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## Campolindo Season Ends in State Finals

By Michael Sakoda



Austin Clarke Photos Gint Federas

The Campolindo boys' basketball team finished their historic season in the CIF Division III state championship game. After an incredible season, the Cougars' season came to an end in a heartbreaking 57-70 loss to Damien at Haas Pavilion on March 27.

"From the beginning of the year, we knew we had a good team, but we didn't know we had a great team," said Austin Clarke, who posted 15 points, eight rebounds and a steal in the loss. "One more win would have been nice, but just to be here was a really special thing."

The size advantage was clear at warmups. Scott Chen and Sean Yamamoto, who make up Campolindo's starting backcourt, are 5'6" and 5'7" respectively. Damien boasts a starting lineup of three 6'4" guards, a 6'5" forward, and a 6'6" center.

Despite this disadvantage, Campolindo kept the game close. The Cougars trailed by four at the end of the first quarter and went on a 6-0 run in the second to take a 20-19 lead. After three quarters, they were still down by four. However, Damien pulled away in the fourth, outscoring Campo 31-22 to take the title.

"The loss is obviously heartbreaking," said Chris Hansen, who had 25 points, 14 rebounds. "But we've never been here before, and I think it sets the tone for the younger guys. It tells them that they can get back here, no matter what people think at the beginning of the year."

Campolindo started the season strong and

continued to improve throughout.

"This is a true team," said head coach Matt Watson of the team's successful season. "They never cared who the high scorer was. It was all about the team. When you get guys that understand that, you just start cruising."

The Cougars (28-5; 12-0 DFAL) stunned tough competition early in the preseason, winning the Gridley Invitational Tournament and the Modesto Christian Tournament.

Campo surged through the DFAL, beating opponents by an average of 18.6 points per game. Their record earned them the No. 4 seed in the NCS playoffs where they trounced De Anza 83-55 and upended Albany 65-50 before losing to eventual champion, Bishop O'Dowd, in the semifinals on March 4.

A tested Cougars team captured the No. 2 seed in the Northern Region of the CIF State Tournament, and began their title hunt on March 14, beating Sacred Heart Cathedral 79-65. Campolindo knocked off No. 3 Sierra 73-61 on March 17, and then the team moved on to survive another test against defending Northern Region champion Drake to advance to the state finals.

Campo graduates six players this year - Chen who handed out a game-high five assists against Damien; Sean Smith, who's committed to Simpson College; Scott Fox; Pat Duryea; Tiger Garcia, who got Campo's offense rolling in the first half; and two-time DFAL MVP, Hansen.

"I couldn't be more proud of what they've done, what they accomplished all year," said Watson. "I know we lost this game, but these guys are winners, so I don't feel like we lost."



Scott Chen



Sean Yamamoto

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