. 7 ALVERNO

Goal scorers extraordinaire Ameenah Issa and Jessica Capra return.

Issa, a senior, had 22 goals and Capra, a junior, scored 20 goals last season for the Jaguars, who won the Horizon League and finished 9-2.

There are 12 sophomores and freshmen on the team. The only other senior is Marina Lesse.

NO. 8 MARANATHA

The Minutemen take a big leap from the Alpha to the Olympic League.

"It will be tough, but I think it is good for us," coach Jolie Robison said.

"A couple of the teams are ranked, and playing those teams makes you a better team."

Robison may have wished her team had toughened up last season when it was undefeated before falling to Torrance 2-0 in the second round of the CIF-SS playoffs. The

Minutemen finished 14-8-1.

"I think this will make us better for the playoffs," she said.

Because it is a five-team league, though, there will be one less guaranteed playoff berth.

Five returning starters will lead Maranatha: forwards Kimmie Sommers and Jessica Austin, midfielder Bianca Mercado, and defenders Taylor French and Tayor Ferry.

NO. 9 WESTRIDGE

The Tigers have 11 starters returning from a team that tied for second in the Prep League last season and played two CIF-SS playoff games.

"Our key role players are back," coach Jason Windass said.

Anchoring the defense will be returning starter Grace Birkenbeuel, a senior. Also back are senior midfielder Alexandra Regas-Riwerts, junior forward Michele Stathos and senior forward Elizabeth Bridges.

The only freshman on the team is Eda Reed, who typically plays forward but may be moved back into the defense.

NO. 10 SOUTH PASADENA

The Tigers are young, but oh, are they talented.

It starts in the middle, where sophomore Tara

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Alem plays. She will play center, forward and
midfield, and she led the Tigers in scoring last
season.

South Pasadena, which tied Monrovia for second
in Rio Hondo League play last season, has five
seniors. The rest are sophomores or freshmen.

Among the top players are forwards Aubrey
Thurman and Aubrey Gorman. Ashley Rollin, who
did not play last season, steps onto the field, and
Erika Quinonez will be a key asset.

"It's nice that they're young and talented," coach
Randy Lilavois said.

"We want to finish at least where we were last
year, and if we do not, we'll be disappointed."

keith.lair@sgvn.com

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