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As Weather Cools, High School Water Polo Heats Up

By Clare Varellas



Miramonte scored four goals in the fourth quarter, but it wasn't enough against Campo's defense
Photos Gint Federas

Over the past month, the high school water polo teams have faced off with a number of rivals in-and-out of the DFAL to prepare for the season, and Oct. 2 marked the first game of intra-DFAL play to determine this year's league rankings.

Girls:

Campolindo once again proved to be the team to beat. Campo has won two titles in the last three years, and with a solid win against Miramonte in the DFAL opener, the team is poised for another run.

The Cougars defeated Miramonte 10-8, but the Mats put up a tough fight. At the start of the fourth quarter, Campo had a 9-4 lead. Miramonte was able to close the gap through fast, powerful offensive plays and strong defense, but it wasn't enough to overcome the early deficit.

"We came out with the right mindset and the right intensity level in the first half of the game," said Campo's head coach Kim Everist. "Miramonte did a good job of adjusting their defense, and we didn't really adjust our defense."

Despite the loss, Miramonte's head coach Trevor Rose welcomed the result after losing to Campolindo 9-3 earlier this season.

"We've been a young team for a few years, and we've had some maturity issues in years past," said Rose. "I think this year we are gelling as a team more. That game against Campolindo was pretty good, not the best effort we could have had, but better than our first game against them."

Meanwhile, Acalanes continues to improve. With 7-5 record, the Dons work on keeping their efforts consistent throughout games, an ability head coach Misha Buchel said still needs to be developed.

"We've definitely had our off-days, but I think overall we are progressing really well and by the end of the season we will be really good," said senior and team captain Chase Lanier.

Boys:

Miramonte continues to stand out, defeating

Campo 11-9 on Oct 2. The Mats have won eight out of the last ten NCS championships, and despite losing some All-American players last year, they hope to build on the tradition.

"The team has done a really nice job. We have a lot of seniors that do a really great job of leading the team," said Miramonte's head coach James Lathrop.

The Campolindo boys are hoping to challenge Miramonte in the title chase this year; they look ready for the task, despite the loss.

The score was tied for most of the game, including a 9-all score heading into the fourth quarter. Miramonte scored the final two goals to take the game. Nevertheless, Campo's head coach Miles Price has confidence in his team's ability.

"The team has done great thus far," said Price. "We're winning games by 7 or 8 goals that would have been close in the past. We're a lot more dominant than ever before. I definitely believe we can win an NCS Championship."

Acalanes has had a rough start with a 3-7 record. After losing some notable seniors from last year, the team has been working on gaining more experience.

"We're just slowly joining together," said Acalanes' head coach Clarke Tamariki. "We expected to be a little further along the learning curve, but we will get it together."

On October 9, Acalanes will travel to take on Miramonte.



Chase Lanier



Clay Smudsky (22) and Scott Zurnacian (2)

Campolindo Sweeps Competition

By Brad Kvederis



Kelly Wirth had 12 kills in the win.

Photos Gint Federas

Campolindo continued its unbeaten start to the DFAL girls' volleyball season, riding solid defense and a superb individual performance to a straight-set victory over Acalanes in DFAL play. Team captain Kelley Wirth led the Cougars to a 25-18, 25-20, 25-22 win over the Dons (4-6, 2-1 DFAL) on Oct. 3.

Wirth, who also started for last year's Division III state runner-up Campo squad, recorded 12 kills and factored heavily in the Cougars' big runs.

Head coach John Vuong said the Cougars' hustle on the defensive end deserved a lot of the credit for his team's success.

"I think the defense - those broken plays, scrappy plays, second chances and third chances - those are the plays that really picked up the intensity and the momentum of the team," Vuong said.

Natalie Meniktas, the Cougars' lone returning senior, robbed the Dons with several tough saves, while sophomore Emma Johnson contributed a number of big plays at the net, including three kills during the late Campo surge that put away the final set.

The Dons proved early on that they were not intimidated by their local rivals, grabbing an 11-10 lead in the first set before Campo ran off five straight points with Wirth serving.

Again, the Dons challenged the Cougars in a close second set behind strong play from Rachel Cox (10 kills) and Molly Dalziel, who recorded nine kills including half a dozen highlight-reel spikes.

Despite the consecutive losses, Acalanes jumped out to a 5-0 lead in the final set. But Campo took the next six points and never trailed again.

Dons coach Todd Travis felt that even in defeat, his team showed it was on the right track.

"We've got a young team, we lost 7 seniors, so a lot of those younger girls are still getting out there, still getting the feel of the game," Travis said. "But we played well. A couple missed serves hurt us, but I think we hit at a really high clip and we were able to compete with them step for step."

Campolindo (10-5, 4-0 DFAL) has already

suffered as many losses as it did all of last season, thanks to a brutal preseason schedule that included a tournament in which the Cougars faced four other state finalists in a single day.

"It was hard in the beginning because we lost two of our key players, but I think that's our job," Wirth said. "As people leave, we have to step up, and everybody steps up at one point in the season to make those plays."

Coach Vuong says his team came away with valuable experience that helped them on Thursday.

"That's the idea to help these girls see the fast-paced game," Vuong said. "That's what really helps when it comes to those tight game situations."

Coach Travis also put the Dons through a grueling preseason schedule -- "We basically played all Division I schools," he said -- and thinks that despite suffering its first conference loss, Acalanes is in a good position and hopeful to make a return to the postseason this year.

"This gave us a good chance to stack up against the best," he said. "So I do think this was good practice for us, and we'll be ready next time around."

In other local action, Miramonte bounced back from Tuesday's straight-set loss at Las Lomas -- in which all three games were close (20-25, 23-25, 22-25) -- with a decisive home victory over Alhambra on Thursday. The Mators (4-5, 2-1 DFAL) never trailed on their way to winning 25-8, 25-21, 25-16. Team captain Maddie Goodreault led the way with six kills, 10 digs and three blocks, while setter Emily Fabian contributed 19 assists to go along with eight digs and three aces.

"(Tuesday's match) was a hard-fought match that came down to errors on our side of the net, and Las Lomas took advantage," Mats coach Dave Masdeo said. "The girls bounced back immediately; once they saw their stats, they worked really hard on Wednesday. We got those mistakes ironed out."

Upcoming rivalry match-ups:

Miramonte is at Acalanes on Oct. 9

Campolindo is at Miramonte on Oct. 15



Emma Johnson's timely hits helped the Cougars seal the win.



Rachel Cox had 10 kills in the loss.



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