

Published November 21st, 2012

Girls Basketball Preps for Preseason

By Conrad Bassett



Miramonte

The upcoming girls' basketball season in Lamorinda promises to be every bit as exciting as last year as each of the three teams returns a solid nucleus of players and the addition of new talent.

A year ago the Miramonte Matadors won every game they played in pre-season and the Diablo-Foothill Athletic League on their way to a berth in the Northern California championship game in Sacramento and a 31-2 overall record.

Head coach Kelly Sopak recognizes the pressure to repeat. "We have a lot to prove again this year. We will do so in the same fashion as last year," he explained. "We are going to run, shoot and press. We are deeper than last year and as a team we are much quicker."

With a target on their backs, the Mats return some key players from last season. Senior point guard Carly Gill will lead the speedy Mats and will be accompanied by fellow all-leaguers, juniors Breanna Alford and Megan Reid.

Sopak is challenging the team in several high-caliber tournaments. In addition to taking on last year's Division II state champion Archbishop Mitty, they will play in Phoenix at the Nike Tournament. They host their own Lady Mats Tipoff Classic and will play in the top-rated Diamond Division of the West Coast Jamboree.

The team looks to fill the voids left by high-scoring Janine Loutzenhiser, who is playing at Rider University, and Devon McDonald, who is running track at Bucknell.

The program has also lost assistant Drew McDonald, who has stepped over to head the boys' program at Miramonte.

Still, Sopak is confident in the talent of his team. "In my 10 years of coaching high school basketball in the area I have never seen as much talent at tryouts as we have this year," he said.

Over in Lafayette, head coach Chris Russell returns for his second season at Acalanes. He will be looking to improve on last year's team that went on to the NCS tournament and won 15 games.

He will be looking for players to step up to replace several key graduates, including Sophie Taylor, who is now playing at Loyola-Marymount University.

"Senior Grace Francis impressed me last year in our loss to Bishop O' Dowd in the NCS semi-final, and has really worked over the summer and fall, and I am expecting her to have a bigger role," Russell said.

Russell also returns three senior leaders in Marie Paladino, Jamie Jacobs, and Molly Martin.

"This year's team is better as a team, so I'm hoping when we need a big shot, rebound, or play, I can count on any one of the five girls who may be on the court at any given time," added Russell.

The team will stay in northern California for all of their tournaments- including trips to Ukiah, Brentwood and local West Coast Jamboree.

Campolindo's head coach, Elgin Leslie, also returns for his second season as varsity coach. The Cougars return senior Laura Hickey and junior Ashley Ewing, who both started every game last year and Leslie is happy to have them back.

"They bring experience and leadership to our team, and both present match-up problems for other teams because of their ability to play multiple positions," he explained.

Senior Kelsey Wixsom and junior Sierra Regan are also returning. "[They] will be looking to step in and contribute more than last year," said Leslie.

The Lady Cougars will be challenged in their pre-season. They will play powerhouses, including Piedmont, McClymond's and Castro Valley. They will participate in tournaments at Northgate and the West Coast Jamboree.

The balance of the competition will remain strong in the DFAL. Dougherty Valley went 21-11 last year with the only blemishes in league coming from two- and three-point losses against Miramonte.

"Dougherty will be tough again. Doug Vanderhorst is a great coach and will have the Wildcats ready. Dublin returns everyone so they might be the favorite," said Sopak.

Regular season play begins in January, but in the meantime, Lamorinda teams will spend preseason preparing for DFAL play.



Acalanes Photos Ohlen Alexander



Campolindo

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