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Lamorinda Teams in Transition Vie for DFAL Title

By Spencer Silva



The 2015 Acalanes Baseball Team looks to win back the NCS Division III Title. Photos Gint Federas

then win a few more after that."

The Mats will travel to Fort Bragg for a tournament, which will serve as a tune up for regular season play.

When asked about the DFAL landscape in 2015, "parity" was the first word that came to mind for Dell'Aquila: "When people say 'parity,' what they usually mean is the competition is weak. In the DFAL, it's the opposite - if you don't bring your A-game, you're going to lose."

After winning consecutive NCS titles in 2012 and 2013, the Acalanes Dons (6-6, 2-0 DFAL) had a disappointing season in 2014 - at least by their standards. Like Miramonte, they lost to eventual champion Tamalpais in NCS. They're 2-0 in the DFAL so far, securing wins over Las Lomas and Dougherty Valley.

Boston College commit and staff ace Zach Stromberg is the team's anchor. The lefty is an extremely tough draw for opposing lineups, but is one of only two starting seniors on a young team - two-way pitcher/outfielder Doug Nimura is other starting senior. The development of freshman Gavin Shipp will be another key to the Dons' success.

The biggest obstacle facing the team in the early season has been health. Head coach Justin Santich-Hughes is proud of how his team has performed in spite of its personnel limitations: "We have not had our full starting line up on the field once this year ... It is a huge credit to the guys on our team to have done as well as we have thus far."

The Dons recently returned from the San Diego Lions Tournament, which culls teams from all over California and is among the best high school tournaments in the country. The team went 0-4, but Santich-Hughes thinks the experience the team gained against high-level competition will benefit his team in DFAL play.

Campolindo (4-4, 1-1 DFAL) has been a dominant force in the DFAL for years, but they're a team currently in transition. Max Luckhurst resigned after a successful 16-year tenure as head coach, which included a four-year stretch from 2010-2013 when the team won consecutive NCS titles.

First year head coach Wayne Franklin didn't comment on the coaching transition, other than saying that it most likely has not been a subtle one for his players. Overall, the team is young, but

Last spring marked the first time since 2008 that baseball teams outside of Lamorinda won the NCS championship in both Division II and Division III.

The Miramonte Mats (4-4, 0-2 DFAL) boast one of the DFAL's best pitching tandems in senior Connor Jackson, a Cal commit, and junior James Vaccaro, a USC commit. Preventing runs has been a strength early in the season, but they've struggled on offense. Head coach Vince Dell'Aquila says his hitters have been swinging the bats better of late, however, especially third baseman Erik Nyman and center fielder Garrett Johnson.

Last season, the Mats lost to eventual Division III champion Tamalpais 2-0 in the second round of NCS. Dell'Aquila thinks both the DFAL and NCS will come down to which team gets hot at the right time. "When four or five players come on a bit at the end, that's when you have a shot at NCS," he explained "it's been a good formula for us in the past. You gotta stick out games 18 through 24 and

junior Max Flower and seniors Ben Skinner and Connor McNally represent a strong core of veteran talent. All three are committed to playing at the next level. Flower is committed to Cal, Skinner to Harvard and McNally to Utah.

McNally, who has started since his freshman year, has been sidelined with a groin injury and hasn't played a game. His return will be a major boon to the lineup, and with a young pitching staff, the Cougars will need to score a lot of runs to make a deep run into NCS. Franklin is encouraging his team to approach the season "not like they're playing for me," but like "they're playing for a championship."



Miramonte played Dublin last week.

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