



SPORTS

LAMORINDA'S LOCAL SPORTS NEWS

DFAL Basketball Moves Towards NCS Playoffs

By Robin Schoettler Fox



Photo Doug Kohen

early February losses to Campolindo (71-61) and Acalanes (52-49) slowed Miramonte's DFAL momentum, and energized the competition. The Lady Mats enter the last week of regulation play at 8-3, behind Dublin (9-1), whose only league loss was to the Mats, 62-61, on February 6.

With a strong finish, on paper it looks like either Campolindo (7-3) or Acalanes (6-4) could potentially catch up as well. But the Lady Matadors have already played 11 games, get that Tuesday bye, and now face only Alhambra (1-9 DFAL). Dublin, on the other hand, starts the week hosting Acalanes, a team they beat the first round (43-33) but which is on a four game winning streak. Then Friday, Dublin faces Las Lomas (1-9 DFAL).

The first time the Lady Cougars battled Alhambra, it was a blow-out, 76-46. Even if Campo can repeat the win on Tuesday they still have to face the Dons at the end of the week. Last time, the Cougars beat Acalanes, 56-42. But now there's that Acalanes winning streak and the emotions this local match-up inspires. And an Acalanes venue. Game time is 7pm.

After Friday, varsity basketball moves to NCS playoffs. Brackets should post on cifncs.org on Sunday, February 22. First round games begin Tuesday, February 24.

The DFAL boys' basketball league championship title already belongs to Miramonte, who'll be guaranteed a Division III NCS playoff berth and likely initial home court advantage. Undefeated (11-0) thus in the DFAL, the Mats have a Tuesday bye and then one last regular season game – at Alhambra on Friday.

The real battle among boys' varsity teams is being waged among the runners up, where NCS playoff berths are less assured.

Campolindo, last year's NCS Division III champs, faces Alhambra first this week, a team the Cougars beat 76-46 in the first half of DFAL play. Results of the Feb 17 game aren't available at press time but one thing is clear: The Cougars enter these final regulation games strong and confident, coming off an amazing quadruple (yes – 4) overtime 90-87 win against Dublin.

Meanwhile, Acalanes' first game this week is against Dublin, a team the Dons beat 65-61, on the Don's home court. But after losing such a tough battle to Campo, Dublin is undoubtedly hungry for a win. And it's the Dons' turn to drive down the 680.

However the week begins, everyone knows how it ends for these cross-town rivals – Campolindo and Acalanes face each other on Friday, always a hard-to-predict emotional event that can easily produce sell-out local crowds. In January, Campo beat Acalanes, a close 52-49, in the Cougar gym. Now the Dons' host

the show. Game time? 5:30 p.m.

At midseason, the girls' DFAL basketball story had a similar ring – Miramonte registered an impressive 5-1 DFAL record, seemingly on tract for another run at the NCS championship. Back to back



Lauren Kimble

Photo Jordan Fong

Soccer Moves to NCS Playoffs



Acalanes' Ashely Borrelli advances the ball up field as Campo's midfielder, Jennifer Whitehouse, defends during Friday's stormy-night Campo win, 1-0

Photo Jamie Fox

2009 NCS 2A playoff brackets went on-line on Sunday. All three Lamorinda varsity high school girls' teams made the 12-team playoff. Acalanes (13-6-4, seeded 7th) begins play on Wednesday, February 18th, with a home game against Piedmont (15-4-2), game time 7pm. Miramonte (11-0-1, seeded 2nd) and Campolindo (12-5-2, seeded 4th) both

earned first round byes and will play 7pm home games on Saturday, February 21. Miramonte will play the winner of the Acalanes-Piedmont game. Campolindo plays the winner of a Berean Christian and Redwood Christian match-up.

On the boys side, Campolindo (9-7-3, seeded 12th) travels to Albany (17-3-3) for its February 18, first-round, 5pm

game. The Acalanes boys' varsity soccer team, seeded 2nd, earned a first round bye and plays at home on Saturday, February 21, facing the winner of a Hayward-St. Mary's High contest. The Miramonte boys' soccer team did not make playoffs.

