

Campo Volleyball Season Ends in NorCal Tournament

By Brad Kvederis



Natalie Meniktas

Photos Gint Federas

A season that began with high hopes and a lot of question marks came to a bitter-sweet end for Campolindo on Nov. 26, as the Cougars bowed out of the CIF girls' volleyball state championships with a 3-1 opening-round loss at Christian Brothers Sacramento. Campolindo finished the season 25-10, and 12-0 in the DFAL.

After narrowly winning the first set, Campo reached game point in the second – but the host Falcons fought back, scoring four straight points to win in overtime and tied the match at 1-1. Christian Brothers then won the third set handily and cruised the rest of the way to win 23-25, 26-24, 25-11, 25-21.

The missed opportunity to go up 2-0 was deflating for Campo, according to head coach John Vuong, who cited it as the turning point of the match.

"I think the big back-breaker was in the second set, when we were up 24-22 and couldn't

close out. It took a lot out of our younger players... [they weren't] able to recover," Vuong said. "Christian Brothers has great outside hitters, but they were playing better defense than us that night."

Tuesday's season finale came on the heels of a heartbreaking five-set defeat at the hands of Bishop O'Dowd High in the North Coast Section championship match the previous weekend. The Cougars overcame a 2-0 deficit in that contest – and thought they had won when an O'Dowd player's spike attempt went out long on match point. But while the players were celebrating, the officials reversed the call after a lengthy delay and ordered the teams back on to the court; O'Dowd won the next two points to clinch the title. (For more about that game, see our online article posted Nov. 24, www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue0719/Cougars-Lose-Heartbreaker-in-NCS-finals.html.)

Despite the back-to-back tough losses to end the year, Vuong said his team still considers the season a success. While they couldn't duplicate last season's run all the way to the state championship game, they swept their conference schedule and came a fingertip away from repeating as section champions – no mean feat for a team that was supposed to be having a down year.

"With eight seniors graduated last year, many thought we were rebuilding. But going 12-0 in league and (being) a section finalist were great accomplishments," Vuong said. "Our players responded to their fullest and competed every night, and challenged each other in practices. That is all we could ask for."

Campolindo looks to be well-positioned for next season, with libero Natalie Meniktas the team's lone graduating senior. Team MVP Kelley Wirth will return for her senior season, and key front-line players Kirsten Sibley and Emma Johnson will be juniors.

"We will expect a bigger season next year," Vuong said. "A lot of things could happen with one year of club volleyball. And the players will be more mature. Our goal is to play in December, and it doesn't change no matter who we have."



Kelley Wirth



Emma Johnson and Kirsten Sibley celebrate after scoring a point

Waiting for the Missing Piece

Basketball teams prep for preseason without key football players

By Conrad Bassett



Acalanes looks to rebuild after a tough year.

Photos Gint Federas

The Lamorinda stronghold on the Diablo Foothill Athletic League boys' basketball title was wrestled away last year by Dublin High School. The three local teams would like nothing better than to bring the banner back to Lamorinda this year.

Last year's DFAL runner-up, **Campolindo** finished at 9-3 in league and 22-9 overall. The Cougars had an outstanding post-season run that took them to the NorCal Division III championship game, where they were edged out 55-52 by Sacred Heart Cathedral (San Francisco).

Head coach Matt Watson returns for his sixth year and looks forward to a strong season. "Getting so close to playing for a state title has pushed these kids to work even harder and to make another title run," said Watson.

However, the Cougars will be off to a slow start because several key contributors to the basketball team are also on the football team, whose playoff run kept them on the field and away from the court.

The basketball team was down four players to football. Two of last year's starters, seniors Andrew Zolintakis and Justin Dunn, are football starters, and senior Isaac Christian and sophomore Sterling Strother are also on the team.

In the meantime, the team was preparing as best as it could. Starting guard Matt O'Reilly returns for his junior season along with seniors Walter Brennan, Luke Hoyle, Ryan Smith, Andrew Cassidy and junior Chris Hansen. Each player will be asked to fill the roles left by graduated seniors Tyler Garrison, Jack Evans, John Schmitz and Matt McCue.

"We have some size, speed and shooters and we should be very competitive on a nightly basis," said Watson.

The Cougars have a highly competitive pre-league schedule, including games against perennial powerhouses Burlingame and St. Mary's Stockton and a rematch against Sacred Heart Cathedral.

Over in Orinda, Drew McDonald is back for his second season as head coach at **Miramonte**. Last year, the Matadors went 17-11 overall and 8-4 in the DFAL.

McDonald's first order of business is replacing six graduated seniors, including three-time all-DFAL player Kiran Shastri, who is currently averaging 12 points per game as a freshman at Chaminade University in Hawaii.

"We're looking for senior Ray Clark, jun-

iors Moneer Mujaddidi and Jake Linares, who contributed off the bench last year, to step up and play bigger roles," McDonald said. "We're expecting sophomore Will Hicks to help us this year after playing JVs last year."

The Mats also return all-DFAL guard senior Joey Goodreault and junior guard Jackson Wegener.

McDonald faces the same challenges as Watson, as he also starts the season without his dual-sport athletes. There are as many as 11 varsity and junior varsity players still playing football, including senior Drew Anderson.

As always, the Mats will tackle an aggressive pre-season schedule including the prestigious Mission Prep Christmas Classic in San Luis Obispo, a tournament that traditionally has some of the top teams.

This season, **Acalanes** basketball will start a new era under first-year head coach Bill Powers, who comes to the Dons after several successful years at Monte Vista in Danville and as an assistant at the junior college level.

Powers takes over a team that struggled at times. The Dons finished 8-18 overall and went 3-9 in the DFAL.

The Dons will build around a core of seniors. "The group of seniors is amongst the most special groups I have seen," said Powers. "They inspire me."

Seniors who will be important for the Dons' success are Zack Kisner and Matt Thomas, whose three-point shooting will stretch opposing defenses. Senior Ross Teichman will help as well. "[He] has a strong inside-outside game," said Powers.

Inside, the Dons return senior Buster Souza who was a force a year ago in scoring, rebounding, and shot blocking.

The Dons will also face a transition as football players switch gears. Seniors Brett Merrill and Kyle Kinnear just finished football and "are banged up" but should be ready to contribute quickly.

The point guard position will be manned by two new varsity players, junior Joey Hewitt and sophomore Andrew McKendell.

Powers will also be challenging his team early with away games at Sir Francis Drake and St. Mary's Stockton.

All three teams will be on the road for pre-season. DFAL regular season action begins on Jan. 7.



Miramonte is still down players from the football team.



Campolindo is ready to build on last year's success.