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## High Schools

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### High school hockey preview: Bowling Green favored in Northwest

#### Older, stronger programs again grouped together in Red Division

By **MARK MONROE**  
**BLADE SPORTS WRITER**

The Northwest Hockey Conference will consist of 18 teams this season, but the area's "original six" high school teams will still face off on local rinks.

The conference took in teams from the Metro Hockey League and has been split into three divisions. Bowling Green, Findlay, Northview, Southview, St. John's and St. Francis will compete in the Red Division. All six teams have established programs.

Bowling Green and Findlay both fell in the state semifinals last year.

St. Francis coach Mike Greeder said BG and Findlay are always the teams to beat.

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"They have little hockey factories down there," Greeder said. "They all grow up playing hockey together. Here [the Toledo area] we're all fighting for the same kids."

Conference commissioner Cos Figliomeni designated which teams would be in which division. Whitmer and Perrysburg had joined the original six last year.

"They more or less put the original six back together," Greeder said. "I think the teams in the lower divisions understand that they'll be competitive every night instead of getting beat 20-0."

The format is patterned after one used in the Cleveland area. The divisions are set for two years, but then teams have the opportunity to advance up a division or be sent down a division each season. Figliomeni will review the divisions after each season.

With 15 players back, Bowling Green is the heavy favorite to repeat as league champion, according to a preseason coaches poll. St. John's was picked to finish second while St. Francis is expected to come in third. The debate ends and the season begins Friday.

Here is a look at the teams in the Red Division listed by their ranks in the poll:

#### **BOWLING GREEN**

**Coach:** Dan DeWitt, 13th season

**Last season:** 28-4 overall, 13-1 league (first place)

**Top returning players:** Senior Matt Emans, F; Juniors Steve Culberston, F; Casey Horner, F; Kevin Rawlik, F.

**Outlook:** The traditionally strong Bobcat program lost just six players from a team that reached the state final four last season. DeWitt has led BG to four state titles with the last coming in 1999 (St. John's had won the title, but forfeited it due to a rules violation).

With speedy, skilled forwards, the Bobcats should score plenty of goals. That might be a key because the team will be playing three new goaltenders - juniors Matt Devries, Dan Marcson and Andrew Hinesman. The young goalies should be helped by four veteran defensemen.

"We must limit shots and quality scoring chances," DeWitt said. "We must execute defensively to let our new goalies adjust to the varsity level."

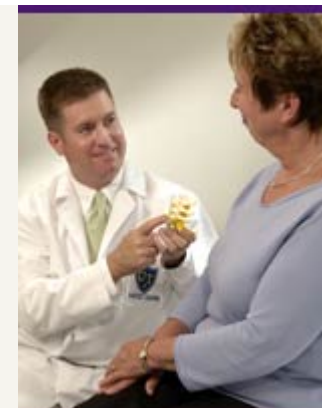
#### **ST. JOHN'S JESUIT**

**Coach:** Gary Stern, 2nd season

**Last season:** 17-17-1, 8-5 (fourth)

**Top returning players:** Seniors Jeff Landry, G; Rick Hathaway, D; Kevin Hockmuth, F; Mike Effler, F.

**Outlook:** The Titans are very experienced, especially in the most important position - in net where Landry is a three-year starter.



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Hathaway is a four-year starter on defense. Hockmuth and Effler have started three years on the St. John's offense.

The Titans have good overall team speed. However, Stern said his team is not physically strong. It also lost five defensemen to graduation.

**ST. FRANCIS DE SALES**

**Coach:** Mike Greeder, 2nd season

**Last season:** 14-12, 6-8 (fifth)

**Top returning players:** Seniors David Wockieciez, D; Michael Richardson, F; Juniors Toby Hafner, F; Bart Urbaniak, G.

**Outlook:** Greeder said he has both goaltenders back. He also said the defense should be hard to score on.

But he said the Knights had problems finding the back of the net last year and may have similar struggles this season.

"We need to score three or four goals every night," Greeder said.

**NORTHVIEW**

**Coach:** Jim Cooper, 27th season

**Last season:** 27-5-3, 11-2 (second)

**Top returning players:** Senior Chaz Alcorn, F; Junior Brett Molnar, F; Sophomore Drew Stark, F.

**Outlook:** The Wildcats appear to be in a bit of a rebuilding mode. Nine players graduated from a team that finished runner-up last season.

"We have a lot of new faces," said Cooper, who also pointed out that the freshmen are talented. "We'll probably take some lumps early."

Northview will rely on its defense to stay with the tougher teams in the Red Division, according to Cooper.

Molnar (13 goals, 18 assists), Stark (17, 14) and Alcorn (11, 15) should provide the offense, while senior goaltender Alex Prior could be a pleasant surprise.

**FINDLAY**

**Coach:** Mike Root, 24th season

**Last season:** 18-10-1, 9-5 (third)

**Top returning players:** Seniors Nick Wolf, F; Kyle Settlemire, G; Michael Meyers, F; Junior Tyler Curlis, D.

**Outlook:** The Trojans graduated eight players from a squad that reached the state semifinals last year where they lost to Lakewood St. Edward.

Findlay, which won state titles in 1978 and '83, looks to be rebuilding after finishing third last year.

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## **SOUTHVIEW**

**Coach:** Wayne Collins, 1st season

**Last season:** 6-15, 1-13 (eighth)

**Top returning players:** Seniors Eric Wilhelm, F; Eric Fournier, F/D; Junior Greg Komisarek, D; Sophomore Levi Kuebbler, F.

**Outlook:** After spending 16 seasons at Ottawa Hills, Collins is trying to mold a young Cougar program.

Kuebbler led the team in scoring last year as a freshman, while Fournier is the team leader.

"We're lacking some size but our work ethic can overcome that," Collins said. "Staying disciplined is a key factor with this young team."

Freshman Trevor Fournier and senior Ben Wewberg will be counted on heavily in net.

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