

LAMORINDA SPORTS

Baseball Begins in Lamorinda

Dons, Cougars face off on Thursday

By Scott Wu

The high school baseball season is under way in Lamorinda and each team is vying for an NCS title. DFAL league play began on March 17. Division rivals Campolindo (5-2 overall) and Acalanes (7-2 overall) will face off in their first DFAL game of the season on Thursday, March 27.

Last year Campolindo took the DFAL title and the Division II NCS title. Acalanes finished second behind Campolindo and went on to win the Division III NCS title. Miramonte had a rebuilding year, but the Mats (4-3 overall) are now looking to get back to the top of the DFAL behind their senior leadership.

This year the Cougars started the season ranked 11th in the state. Campolindo head coach Max Luckhurst is optimistic about the upcoming season despite losing some key graduates. "We will try to keep our momentum going by getting the new guys on this year's team up to speed," Luckhurst explained.

He expects strong leadership from returning seniors Denis Karas and Matt Ledrech, both of whom were first-team all DFAL players in 2013. Other crucial players on the Cougars' roster include juniors Adam Remotto and Conor McNally who also earned all-league rights last season.

Luckhurst is focused on instilling baseball fundamentals to his team. "Throwing strikes, taking care of the

baseball defensively, and having competitive at bats will be the keys to our success," he said. Whether they're on the diamond or in the classroom, Luckhurst will look to instill discipline and determination into his players this year. "I expect my players to be good students, good people, and to work very hard and pay attention to details when they practice."

A win over the otherwise undefeated Berkeley High School in pre-season play showcased their ability to contend with the best. With motivation and momentum, the Campolindo Cougars will be a force to be reckoned with this spring.

The Acalanes Dons, coached by Justin Santich-Hughes, are also looking to continue their success. The Acalanes squad will rely on its upper-classmen for guidance. "Seniors Grant Henderson and Austin Fisher will be two vital players to our team this year," Santich-Hughes said. Henderson, a second team all-league player will serve as a utility infielder this season, whereas gold-glove winning Fisher will play shortstop.

"Returning sophomore Jake Berry will also be key to our success," Santich-Hughes noted. Berry, a stand-out second team freshman in 2013, returns to the diamond as the starting second baseman for the Dons.

Even with key returners, the Dons will have to replace five all-league seniors. "Although graduating these

players was tough, we are confident that this year's team can fill their shoes," Santich-Hughes said. They have been able to do so early with pre-season victories over NCS powers College Park and San Marin.

Despite coming off of a rough 2013 season, the Matadors look capable of rebounding this season. "Our team has 13 seniors and five captains who provide excellent leadership," coach Vince Dell'Aquila explained. Key returning players include seniors Bennett Stehr and Andrew Rozensweig. Stehr, a 2013 second team catcher and star lineman on the football field, is the first Miramonte player since now MLB slugger Brett Jackson in 2009 to hit a home run over the fence into the Miramonte pool. Rozensweig, Miramonte's lefty ace, led the NCS in strikeouts during the 2014 pre-season and is looking to continue his pitching success.

"Sophomore James Vacarro will also be a crucial factor in our pitching success this year," Dell'Aquila said. Miramonte, who has shown that it can play at an elite level, should be a serious contender during the 2014 spring baseball season.

With significant wins over Tenynson and Skyline in pre-season play, the Mats have shown their strength. "We're a good, cohesive team that is looking to play solid baseball, be smart defensively, and pitch well," Dell'Aquila said.

Girls Qualify Two Teams to State Tourney

Mats reach regional finals

By Conrad Bassett



Ashley Ewing Photos Gint Federas



Megan Adachi

top tier of Northern California teams in the Open division. The Mats took two road games before falling in the Regional Finals to Salesian.

Their first trip was to Delta College in Stockton where they beat St. Mary's (Stockton) 94-79.

The Mats employed their ferocious press and deep bench and pushed out to a 24-16 lead after one period and led by seven when sophomore Keana Delos Santos went on a personal 7-0 run to double the lead – all in about 20 seconds. She nailed a three from the corner followed by a layup and then a steal and another layup.

Sophomore Sabrina Ionescu led all scorers with 31, senior Mariah Seals added 15 and Delos Santos finished with 14.

With the win, the Mats advanced to face Carondelet before a loud and packed crowd.

Coach Kelly Sopak and the team were thrilled with the community support. "It was so cool the last two weeks to see the tremendous support. It really means a lot to the kids and coaches. Heck, I even tried to fire them up near the end of the game. The fans were very much a part of both wins here in Nor Cal."

The game was tightly contested from the beginning. Carondelet had their biggest lead of the game at 30-23 when an unsung player came off the bench for the Mats. Freshman Elle Louie hit a corner three point shot and then a second one a few minutes later to get the Mats back in the game.

Coach Kelly Sopak remarked, "Elle is a tremendous player. She makes a lot of active plays that sometimes don't get credited as a stat. Tonight she stepped up and delivered some big shots and timely rebounds. She has come a long way."

Miramonte had a 43-40 lead at the half.

The game was tied at 80-80 with 2:32 to go. Louie hit a free throw to give the Mats the lead with 1:44 to go – a lead they would not relinquish as Ionescu hit six clutch free throws in the last minute to seal the 92-87 win.

"I don't really think about the makes or the misses. In our system, I have the green light to make plays and fortunately tonight I started to feel it



Keana Delos Santos



Mariah Seals

late in the game," said Ionescu.

Ionescu led the team with 33 points and Seals added 23.

These wins led to a rematch, at Sleep Train Arena in Sacramento on March 22, with Salesian (Richmond), who had handed Miramonte its only loss of the regular season.

The Pride pulled out to a large early lead and the Mats came back, but not quite enough and lost the CIF Northern California championship game 78 to 64. Ionescu led all scorers with 23.

Miramonte finished with a 30-2 record.

"To make the Nor Cal championship in the Open bracket is just an amazing feat for this school and community," said Sopak. "I am extremely proud to have coached this team."

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