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Tradition lives on for champs

Salt Lake Tribune

Brett Sommerville

Utah again proved to be a basketball state with large crowds at the always-entertaining state tournaments. Tradition-rich schools Bingham, Highland and Judge Memorial were state-title winners.

TEAM CHAMPIONS - Bingham (5-A), Highland (4-A), Judge Memorial (3-A), South Sevier (2-A), Escalante (1-A)

MVPs - Brett Sommerville, Bingham; Jake Orchard, Highland; Daniel Deane, Judge Memorial; Carson Christensen, South Sevier; Chad Cottam, Escalante

ATHLETE OF THE YEAR - Brett Sommerville, Bingham

LOOKING AHEAD - Riverton boasts the state's top returning player in Morgan Grim and may be able to improve on its second-place finish. Davis, Bingham and Alta will also contend in 5-A. Provo is a heavy favorite in Class 4-A, while Judge will face greater challenges in 3-A next season.

Bingham and Judge Memorial are two of the state's most storied and successful basketball programs. In 2006, both teams picked up elusive championship trophies.

The Miners defeated nearby rival Riverton in a dramatic Class 5-A championship game. Brett Sommerville dribbled the length of the floor and got a helpful screen from best friend Sloan Baker before hitting a game-winning eight-foot basket as time expired. The win gave Bingham its first state boys' basketball title in 16 years.

The Bulldogs were ranked No. 1 in 3-A from the opening tip until they beat reigning champion Tooele 40-29 in the title game. Judge's Daniel Deane was the team's focal point, but the program's first state title in 26 years wouldn't have been possible without the contributions of Jaxon Myaer, Marcus Walisky, Andrew Maertens and Luke Hristou.

Highland had perhaps the deepest team in the state and rolled to a 24-1 record. The Rams were buoyed by the additions of the Brown brothers, Les and Braden, and blew out most of their opponents. Jake Orchard was the 4-A MVP, and Steve Panos had a breakout season. Both players signed with Weber State.

South Sevier wasn't the deepest team in the state, but it found what worked for the team. The Rams beat teams with their trapping defense and used a balanced scoring attack. South Sevier narrowly edged Kanab in the 2-A semifinals and Juab in the championship game.

Escalante's solid senior class was too much for the rest of 1-A. The Moquis, led by 1-A MVP Chad Cottam, won

each of their state tournament games by double digits. Escalante won its final 20 games and just three of those victories were by fewer than 10 points.

The season wasn't just about the teams that won state titles. Riverton qualified for its first championship game in the school's seven-year history. Hillcrest's program made great strides, as it had a 19-game winning streak and qualified for the state semifinals for the first time since the 1980s.

The season also had its low moments. Former Tooele coach Gary Alverson died after a tough battle with lung cancer. Taylorsville coach John Bowman learned he had brain tumors and a lung tumor.