

# Fort Bend Herald

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## Sports

### Needville, EB aim for state titles

#### 2009 Preseason Softball Preview

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After two teams excited the fans during the 2008-09 season, this year offers even more as both Needville and East Bernard are early picks to make a run to a region title and a berth in the state championship round.

Here is a breakdown of each area team and their respective districts.

#### DISTRICT 23-4A

Despite losing four All-district First Team performers, **Foster** is still loaded and is the favorite to capture another district crown.

The key cog returning for Foster is pitcher Keely Shuler, who has a 46-6 career mark and is a force on the hill. She was a big factor for seven-year head coach Christie Rees, whose Lady Falcons went 25-4 last year and fell to Nederland in the Region III quarterfinals.

Along with Shuler, experience is a big strength for the Lady Falcons, as eight players return this year. led by starters third sacker Jamie Moreno, outfielder Tiffany Rodriguez and catcher Dana David.

Lost to graduation was power hitter Emily Bledsoe, along with Haley Starkey, Dana Criswell, Erin Kocich and Kathleen Zellers.

But District 23 is not what it has been in the past, leaving Foster as the choice to win it all in 2009.

**Lamar Consolidated** is a team that could make some noise this season, according to 15-year head coach Pat Peloquin.

After a 14-17 season that saw them just miss out on the playoffs, the Lady Mustangs have five key contributors back this year and could give El Campo a run for second place.



Returning for Lamar are Marissa Thome, Annalise Romo, Elyssa Alvarado, Megan Elledge and Morgan Hein.

With both quality pitchers back, including three seniors and a four-year starter in Thome, Lamar has time to grow before district play gets underway.

Youth is the Achillies Heel for the Lady Mustangs, which lost Stacey Vacek, Valerie Do and Kimberly Wallace to graduation.

But time is on their side.

**Terry** can only get better, with first-year head coach Greg Horn at the helm.

After a 2-15 record last year, the Lady Rangers will be better with seven starters returning in 2009.

Back are senior Kelly Petroski, juniors Danielle Gonzales, Brandi Yates, Kayla Worley, Savannah Thorson and Kourtney Macleod and sophomore Laura Martinez.

Experience, along with solid bats up and down the lineup are two key strengths, along with good speed on the bases and in the outfield on defense.

Youth on the hill and having never made the playoffs are two factors Terry must overcome to make the postseason. But with four teams now advancing out of each district, odds are good the Lady Rangers will beat out Bay City for fourth place.

**Preseason Prediction:** 1. Foster; 2. El Campo; 3. Lamar Consolidated; 4. Terry; 5. Bay City.

## **DISTRICT 26-3A**

As has been the case in recent years, this district is one of the best in Region IV.

**Needville**, fresh off a run to the Region III championship game last year and a 28-6 record, lost just two players from that team and will only get better.

Much of the team features players from the Needville Junior League All-star team that took third at the Junior League World Series three years ago.

Veteran coach C.J. Mazac, who has been the head coach for 13 years, is loaded up and down the lineup, and on defense, led by pitcher Cally Falls.

Also back are infielders Alyssa Rodriguez, shortstop Shelby Parham, third baseman Jenny Stack and catcher Courtney Cox, along with outfielders Becca Rademacher, Julie Kalmus and Cierra Wieghat.

In addition to potent bats, the Lady Jays feature a wealth of speed and solid defensive players. Kayla Johns graduated, but will be aptly replaced by Julie Stack. Another key addition is Shauni Prihoda, who compete for starting time both in the outfield and infield.

On the hill, Falls is a dominant pitcher with a wide assortment of offspeed pitches and excellent ball movement.

**Preseason Prediction:** 1. Needville; 2. Sweeny; 3. Columbia; 4. Wharton; 5. Stafford; 6. Royal.

## **DISTRICT 26-2A**

Without question, **East Bernard** is the prohibitive favorite to win the district championship.

And after their sterling run to a state title last year, the Brahmarettes (31-4-1 last year) have the tools in place to do it again this year.

Third year head coach Amy Bush has eight experienced players back, led by All-state MVP pitcher Courtney Repka. She is joined by All-district catcher Liz Reyes.

Repka, a senior, is the most dominant pitcher in Class 2A. Her size and ability to paint the corners makes her difficult to hit. She is a threat to throw a no-hitter every time she takes the mound.

Joining them are Cameron Kieler, Brittney Wilcox, Ashley Miculka, Anna Giannetti and Trisha Polak.

If there is a weakness on this team, it's the loss of four solid contributors last year, including three-quarters of the infield in Laura Kubes, Haley Dawson and Samantha Wasek.

The top of the batting lineup will also go through a reshuffling process.

Other the other side of the spectrum, **Brazos** features six returning letter winners from a 6-16 squad and hopes to get back to the playoffs.

Head coach Denise Minks, in her 11th season at Brazos, will hang her hopes on senior pitcher Shelby Sulak and junior infielder Jamie Horelica, along with sophomores Brittney Sheets, Morgan Supak, Allyssa Young and Lauren Webber.

Hard work ethic and the ability to learn are factors on the Cougarettes's side.

But inexperience will hurt early after the team lost Victoria Morris, Brittany Fischer, Christina Fischer, Jessica Sliva and Hannah Emmons from last year.

**Preseason Prediction:** 1. East Bernard; 2. Hallettsville; 3. Weimar; 4. Schulenburg; 5. Brazos; 6. Hempstead; 7. Rice Consolidated.

## **DISTRICT 23-5A**

Under second-year head coach Gary Crissman, **Travis** has the majority of its roster back and hopes to make a run at the postseason in 2009.

The Lady Tigers is balanced, with pitcher Alexis Estrada back to lead the way.

The lineup is solid, led by Holly Berger, Sabrina Gonzales. Maryssa Silva and Sara Aguilar.

**Preseason Prediction:** 1. Elkins; 2. Clements; 3. Austin; 4. Dulles; 5. Travis; 6.

Kempner; 7. Hightower; 8. Marshall; 9. Bush; 10. Willowridge.

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