Jeremy Katz has seen it all happen. When the senior forward started at University School, it was a casual program that played in the less competitive fall season. But three years ago, the Suns brought in coach Salomon Kidane, a former player for the Swedish National Team, and they’ve since become one of the state’s best programs. “The whole mentality changed,” says Katz, whose brother Oliver, a junior, is another standout on the team. “We started getting more serious.” While Katz remains one of the area’s best strikers, he now has a ton of talent around him. Juniors Conner and Calvin Rezende are natives of Brazil who combined for 44 goals and 38 assists last season. Kewsi Alleyne is one of the state’s best in the back, while fellow senior defender William Cannon has committed to play for San Diego State next year. Eric Reyes, a UC Santa Barbara commit who could be the best keeper in the state. And those are just the big names. The majority of starters returned this season for a team that lost only one game before falling to Pine Crest, 1-0, in the regional quarterfinal last year. But hey, that’s soccer, as Kidane points out. “We’re just trying to take it one game at a time,” the coach says. “The ball is round. It can bounce anywhere.” That’s especially true in Class 3A, which last year featured a veritable “group of death” in World Cup parlance: Gulliver Prep, North Broward Prep, Pine Crest, Plantation American Heritage and defending champ Belen. Still, the Suns plan to win. “Because of all the talent, the expectations are very high,” says Katz. He should know.

Girls’ Basketball • Trinity Christian
After falling to crosstown rival Lake Worth Christian in the regional semifinals last year, Trinity Christian has emerged as the early favorite for the Class 1A crown this season. The Warriors are led by captains Jamiesha Faulkner, a Southern Miss recruit who is rated the nation’s No. 99 senior in the ESPNU HoopGurlz 100, and Danielle McCray, a junior forward who averaged 23 points, nine rebounds and nearly four blocks per game last season. Junior forward Crystal Connors put up 14 points and eight rebounds per game last year while freshman combo guard Alicia McCray averaged 10 points.

Boys’ Golf • Benjamin
The Benjamin School’s boys’ golf team was close last fall, finishing second to Circle Christian at the Class 1A state tournament. This year there was no one in the way, as the Buccaneers took home the team title by nine strokes in early November. Juniors Matt and Alec Ceravolo finished second and fourth, respectively, to pace the team. Matt had a two-round total of 140, or 4-under par, while Alec shot a 142. Freshmen Ryan Johns (149) and Clancy Waugh (151) and eighth-grader Peter Mathison (154) all played beyond their years.

Girls’ Soccer • St. Thomas Aquinas
Last year’s double-overtime loss to Satellite in the regional finals still stings, and the Raiders are looking to set things right. Led by Ashley Oswald, a junior midfielder and one of the top playmakers in the state, and Amanda Pivacco, a Florida-bound defender, Aquinas certainly has the talent to make a deep run. Throw in the scoring ability of junior midfielders Ana Cufia and Brittany McDowell and junior forward Julie Schumacher, and the Raiders have a potent lineup from top to bottom. Senior Jennifer Grimes and junior Julia Kantor should again split most of the time in net.

breakout teams
BOYS’ BASKETBALL – DR. KROP
Junior Angel Rodriguez runs the show for a team that’s always in the thick of things.

GIRLS’ SOCCER – BOCA RATON
Georgia-bound senior Caillin Woody leads a team that advanced to the regional finals in 2008-09.

WRESTLING – COLUMBUS
Junior Mark Guluean and senior Matthew Noffo look to improve on last year’s fifth-place finish.

GIRLS’ BASKETBALL – GULLIVER PREP
Alyssa Baron and Co. dropped just two games last year before bowing out to eventual champ Parkway.