



NET WORKING

Beginning tonight, basketball teams enter monthlong proving ground of league play.

BY KENNY CONNOLLY, MATT HANLON
AND BRIAN WHITEHEAD
ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

The high school boys basketball season is in full swing. Nonleague games and holiday tournaments have provided teams the opportunity to play their way into midseason form.

Preseason wins and tournament championships are terrific. But make no mistake, league wins and league championships are what ultimately define a team's season.

El Dorado, Esperanza, Valencia and Yorba Linda soon will begin league play. In just more than a month, league champions will be crowned and post-season tickets punched.

It's a treacherous stretch of basketball, during which there'll be no shortage of narrow victories and losses.

The season's premier sport always promises its share of upheaval. The unpredictability of each outcome is the sport's best draw.

The cities of Yorba Linda and Placentia were fully represented in the playoffs last season, with El Dorado and Esperanza advancing the farthest of the four teams. By the look of things already this winter, there'll be more of the same postseason success in 2014.

EL DORADO HIGH

2013 record: 12-18, 1-11 in Century League
Notable: Beat No. 11 seed Gabrielino High in the opening round of the Division 3AA playoffs; lost to San Marcos High, 49-42, in the second round

Coach: Ryan Mounce

Top players: Riley Kemmer, Sr.; Elijah Mosham, So.; John Yi, Sr.

Century League opener: Tonight at Esperanza

VALENCIA HIGH

2013 record: 9-19, 3-9 in Empire League
Notable: Lost to Villa Park High, 53-44, in the first round of the Division 2AA playoffs

Coach: Dean Yoshimura

Top players: Anderson Saucedo, Sr.; Brennon Palmer, Jr.

Empire League opener: Tuesday at Tustin

YORBA LINDA HIGH

2013 record: 13-15, 3-9 in Empire League
Notable: Lost to Jurupa Valley High, 73-57, in the first round of the Division 3AA playoffs

Coach: Jason Pietsch

Top players: Isaac Douglas, So.; Brad Johnson, Sr.

Empire League opener: Tuesday vs. Western

AZTECS ASSIST ASSET

Inexperienced Esperanza looks to record-breaking senior Troy DeLuca for leadership.

SEE PAGE 9

Senior Troy DeLuca has already broken Esperanza's career mark for assists.

MACKENZIE REISS,
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ESPERANZA BOYS BASKETBALL PREVIEW

Passing the milestone

In the midst of a record-setting season, standout senior assists off the court, too.

BY MATT HANLON
ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Troy DeLuca always seems to be at the helm of his teams, passing.

He's been a point guard for four years at Esperanza High. He also played quarterback for the football team.

"I feel like you have more control over the basketball, coming down the court," said DeLuca, a senior and co-captain of the Aztecs. "And then (playing football) dropping back in the pocket there's six guys coming to kill you, trying to have a mini-car accident with you."

DeLuca's preference isn't hard to understand - his skill at dishing passes on the court has earned him a spot among the greatest playmakers in program history. On Nov. 6, DeLuca quietly broke the Esperanza career assists record in the Aztecs 53-51 loss to Sonora, surpassing the previous record of 301, set in 1991. The milestone is another accolade in DeLuca's career; he broke the single-season assist record of 154 last season.

DeLuca was just 11 assists shy of the career mark entering his senior year. He had no idea, however, until his coach reminded him. He's not even sure of the exact pass that made him the new record holder.

"To be honest I don't really think about it that much," DeLuca said. "Maybe it will dawn on me at the end of the season. I imagine that will be a pretty good feeling."

The humble, 5-foot-10-inch DeLuca has the perfect combination of ball-handling skill and selfless character, his teammates say.

"He's definitely a passer's point guard," said co-captain Jarrett Brodbeck. "He's just a good player. ... He sometimes looks to shoot, but rarely ever. He likes to get the ball to his teammates."

