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Mats Fall to Rival St. Mary's-Stockton in NorCal Final

By Spencer Silva



Sabrina Ionescu Photo Gint Federas

After a battle through the CIF Open Division, Miramonte's season came to an end in the Regional finals. The Mats (30-3) fell to the St. Mary's Rams (33-1) 67-58 on March 21 at the Sleep Train Arena.

Despite the loss, Miramonte head coach Kelly Sopak was proud of the work his team had put in throughout the long season. "We put a lot of work from November to where we're at today, the schedule we put together, and the level of competition we played. We just got better as the season went along," Sopak said.

The Mats got off to a slow start, adjusting to

the full-court press employed by St. Mary's. The Rams doubled, and often triple-teamed, Miramonte guard Sabrina Ionescu. In the words of St. Mary's coach Tom Gonsalves, "We tried to limit her touches and make someone else beat us."

The Rams came out firing early, jumping out to a 44-29 lead at the half on the back of eight three-pointers. The Mats then went on an 8-0 run to begin the second half, only for St. Mary's to counter back with a 14-0 run of their own.

"They have a lot of firepower and they just keep coming at you," said Miramonte coach Kelly Sopak.

It was the second time in as many seasons the Mats faced the Rams in the postseason. In the first round of the 2014 tournament, they beat them by a 15-point margin.

"(St. Mary's) has always been our rival," said Miramonte standout Sabrina Ionescu. "We knew what we were getting into and they knew what they were getting into."

Keana Delos Sanots led all scorers with 17 points and 11 rebounds. Forward Uriah Howard and Ionescu both chipped in 11 points and 12 rebounds.

The Mats will return all of their starters in 2016 and believe the experience of playing on the big stage will serve them well for next season.

"The new people grow from the experience and learn how competitive it is, how every opportunity we have, we have to grow from and learn from it," Ionescu explained. "I think it's going to help us next year."

Miramonte and Acalanes Postseason Ends in State Finals

By Karl Buscheck



Rachelle Louie



Brooke Panfili Photos Gint Federas

It's been a banner year for Lamorinda girls' high school hoops. Miramonte rolled through the early rounds of the Open Division State Championship, while Acalanes advanced to the semifinals of the Division III tournament.

The Mats began the team's run by edging Pinewood 57-52 in an overtime home win on March 13. Sophomore forward Rachelle Louie starred for Miramonte, scoring 16 points to help the Mats hold off a furious late charge.

In the semifinals, Miramonte topped St. Ignatius 67-55 on March 17. The Mats led wire-to-wire, but it was an eight-point run to start the final quarter that sealed the win.

"The first three minutes of the fourth quarter, that's the difference between whether someone's going to come and play with you or whether they might just go away," said head coach Kelly Sopak. "So, that's been an emphasis all year. It was great to see us actually do it."

Sabrina Ionescu had a characteristically big night, as the junior guard racked up 26 points and 14 rebounds while playing every minute. As Sopak explained, the entire team just has a knack for coming through when it matters most. "For a young group, they step up in the big games," he said.

Acalanes also stepped up in a big way during the 2014-2015 season. A year removed

from an 11-15 finish, the squad reached the semifinals in the Division III State Championship.

"It was definitely a huge accomplishment for us," said head coach Chad Wellon. "The girls bought into the program and having that year of experience under their belts was huge."

After earning a bye in the first round, the Dons took down Shasta 62-57 at home on March 14. A lot of the credit for that result goes to sophomore Brooke Panfili.

"She went nuts in the fourth quarter," said Wellon, after the guard scored 14 points in a row.

Panfili wasn't the only Don who provided major contributions throughout the postseason. Sophomore forward Emma Godfrey dominated the boards, while junior guard Julia Lyons and sophomore forward Roni Marrone stood out as the defensive stars.

On March 17, Acalanes ran up against the No. 1 seed Vanden in a road clash, and lost 75-44. The defeat ended the Dons' season, but the team was able to put the loss in perspective.

"You're not guaranteed to get back to this position next year," said Wellon. "So, I just really wanted them to enjoy the moment, which I think they all did."

Middle School Madness

Submitted by Judy McNeil



From left: George Ekmekjian, coach Daryl Utter, Peter O'Donnell, Kellen Clancy, Alex Metz, Rex Curtiss and Lucas Nomura. Not pictured: Chase Peterson.

After a tough 0-7 season, Joaquin Moraga's seventh grade boys' basketball team caught fire and won three straight games to take

first place in the Piedmont Tournament. They won their division after beating Stanley in the final with a last minute free throw.

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