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Dons Edge Mats; Cougars Seek Four-peat

By Hunter Hewitt



Senior pitcher Andrew Merken pitched five scoreless innings against Miramonte. Photo Ohlen Alexander

With five games remaining, the Matadors (7-11, 2-7 DFAL) now find themselves in a desperate situation - they must win the rest of their games in order to make the NCS Division III playoffs.

"We just have to take it one game at a time," Dell'Aquila said. "If we don't win out, it will be the first time in 14 years that we haven't made the playoffs."

While Miramonte risks ending its streak of consecutive playoff appearances, Campolindo is working on two impressive streaks of its own.

After a shaky start to the season, the Cougars have regrouped and won seven straight games. Head coach Max Luckhurst hopes to keep the momentum going into playoffs, where his team will attempt to win its fourth straight NCS title.

The team's experience is sure to help - fourth-year varsity players Trent Shelton, Brett Stephens and Robbie Tenerowicz are looking to add another championship to their already impressive resume.

"Those guys have done nothing but win," Luckhurst said of the trio of seniors. "Now, the younger guys who have looked up to them have an opportunity to help them win another."

As of last Thursday, Campolindo (13-6-1, 7-1) held the advantage over the Dons (15-6, 6-3) in the DFAL standings, but the Cougars are in pursuit of bigger goals.

"Every year our goal is to win NCS," Luckhurst said. "We are in a unique situation to win our fourth in a row, and we are trying to keep the streak going."

Although Campolindo and Acalanes are battling for the DFAL title, the two teams will not meet in the postseason. The Cougars compete in the NCS Division II playoffs, while the Dons are in Division III.

Despite the different divisions, the goals are identical.

"It's always the goal here to win NCS," said Acalanes head coach Justin Santich-Hughes, whose team also won the NCS Division III crown last season. "We are battle-tested, not only from past seasons, but this year as well. We want to keep winning and go into the postseason playing well and feeling good about ourselves."

The NCS playoffs are set to begin on May 21.

With six new starters and a schedule filled with tough opponents, the Acalanes baseball team had several questions about their potential for success entering the 2013 season.

Fast-forward two months, and those questions are going, going, gone.

Behind a strong performance on the mound from senior pitcher Andrew Merken, the Dons defeated Miramonte last Thursday, 6-0. Merken pitched five scoreless innings and benefited from a balanced offensive attack highlighted by a four-run first inning.

"I was feeling good and all my pitches were working," Merken said. "We also hit really well and played great defense, so it was a team effort."

The run-filled first inning for Acalanes was a familiar sight for the Matadors, as they have had reoccurring problems with scoring outbursts all season.

"That has been something that has followed us all year long," Miramonte head coach Vince Dell'Aquila said. "We are playing some really good teams, and we haven't been able to avoid the big inning. You can't afford to do that in this league."

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