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Lamorinda Divers Prove Sportsmanship and Competitiveness Can Blend

By Lucy Amaral





Campolindo freshman Maren Kjell doing a Front Somersault One Twist Photo Doug Kohen

On the surface, it doesn't seem to make sense. Divers from Lamorinda-area high schools who've spent years competing against each other, now find themselves practicing nearly every day together, helping each other get better, supporting each other through the rough patches, even teaching one another new dives. How can this work?

Apparently very well, thank you. Enter CLAM, an acronym for Campolindo, Las Lomas, Acalanes and Miramonte. A collaborative effort created in 2007 by Acalanes High School District and its athletic directors, CLAM was formed as a way to keep the dive program alive after each high school struggled to maintain individual dive coaches.

This season, Marie Estorge has been named as umbrella coach, taking over from the founding coach, Erich Tupper. Estorge began her diving career at Sherman Swim School in Lafayette at age 36 in the master diver division and has performed in numerous meets including national and international competitions. "The existing coach was leaving so I stepped in because I love diving and I wanted to make sure the local high school students have as much opportunity as I could contribute."

Currently, there are 13 divers from Campolindo, six from Acalanes, three from Miramonte and, for this year, one from College Park in Pleasant Hill. The program is open to Las Lomas, but no divers have signed on.

Estorge is quick to state that the divers are highly competitive, but have found a way to blend competitiveness and sportsmanship throughout the program. "The competition between divers is not an issue, it actually works to the student's advantage," she said. "Practicing together helps motivate the students. The other divers help me coach and demonstrate so students from all levels can improve."

The concept of practicing as one unit, then competing against each other may sound at odds with logic, but for these divers, it's a natural fit. "When I am practicing with the other divers, we help each other out," Campolindo Junior Lindsey Mascheroni said. "When you are in the competition, you are focused on you. You encourage (your practice mates), but during the meets, you concentrate on you (and your school)."

Using a combination of verbal coaching, springboard practice, and intuitive ability, these divers improve quickly. Mascheroni, for example, is a first year diver with CLAM starting in the Future Champion division, but has moved up quickly and is now diving Varsity. "She is the diver who will watch someone dive and will execute the dive with only verbal coaching," said Estorge.

A former swimmer with Springbrook, Acalanes Freshman Westin Mirner joined the dive team because "it looked fun." Mirner said that it takes only one or two

practices to learn new dives and having other divers there helps him improve. "You move ahead pretty quickly," he said. "You start out simple, then you just go for it." In his first dive competition, Mirner took first place in the Future Champion division.

Estorge emphasized that those who might be interested in to trying diving don't need to worry about having specific dive experience. "It's a great 'cross-over' sport," she said. As an example, Estorge noted that the tumbling and twisting moves of gymnastics can mirror dive moves and that those with ballet experience could get some great height on the board. "Wrestlers would also make good divers," she added. "As athletes they have good balance and an awareness of their body," which are key assets in diving.

Randall Takahashi, athletic director for Acalanes High School, says he is elated with Estorge and the program. "And, I have heard similar accolades from the other athletic directors," he said. "Marie provides the divers with solid instruction, and has improved the program by creating additional competition with (other schools like) De La Salle, Carondelet, Berkeley and Deer Valley."

Estorge said she hopes the program will continue to grow and evolve, such as adding coaches and developing individualized programs within the CLAM system to maximize each diver's competitive ability - in a sportsman-like manner, of course.





Remy Miller, a Miramonte junior, doing a Front Somersault Pike Photo Doug Kohen

CLAM DFAL Diving

Meet Results -- May 9, 2009

Varsity Girls

- 1st -- Maren Kjell, Campo (340 points)
- 2nd -- Eliza Galligan, Campo (324.4)
- 3rd -- Heather Finertie, Miramonte (306.4)
- 4th -- Alexis Cravero, Campo (299.35)
- 5th -- Lindsey Mascheroni, Campo (273.35)
- 6th -- Sophie Smith Campo (253.9)
- 7th -- Remy Miller, Miramonte (243.9)

Varsity Boys

- 1st -- Will Griffiths, College Park (293.4 points)

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