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Girls Basketball: Midwestern League team capsules

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## 1, Willamette

**Co-coaches:** Terry Harrison (19th season) and Paul Brothers (12th season).

**Last year's record:** 19-6 overall. Second place in league at 13-3. Beat South Salem 51-43 in second round of playoffs; lost to Southridge 58-25 in quarterfinals.

**Top returners:** Danielle Bellando, sr., 5-9, wing; Katie Stewart, sr., 5-10, wing; Aly Bruns, soph., 5-5, point guard; A.J. Smith, soph., 6-0, post; Katie Collins, soph., 5-4, guard; Shimea Jordan, jr., 5-9, wing; Sarrah Duke, soph., 6-0, post; Alyssa Garner, soph., 5-9, wing; Whitney LeCompte, jr., 5-4, guard; Lissa Hatefi, sr., 5-4, wing.

**Top newcomers:** Tina Spencer, sr., 5-6, guard; Friederike Moderegger, 6-2, jr., post.

**Outlook:** The third-ranked Wolverines (6-3) opened the season with a bang by knocking off Sheldon, only to drop three of their next four against extremely tough competition: Lake Oswego, Roseburg and Wilsonville. They regained their form by capturing the Silverton Tournament last week with wins over No. 6 Bend and the No. 10 Foxes. Despite an experienced returning cast, led by Bellando and Stewart, Brothers said Willamette is still searching for leadership after the graduation of four-year starter Shantele McGee. Bellando, Stewart, Smith and Bruns, a third-team all-league point guard, are all returning starters and Collings rounds out this year's starting five. Jordan heads a deep and solid bench for the Wolverines, who are favored to win the conference title and extend their league record to 10 straight trips to the playoffs.

**Quotable:** Brothers: "One thing I do like about the new classification is no league games before Christmas. I think that's a real positive."

## 2, Churchill

**Coach:** Chris Stewart (fifth season).

**Last year's record:** 19-7 overall. League champions at 14-2. Beat West Albany 52-50 in second round of playoffs; lost to Grants Pass 48-39 in quarterfinals.

**Top returners:** Susan Smith, soph., 5-5, point guard; Natalie Sprecher, sr., 5-10, post; Mackenzie Fegles, jr., 5-11, post; Erin Oeming, sr., 5-9, post; Alexa Moore, 5-5, soph., guard.

**Top newcomers:** Tana Loftin, sr., 5-3, guard; Darla Weber, jr., 5-7, wing; Katie Chapman, jr., 5-10, post; Jordan Goschie, soph.,

5-7, guard.

**Outlook:** The ninth-ranked Lancers (7-3) are expected to challenge Willamette for the league title despite the graduation of league MVP Mercedes Alexander, who led Churchill to last season's crown. Smith, who earned second-team all-league honors as a freshman, returns to run the offense, and third-team pick Sprecher is a workhorse on defense. All three preseason losses came against top 6A teams - North Medford, Sheldon and Roseburg. Churchill gained some momentum by winning last week's Summit Tournament with wins over Century, Summit and Sherwood. Loftin, a transfer from Marist, is a three-point threat, and Fegles is a tough defender and rebounder. Moore, Oeming and Chapman are all solid players who can start or come off the bench.

**Quotable:** Stewart: "If anybody can go through our league undefeated, they deserve to be champs."

### 3, North Eugene

**Coach:** Brent Coleman (fourth season).

**Last year's record:** 10-14 overall. Tied for fifth place in league at 6-10.

**Top returners:** Makenzie Ficek, soph., 5-9, wing; Katie Kimball, jr., 5-4, wing; Esty Geiger, jr., 5-5, guard; Courtney Radekin, jr., 5-9, wing; Kristen DeHaven, soph., 5-9, post; Kristen Huff, soph., 6-1, post.

**Top newcomers:** Jamie Wilson, jr., 5-7, guard; Marissa Santana, jr., 5-4, guard; Kristie Dunn, jr., 5-9, wing; Kasey Wetzell, jr., 6-1, post.

**Outlook:** With no seniors on the varsity roster, the Highlanders (2-6) struggled in the preseason in an effort to gain experience against quality competition. Those games included losses to Sheldon, North Medford, Roseburg and Crescent Valley, the top-ranked 5A team. There is plenty of athleticism on the squad, led by Ficek, a third-team all-league pick, who averaged in double figures as a freshman. Geiger and Kimball both received honorable mention last year, but Kimball is out for the season after suffering a torn ACL in North's last game before Christmas. Wilson, meanwhile, returns from an ACL injury that cost her all of last season. Radekin, DeHaven and Huff all play up front. Coleman said rebounding and learning how to finish games are North's chief concerns heading into league play.