Go to www.cifncs.org, for updated bracket results throughout the playoff.

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Kellen Ito – Campo's New Varsity Blocking Force

By Conrad Bassett



Kellen Ito in action on January 30

Photo Doug Kohen

It feels a little like Kellen Ito, Campolindo's 6'5" starting center, came out of nowhere. Currently a junior, Ito didn't play Cougar basketball his freshman year. And he wasn't one of the four sophomores who played varsity last year, or even the fifth sophomore who moved up from junior varsity for last year's NCS playoffs.

Yet Ito leads the Cougars in several statistical categories including rebounds and blocks as well as having the second highest average per game. His 63 blocked shots (to-date) is one of the highest in the Bay Area and one of the reasons Campolindo's competitors sometimes have second thoughts about taking the ball inside.

So how did Kellen go from off the court to center court? He didn't. He's been honing basketball skills by playing on Asian basketball league courts, where his long-time team, the East Bay Rising Suns, competes. Others Kellen has competed with on the East Bay Rising Suns are starters at high schools like Albany and Head-Royce.

The Rising Suns are a newer

generation of the same teams Kellen's father, Rick Ito, once played on. Teams that taught the elder Ito basketball fundamentals that took him from Berkeley high school to a spot on the Cal State – Hayward (now Cal State – East Bay) basketball team, and such follow-on opportunities as overseas and San Francisco Pro-Am league play. Even now, Rick Ito plays in an adult off-shoot of the Rising Suns while also coaching and serving as the Rising Suns' current president.

Asian leagues have been around for decades, some as early as the 1930s, says Rick Ito. They're leagues known for grade-based play even through high school, and a focus on fundamentals. Many comprise teams that compete among local Asian churches, though there are also all-star travel leagues and tournaments.

One goal of Asian leagues, says Rick Ito, is to help prepare Asian players for high school ball, noting that he believes that 95% of the Asian players on current varsity teams played in the Asian leagues at some point. It's a statis-

tic hard to verify but there's an impressive list of names and schools on www.risingsuns.net. Teaching basketball fundamentals, says Ito, is only one of the reasons Asian leagues exist. "The real focus is building cultural community, having fun together," says Rick Ito. Rick Ito is just half of Kellen's genetic predisposition to basketball. There's also Kathy Halpin Ito, Kellen's mother, a top basketball player at both Livermore High School and at Cal State Hayward, who became an All-American in a second sport (track) at CSUH.

Transitioning to varsity, says Kellen, has been a lesson in responsibility.

"The biggest change... is how hard I have to work because much more is expected at this level by the coaches, the fans, and my teammates," says Kellen.

Campo head coach Matt Watson says he's been pleased with Kellen's play this year, noting that Kellen "is deceptively quick--he does not look that quick but can beat you to the basket."

Against Maria Carillo High early in the season, Kellen had 22 points, nine rebounds and three blocks and held his own against the Pumas' 6'7" Justin Herold who is averaging 22 points and 15 rebounds per game. Against Las Lomas, Kellen dropped in 17 points on 8 of 9 shooting, had nine rebounds and sent five Knight shots back to where they started.

In the 90-87 four-overtime win over Dublin on February 12, Kellen corralled 14 rebounds, including nine offensive ones that he passed back out to other Cougars. He held the Dublin center, who eventually fouled out, to two points.

"Kellen is a double-double type of player which is very difficult for a first year varsity player," says Watson.

As for waiting to join Campo's basketball program until his sophomore year, Kellen said he'd been playing year-round basketball for nearly seven years at that point, and had begun to burn out. The time off reignited his interest in the sport. Says Kellen, "It allowed me to put (things) in perspective and realize how much I love basketball."

Correction:



Photo Jordan Fong

In our February 4 story Matadors Dismantle Knights in Walnut Creek, we incorrectly identified Davis Louie as a Las Lomas player and team captain. Louie, seen in this picture, plays for Miramonte.