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## MaxPreps Xcellent 25 Preseason National Girls Basketball Rankings

California, Texas and New York step aside — the DMV is where the power of girls basketball lives in 2011-12.



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Graphic by Ryan Escobar

Riverdale Baptist, St. Mary's and Memphis Central head the list of the MaxPreps Xcellent 25 Preseason Girls Basketball Rankings.

The arrow in the middle of the wheel spins every year, flicked by the whims of DNA and the luck of the coaching draw.

One year, the arrow might point to the San Francisco Bay Area; the next, to New York City. Back in the '90s, there was a year in which the state of Minnesota produced 22 Division I female basketball players, a class topped by the Miller twins, who both still play in the WNBA.

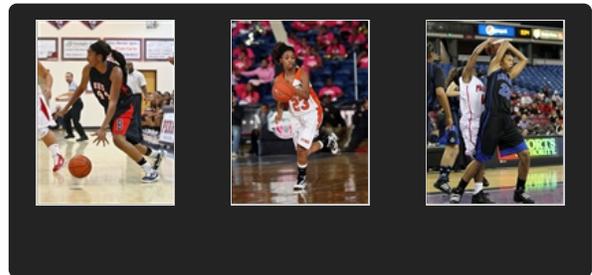
In 2011-12, there are likely areas the metaphorical arrow might point to as the best in the nation: Atlanta is flat loaded, and Tennessee also has an outstanding crop of top players. But the prize this season goes to what's known as the DMV. That, to the uninitiated, is Washington D.C., Maryland and Virginia, and when it comes to the best high school teams in the country, you can barely get out of the Beltway traffic without bumping into one.

At the top of the list is our national No. 1, Riverdale Baptist, but a case could be made that St. John's out of D.C. belongs at the head of the table. And then there's Our Lady of Good Counsel, which lost five games last year – four to St. John's. But don't sleep on the Academy of the Holy Cross either, since the Tartans gave St. John's one of its two losses. The other Cadet loss? Riverdale Baptist.

"In our league, we've got three national-level teams," says Tom Splaine of Our Lady of Good Counsel.

It's not like this is the first time the DMV has had some punching power. Ten years ago, the DMV could boast about Marissa Coleman (St. John's, Maryland) and Monique Currie (Bullis School, Duke), who both play for the Washington Mystics, and Kaii McClaren (Good Counsel, UConn) now playing overseas. In addition, Nikki Teasley (St. John's, North Carolina) was the starting point guard

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when the Los Angeles Sparks won the WNBA title, and Kara Lawson (West Springfield, Tennessee) has a WNBA ring from Sacramento and an Olympic gold medal.

But Splaine feels the DMV might be even stronger this season.

"The coaching in the last 10 years in the Washington Catholic Athletic Conference has been very good," he says, but obviously coaching can only go so far. It takes talent to win at the highest level and Riverdale Baptist alone has Jonquel Jones (Clemson), 6-foot wing Jennie Simms (West Virginia) and 5-11 shooting guard Kellia Atkinson (Wake Forest).

The other three have similar star-studded rosters, and as they play in the same league (along with teams such as Archbishop Spalding, which would be a regional power in most other areas of the country), they'll go head-to-head often. Riverdale Baptist is, obviously, not a Catholic school, and thus won't meet any of the other three – unless it's at the Nike TOC in Phoenix before Christmas. The Crusaders will be at that powerhouse tournament, as will St. John's and Good Counsel, and will get a chance to prove themselves on a national stage.

And though Riverdale Baptist will have the most prominent target on its back there, and in every other game, all the schools from the DMV will carry a little of the same burden. That comes with the territory of the arrow aimed at the best in girls basketball in the country.

At least for this year.

## MAXPREPS XCELLENT 25 PRESEASON NATIONAL GIRLS BASKETBALL RANKINGS PRESENTED BY THE ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

### 1. [Riverdale Baptist \(Upper Marlboro, Md.\)](#) (30-4 last season)

If you like size, you'll love the Crusaders. Start with 6-3 forward [Jonquel Jones](#), an underrated high school All-American, if there is such a thing, add 6-0 wing [Jennie Simms](#) (West Virginia), 5-11 shooting guard [Kellia Atkinson](#) (Wake Forest) and 6-2 post [Brittany Jenkins-Murray](#), and there's size everywhere. Point guard [Auteoanna Jones](#) is "only" 5-7, but since she's just a sophomore, maybe she'll grow some. Oh, and Riverdale Baptist has a tremendous schedule, so if the Crusaders can run the table, they are a no-doubt No. 1.

### 2. [St. Mary's \(Phoenix\)](#) (28-2)

The Knights finally have some seniors, which is pretty scary since last year, without any, their average margin of victory in the Arizona 5A playoffs was 25.7 points. And even though seniors [Shilpa Tummala](#) and [Cortnee Walton](#) are NCAA Division I players, it's generally conceded that the junior class is stronger, and that's scarier still. On top of that, they're at home for the Nike TOC. If the Knights win in Phoenix, they should roll through Arizona.

### 3. [Memphis Central \(Tenn.\)](#) (29-9)

Nine losses is a lot of losses for a Top 5 team, but the Warriors battled through tragedy (the deaths of two teens close to the team) and a brutal travel schedule. With everyone back, including seniors [Danielle Ballard](#) and [Aaliyah Whiteside](#), Memphis Central has the talent and the schedule to make a run at No. 1. And just winning in Tennessee won't be easy, as Riverdale (No. 11 below), Clarksville and Mt. Juliet are all very strong as well.

### 4. [St. John's \(Washington, D.C.\)](#) (33-2)

Four starters return for the Cadets, who lost only to Riverdale Baptist and league rival Holy Cross, a team they beat twice. In addition, St. John's brings in 6-1 freshman [Dejanae Boykins](#) and gets [Jade Clark](#) back from an ACL tear. In short, the Cadets should be better, and they'll get to show just how much so at the Nike TOC.

### 5. [Norcross \(Ga.\)](#) (29-3)

Any roster that includes 6-1 senior [Diamond Deshields](#) (daughter of former MLB infielder Delino DeShields) is going to be pretty formidable, but coach Angie Hembree also has senior [Tori Carter](#), junior [Shayla Cooper](#) and sophomore [Bri Williams](#) back from the 29-3 Georgia 5A champions. There are also a couple of D-1 senior posts to anchor the inside game, and a solid schedule - all of which adds up to a Top 10 preseason ranking.

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