**Quotable:** Coleman: "This might be the most athletic team we've had in a while. We just have to see if we can combine that athleticism with basketball."

### 4, Marshfield

**Coach:** Debbie Dunbar (first season).

**Last year's record:** 8-17 overall. Tied for fifth place in league at 6-10.

**Top returners:** Ali Worthen, jr., 5-10, wing; Taylor Scott, jr., 5-4, guard; Hannah Smith, jr., 5-5, guard.

**Top newcomers:** Moriah Roberge, soph., 5-5, point guard; Brianna George, soph., 5-8, guard; Melanie Stout, soph., 5-9, forward; Alicia Johnson, jr., 5-8, post; Brittney Young, soph., 5-6, guard.

**Outlook:** The Pirates (7-3) are trying to overcome the loss of 6-2 senior post Heather Porter, who is out for the season after suffering a torn ACL in the volleyball playoffs. Porter, who has signed to play basketball and volleyball at Southern Oregon, was the MWL's fifth-leading scorer (12.6 points) last year. Without her inside presence, Marshfield has relied on depth and athleticism to score points in transition and pressure teams on defense. Roberge is the point guard, with Worthen, Scott, George and Stout also in the starting lineup. A strong bench is led by Smith, Young and Johnson. The Pirates have two wins over 3A powerhouse Myrtle Point and two losses against fifth-ranked Ashland. If they can survive the grind of a triple round-robin league schedule, Marshfield hopes to end a 17-year postseason drought.

**Quotable:** Dunbar: "We know it's going to be a battle, but getting into the playoffs is our No. 1 team goal."

## 5, Thurston

**Coach:** Michelle Tuma (first season).

**Last year's record:** 6-17 overall. Eighth place in league.

**Top returners:** Kirsten Cardwell, sr., 5-9, guard; Renee Keeling, sr., 5-10, forward; Melissa Montes, sr., 5-8, guard; Brittany Burroughs, jr., 5-10, forward; Natalie Smith, soph., 5-4, guard; Tara Hill, jr., 5-11, forward; Whitney Hughes, jr., 5-11, post; Kayla Stewart, sr., 5-2, guard; Brittney Pierce, soph., 5-7, guard.

**Top newcomers:** Jessica Randall, jr., 5-10, forward; Andrea Ward, jr., 5-10, post; Courtney Welling, jr., 5-5, guard.

**Outlook:** Thurston (2-7) weathered a brutal preseason with six of its losses coming against top 6A teams or ranked 5A squads. Under Tuma, who spent the past three seasons as an assistant coach at Sheldon, the Colts will play a full-court game anchored by an aggressive and physical defense. They don't have much size, but they do have a wealth of experience with three seniors in the starting lineup: Cardwell, Montes and Keeling. Smith and Burroughs round out the starting five, although Tuma won't hesitate to dip deep into her bench to keep players fresh. Tuma said the key for Thurston is to focus on improving each day and not worry about what other teams are doing.

**Quotable:** Tuma: "The girls want to succeed ... whenever I throw something at them, they embrace it and go with it. It's a very coachable group, which is what you need when you come in as a new coach."

## 6, Springfield

**Coach:** Chuck Wenger (first season).

**Last year's record:** 2-22 overall. Ninth place in league.

**Top returners:** Samantha Stoner, jr., 5-11, guard; Kati Grabler, sr., 5-9, wing; Kelsey Shrum, sr., 5-11, post; Kenzie Smith, soph., 5-10, post; Lindsey Leighton, jr., 5-5, guard; Brandi Dunn, soph., 5-6, wing.

**Top newcomers:** Taryn Urmson, fr., 5-7, wing; Po Schnetzky, fr., 5-4, guard; Honey Ah Sam, sr., 5-9, wing; Sabra Lindahl, fr., 5-8, wing.

**Outlook:** The surprising Millers (5-4) have already won more games than they did the past three years combined. The next step is to prove they can compete in the MWL, where they've posted a dismal 1-47 record over the past three seasons. The good news is they have a nice mix of youth and experience this year and enough depth to get up and down the floor. Four starters return, including Stoner, a third-team all-league pick, plus Grabler, Shrum and Smith. Urmson, a freshman who leads the team in scoring, has been in double figures nearly every game. Leighton and Dunn are both returning lettermen, and Schnetzky is a good ball-handler off the bench. The Millers still need to cut down on their mistakes, but Wenger believes that they will play with more confidence this year.

**Quotable:** Wenger: "We're still chasing the rest of the pack, but I think we can compete with people."

## MWL GIRLS BASKETBALL OUTLOOK

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### A TEAM-BY-TEAM LOOK AT THE 2006-2007 SEASON

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