

Festive time Cherokee, Etowah part of 10-team festival of area high school programs

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As the busy Christmas tournament season begins, the boys teams at Etowah and Cherokee will kick it off not far down the road in Marietta. The first Atlanta High School Hoop Festival will take place Saturday at the Cobb County Civic Center and will feature the two teams against some of the area's top programs.

"We are really looking forward to it," tournament director William LoPresti said. "We are real excited about the field of teams that we have, especially showcasing some of the top coaches and players in the area." The tournament, which is sponsored by the **Southeast Basketball Academy**, will feature 10 teams from around metro Atlanta. Some of the premium matchups include Cherokee's game against Region 5AAAAA power McEachern and Etowah's game with Blessed Trinity, which sits as the No. 2 team in Class AAA.

LoPresti said the tournament format helps get players plenty of spotlight and gives coaches at the next level a peek at up and coming talent. "We wanted to try and get 10 teams that were quality teams to come in and, pretty much, play games throughout the day," LoPresti said. "(We wanted to do this) mainly for the benefit of trying to get the kids some exposure and the team some exposure from college coaches."

For Cherokee, which has opened the season at 5-1, the chance to play a talented McEachern team on a four-game winning streak provides excellent competition, and head coach Roger Kvam his squad is looking forward to the experience. "It will be interesting for us to play a team we don't usually play out of region," Kvam said. "We know a little bit about McEachern. They have got a lot of size and they have got a good guard, Trae Golden, that had committed to Ohio State."

Etowah opened its season at 4-4 overall and 2-1 in Region 5AAAAA, but will play no slouch in an 11-0 Blessed Trinity team. "You don't get a chance to play against the (No. 2) team in the state very often," Etowah coach Don Hurlburt said. "Blessed Trinity is a really good team. I have gotten a chance to see them play twice this year and they are probably the smartest team that we will have faced this year."

The other matchups in the tournament will include Morgan County against Osborne, Central Gwinnett against Walton and Shiloh against North Cobb.