

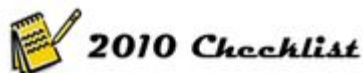
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## NorCal showcases promising talent

 By Glenn Nelson  
 HoopGuriz

MORAGA, Calif. -- Discussions about the fertility of California as a producer of women's college basketball prospects often focuses on the southern portion of the state. You'd think such talk would give the NorCal folk an inferiority complex but, truth be told, the region is cranking out its share of recruits and state high school champions.

To wit, the EBX Fall Showcase featured a great sampling of just the Bay Area, which already is home to national powerhouses Sacred Heart Cathedral (San Francisco) and St. Mary's (Berkeley) and perennial contender Archbishop Mitty (San Jose), just to name a few. Forcefully moving onto the list will be Berkeley High School, powered by two elite 2011 prospects [Brittany Boyd](#) and [Chairese Culberson](#). Lots of young, inside talent was on display, making the area a priority destination for colleges for years to come.

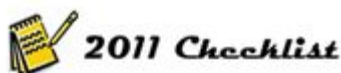


Northern Arizona got an early Halloween treat with a commitment from [Khyra Conerly](#), a 5-foot-10 guard from Hayward, Calif., who looked great here. She is big and fast, and explodes off the floor. Off the bounce, she gets low and attacks her defenders, then can power her way amongst the tall trees. Her hangtime sometimes can be her enemy as she often drifts on her pull-up jumpers. All in all, she has oodles of upside.

Compared to most players these days, [Brandi Henton](#) of Modesto, Calif., hasn't been playing organized basketball very long (five years), but she sure is getting the hang of it awfully quick. And has forged her own style at the point. Many point guards bounce around the court like pinballs, but Henton, at 5-8, has decent size and is smooth, like a dollop of pudding at a midnight refrigerator raid. She shows strong leadership skills and gets good zip on her passes. Henton, who just committed to Long Beach State, isn't a constant initiator of the offense via penetration and her forays into the lane are more strength-based than hatched from quickness or dribble moves. She shows good form from the perimeter, though could stand to relax her shooting hand some. Some may find her better suited to the guard spot, but she probably isn't the stone-cold shooter most teams like at that position.



Long Beach State commit Brandi Henton shows good form from the perimeter.



Size can be a curse for girls because, if they have it early, they are typecast as post players. Alas, many don't keep attaining it, and end up with a game that is not in

complete concert with their size. **Saidah Allen** of Oakland, Calif., has time to avoid the trap. At 6 feet, she has size, though not height, galore. She also has some perimeter skills, and her coaches obviously are pushing those. Moreover, Allen is just coming off a year and a half of inaction due to two right-knee surgeries. Because of that, we think it's worth checking on her progress during the high-school season and the next non-scholastic evaluation periods.

Aptly, Brittany Boyd is from Hercules, Calif., and, as one coach here noted, is a "duh" prospect. As in, "duh, she's one of the best prospects out there." A 5-8 guard, she is smooth and powerful, and lethal from a lot of areas on the floor. Currently No. 50 in the ESPN HoopGurlz Super Sixty for 2011, she also has some advanced tricks in her arsenal, including what the late Pete Newell dubbed the "Kiki" move after Kiki Vandeweghe, the master of the drive-and-step-back jumper. A little less reliance on her right hand, particularly on the dribble, will bring Boyd closer to perfection.

If Boyd is a "duh," then club and high-school teammate Chairese Culberson is a "wow." The Oakland forward is 6 feet of stone pillar. Her picks alone will toss an unfocused defender into another dimension. Because of her power and athleticism Culberson has fits of being unstoppable inside, even against taller opponents. She may seem to some as a little on the short side for the forward position, but she occupies a lot of space inside and can hold it. Moreover, Culberson not only can dish it out, she can take anyone's best shot and still deliver.

The likes of **Nici Gilday** of San Jose, Calif., are easy to overlook in an evaluation environment, but every team needs players like her. At 5-9, she has decent size and a good mid-range game. She's not afraid to challenge bigger defenders off the bounce or even finish with her left hand in traffic. She also can pull off the dribble and is developing a nice tear-drop shot in the lane. Moreover, she has good ball skills, obviously thinking one pass ahead at all times.