DeLuca made varsity as a freshman. He became a starter as a sophomore, running the offense on the court for a team that won a



MACKENZIE REISS, ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Troy DeLuca, Parker Sims, Tyler Thomas, Jarrett Brodbeck and Jared Brown will form the starting lineup for Esperanza boys basketball. Senior guard DeLuca broke the Esperanza career assists record of 301 on Nov. 6, and also holds the record for assists in a single season.

Century League title. From the beginning, his talent and work ethic set him apart.

"You knew he was destined to have an outstanding career here," coach Mark Hill said. "Because you could tell he was very dedicated to developing himself as a basketball player, the amount of time he put in offseason training and his desire to get better, you see that that's a tangible thing."

On an inexperienced Esperanza team sporting a 5-6 record through Dec. 26, DeLuca's experience and leadership are assets as valuable as his passing ability.

"He's a very intelligent basketball player, he picks things up," Hill said. "He's a true coach on the floor. He'll even see things on the floor and say, 'Coach they're doing this and they're doing that.' ... Just his vast experience of playing so much basketball (helps)."

DeLuca elected to not play football this fall, a decision due largely to the

2013-14 team roster

1	Sammy Jones	G	Jr.
3	Jared Brown	G	Sr.
4	Jarrett Brodbeck*	F	Jr.
5	Marcus Kinan	G	Jr.
11	Jake Johnson*	G	Sr.
15	Daniel Karraa	G	Sr.
21	Troy DeLuca*	G	Sr.
22	Parker Sims	F	Sr.
23	Anthony Suruor	F	Sr.
24	Jacob Serna	G	Jr.
31	Tyler Thomas	C	Jr.
32	Rakahn Haddadin	G	Jr.
33	Grant Poling	G	Jr.
42	Adam Obermeier	F	Sr.
44	David Younger	C	Fr.
45	Kyle Chester	F	Sr.

*Team captain

amount of practice he knew he'd miss for a church missionary trip to Guatemala. Although it gave him more time for basketball, he regretted it initially. That quickly changed while building houses and work-

ing with kids in impoverished villages.

"I'm definitely a lot more thankful for the things I have here and blessings," DeLuca said. "I've always wanted to be a missionary." DeLuca's service did not

2014 schedule

(All games at 7:15 p.m.)
Jan. 2 vs. El Dorado
Jan. 4 vs. Brea Olinda
Jan. 8 at Canyon
Jan. 14 vs. El Modena
Jan. 17 at Villa Park
Jan. 21 at Foothill
Jan. 24 at El Dorado
Jan. 27 at Brea Olinda
Jan. 31 vs. Canyon
Feb. 7 at El Modena
Feb. 11 vs. Villa Park
Feb. 13 vs. Foothill

2013 results

(3-9, T-fifth place)
L, 71-49, at Foothill
W, 66-64, vs. El Dorado
L, 72-39, vs. Brea Olinda
L, 62-61, vs. Canyon
L, 57-48, at El Modena
L, 55-52, vs. Villa Park
L, 64-49, vs. Foothill
L, 75-65, at El Dorado
L, 52-51, at Brea Olinda
W, 69-62, at Canyon
W, 65-58, vs. El Modena
L, 80-58, at Villa Park

go unnoticed. He applied for and won the Presidential Service Award from the National League of Young Men after compiling more than 300 service hours over the past year. He's planning another missionary trip to Africa in July.

DeLuca - who is homeschooled but takes physical education at Esperanza - has hopes of playing for a National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics school after he graduates this spring. The 4.0 student has talked with coaches at small schools in Colorado, Oregon and Washington,

where he hopes to major in intercultural studies.

The long-term goal is to continue missionary work, he says. He aims to be helping others long after his basketball career.

"I just like to ... treat the game with respect and the people who are playing it with respect, while still keeping that competitive edge," he said. "But at the end of the day, remember that there's more to life than basketball."

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"It's important that you have someone that's coachable in that respect and can kind of just get everyone together. ... And, of course, he's got the utmost respect from all the kids. You can just see that they all kind of defer to him."