

High School Sports

Meghan Brown of Cinco Ranch made the All-Greater Houston first team.
GARY FOUNTAIN: FOR THE CHRONICLE



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 SOFTBALL PREVIEW

A look at the spring season at Houston-area schools

Alaniz should mow more of 'em down for Texas City; Katy still has muscle

By **JENNY DIAL**
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Five key questions

1. Will Katy make it back to state?

Last season, the Tigers made it all the way to the Class 5A championship game before losing to Garland 1-0. Katy has all the elements to return to state, but it will face plenty of competition in Region III. Stacy Dominique, Holly Holl and Matte Haack will be a formidable force at the plate. Although the Tigers' pitching was shaky at times last season, Denise Arnold has another year of experience under her belt and got better as last season progressed.

2. Which districts will be the strongest?

In Region II, 16-5A will be extremely strong with Klein Oak and Tomball leading the way. Both had young but competitive teams last year and should do well in the playoffs. District 18-5A was super tough last year with Cinco Ranch and Katy meeting in the Region III final. Katy Taylor, Mayde Creek and Morton Ranch will add to the mix. Clements, Elkins and Fort Bend Austin are the teams to beat in 23-5A, and newcomer Travis could turn some heads. In 24-5A, Pearland, Brazoswood and Alvin should make it a tight race.

3. Which schools have the best pitching?

Texas City has Crystal Alaniz, who as a freshman took the Stingarees deep into the playoffs. Foster boasts Keely Shuler, who is coming off an excellent summer campaign. Second Baptist's Kendall Stiefel and Fort Bend Baptist's Rachel Fox also are among the area's top pitchers.

4. Which teams will lead the area in hitting?

Katy led the area last season with a .422 batting average, and the Tigers return the majority of their bats. Elkins and Clements boastsolid-hitting lineups from top to bottom. Waltrip and Barbers Hill were among the top-hitting 4A teams in the area in 2007 and should be again this season. And don't forget Second Baptist and Lexy Bennett, who led the area with a .691 batting average last year.

5. Which teams will be the surprises of 2008?

RESOURCES



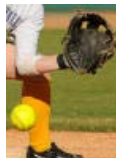
2007: Softball Player of the Year

Matte Haack, Katy

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SOFTBALL POLL

Pick a state title winner from this list.
 (Poll closes: Feb 15 at 11:59 p.m.)



- Foster
- Katy
- Klein Oak
- Texas City
- Tomball

[Vote](#)

Start with Travis in District 23-5A. It will be playing a varsity schedule for the first time and could be a sleeper. Nimitz was pretty good last year but will be even better with speedy Rachelle Harris, the area's stolen-base leader in 2007, and lefthanded pitcher Jessica Davis. Langham Creek flew under the radar last season but could be one of the teams to beat in 17-5A.

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Five players to watch

CRYSTAL ALANIZ

Pitcher, Texas City

The sophomore broke onto the scene last year and finished with a 13-6 record, 0.51 ERA and 217 strikeouts. She led the Stingarees to the Class 4A Region III finals.

LEXY BENNETT

Shortstop, Second Baptist

The Texas-bound senior's .681 batting average last season was tops in the area. She also had 25 extra-base hits.

LESLIE LEJUNE

Center fielder, Memorial

The senior easily is one of the best players around. She made several remarkable defensive plays last season and led the Mustangs with a .453 batting average and 29 RBIs.

MATTE HAACK

Shortstop, Katy

The junior was the All-Greater Houston position player of the year after helping the Tigers reach the state tournament for the first time. She led the team with a .494 batting average and was a threat to steal every time she got on base.

MEGHAN BROWN

Catcher, Cinco Ranch

The senior made a name for herself when she homered three consecutive times in the regional finals last season. She batted .347 in 2007 and led the Cougars with 26 RBIs.

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Rankings: Class 5A

1. Katy, 38-5 in 2007
2. Klein Oak, 21-6
3. Cinco Ranch, 32-7
4. Pearland, 32-8
5. Alvin, 38-10
6. Elkins, 24-10
7. The Woodlands, 28-8
8. Tomball, 20-8
9. Brazoswood, 38-7-2
10. Clements, 25-11

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Rankings: Class 4A/others

1. Brenham, 36-7-1 in 2007
2. Texas City, 23-10
3. Foster, 25-7
4. Barbers Hill, 23-5

- 5. Fort Bend Baptist, 31-5
- 6. Second Baptist, 30-5
- 7. St. Agnes, 32-9
- 8. Huntsville, 11-14
- 9. Livingston, 24-11
- 10. Waltrip, 19-11

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All-Greater Houston first team

Position	Player	Class	School
Pitcher	Crystal Alaniz	Sophomore	Texas City
Pitcher	Amber Anderson	Senior	Alvin
Pitcher	Sarah Blair	Senior	Katy Taylor
Pitcher	Rachel Fox	Sophomore	Fort Bend Baptist
Pitcher	Keely Shuler	Sophomore	Foster
Infielder	Lexy Bennett	Senior	Second Baptist
Infielder	Emily Bledsoe	Senior	Foster
Infielder	Emily Albus	Sophomore	Brenham
Infielder	Matte Haack	Junior	Katy
Outfielder	Leslie LeJune	Senior	Memorial
Outfielder	Stephanie Shiflet	Senior	Clements
Outfielder	Jessica Stoelke	Senior	Cinco Ranch
Catcher	Meghan Brown	Senior	Cinco Ranch
Catcher	Holly Holl	Junior	Katy
Utility player	Joanna Krienitz	Junior	Dobie

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All-Greater Houston second team

Position	Player	Class	School
Pitcher	Diana Espinal	Senior	Cypress Falls
Pitcher	Nicole Gremillion	Sophomore	Elkins
Pitcher	Chandler Hall	Sophomore	Barbers Hill
Pitcher	Shelby Lancaster	Sophomore	Tomball
Pitcher	Katelyn Thomason	Junior	Klein Oak
Infielder	Rae Cassel	Senior	Deer Park
Infielder	Nikki Chandler	Senior	Langham Creek
Infielder	Rachelle Harris	Senior	Nimitz
Infielder	Ashley Curry	Senior	Brenham
Outfielder	Cecily Gomez	Senior	MacArthur
Outfielder	Kelsie Meadows	Senior	Tomball
Outfielder	Brooke Turner	Junior	Brenham
Outfielder	Jessaca Spears	Senior	Fort Bend Austin
Catcher	Roxy Cassel	Junior	Deer Park
Catcher	Chastity Skipper	Sophomore	Texas City
Utility player	Rachel Castello	Senior	The Woodlands

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