On the heels of much talk about 2010 being a down class for posts comes the 2011 class, which has been far more promising. Add [Vanessa Leo](#) of San Jose, Calif., and Archbishop Mitty High School to the growing list of high-major prospects. First of all, she is an agile 6-4; secondly, she plays for coach Sue Phillips, who often seems to operate a farm for inside players in Northern California. Some will argue that Leo has more of a body type for the forward position and she supplements that argument with more-than-competent play from the high post, especially. However you do see a lot of lanky, mobile posts on the next level, though not a herd of those who, as Leo does, offer a solid fundamental base -- finishing left and right, being decisive after the catch -- at such a young age.

In this go-go, instant-analysis era, there sometimes is a tendency to not thoroughly consider how a player might translate from one level or position to another. It takes a little imagination to appreciate the likes of [Erica Payne](#), the Danville, Calif., dervish. Out of necessity, she is minding the low post for her Carondelet High School and East Bay Xplosion teams and, at a wiry 6-2, could appear to be under-tooled for the task. But Payne overcomes any size deficiencies with quickness and an incredible motor, and both qualities will serve her well on the next level at the forward spot. Moreover, she is bent on developing more of a perimeter game, unveiling here a longer-distance shot that still is more of a stationary launch, albeit one with a nice, high release point, a nice attribute for an inside player.



Guard Brittany Boyd has some advanced tricks in her arsenal.



Add Vanessa Leo, of Archbishop Mitty High School, to the growing list of high-major prospects.

## 2012 Checklist

We always swear it's risky for players to assume they have an "on" switch, but then we see kids like [Hannah Huffman](#) of Diablo, Calif., the 5-9 Carondelet teammate of Erica Payne's. It's not that Huffman doesn't play hard all the time, it's just that we've seen her spring to life late in games enough times to think it's not a coincidence. She certainly has the size and strength, as well as skill set, to be a go-to player late in tight games. Huffman will surprise defenses off the dribble, powering her way into the kill zone and displaying good dexterity in getting her shot to the rim. She also owns a lethal companion skill -- a nice pull off the bounce, using her size and consistent release to tremendous advantage.



Hannah Huffman can surprise defenses off the dribble.

## 2013 Checklist

We didn't get a long look at **Breanna Brown** of Oakland, Calif., but we got enough to prompt a double take when looking at her class. Incoming freshman bigs don't get too much better. At 6-2, she is a fluid athlete who gallops up and down the floor and, what's more, looks for the ball with hands raised in transition. We didn't get to see much of her in a halfcourt offensive setting, but her defense -- her blocks as well as challenges of shooters -- was enough to make us want to see more.

## 2014 Checklist

The name will sound familiar, though the game will not. **Mikayla Cowling** of Benicia, Calif., has an older sister, Alex, who was a HoopGurlz Hundred prospect in 2008 and now is at Loyola Marymount. While **Alex Cowling** was a bit of an undersized forward at 5-10 with a high motor, younger sis is all arms and legs at 5-11 and counting. Mikayla Cowling also is extremely quick, which combined with her wingspan makes her an effective defender who closes out on shooters like guys on a supermodel. What's exciting is that she's still a middle-schooler and likely to add more inches and muscle, which in three years ought to make Cowling at least as well-pursued as her sister.

If coach Mark Anger can fend off the vultures, he might have his best East Bay Xplosion team since the Paris twins or Jayne Appel/Jacki Gemelos era. Exhibit B (Cowling being the alphabetical first exhibit) is **Gabby Green**. Unlike most players this age, there is little that's theoretical about the 5-11 phenom from Los Altos, Calif. She already has a game as complete as others years ahead of her. An elastic shooter to beyond the arc, she can go hard off the dribble left and right and finishes naturally with



Gabby Green is an elastic shooter beyond the arc.

either hand. Yes, she still makes "young" mistakes, such as dangerously using spin moves beyond the top of the lane. But, more than anything, what already sets Green apart from her age group is her unmistakable court presence.

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