

Charm City Challenge features BCL's best prospects

Some of the nation's premier high school basketball programs and players will be on display Dec. 2 at UMBC's RAC Arena, site of the inaugural Charm City Challenge.

The four-game mixer features members of the Baltimore Catholic League against counterparts from the Washington Catholic Athletic Conference, which has traditionally had the upper hand over its neighbor to the north in the season-ending Alhambra Catholic Invitational Tournament in Allegany County.

The talent includes two of the best prospects to come through the BCL in recent years.

The 3:45 p.m. game matches John Carroll against St. Mary's Ryken of Leonardtown. Coach John Zito's Patriots are led by Immanuel Quickley, an explosive combo guard who led them to the BCL title as a sophomore and represented the United States at the FIBA under-19 world championships in Cairo, Egypt last summer. He has accepted a scholarship from perennial NCAA power Kentucky.

The 5:30 p.m. game has Mount St. Joseph going up against St. John's of Washington, D.C. Coach Pat Clatchey's Gaels, who swept the BCL and Maryland Interscholastic Athletic Association A Conference titles last year, are anchored by 6-feet-9-inch Jalen Smith, who is headed to Maryland. He'll be reunited in College Park with Darryl Morsell, a current Terp freshman who was his frontcourt running mate the last two seasons.

The program tips off at 2 p.m. with Our Lady of Mount Carmel going up against Bishop McNamara of Forestville. Coach Hakim Hibbert's Cougars finished third in the BCL regular season standings last winter, but defeated St. Maria Goretti in the semifinals to reach the final, where they ran out of gas against Mount St. Joseph.

The day concludes with a 7:15 p.m. scheduled tip-off between St. Frances Academy and Gonzaga, the defending WCAC champion. Coach Nick Myles is counting on three returning starters for the Panthers, whose most recent BCL regular season title came in 2013.

The event is sponsored by Charm City Charities, which was founded by Bill and Beth Spotts, parishioners of Church of the Nativity in Timonium. His coaching background includes the former Towson Catholic High School, and from 1992-98 he ran the Charm City Classic, which brought some of the nation's top players here to challenge Baltimore's best.

The league with the best cumulative record will take home the Savage/Wootten Trophy. It honors the late Jerry Savage, who coached Loyola Blakefield and helped found the BCL in 1971, and Morgan Wootten, who over 45 seasons made DeMatha Catholic in Hyattsville into the nation's most enduring high school program.