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Acalanes, Miramonte in NCS Tennis Tournament

By Spencer Silva



Photo Gint Federas

Since the first NCS team tennis tournament in 1999, only seven high schools have earned the distinction of champion. Acalanes had a chance to become the eighth school on that list on May 16. Under a new coach, Stephanie Lawrence, Acalanes reached the title match for the first time in school history. In the championship, the Dons faced off with DFAL rival Dougherty Valley, but fell by a final score of 5-2.

Acalanes (24-3) earned the No. 2 seed in the tournament after finishing second in the DFAL. On their way to the finals, the Dons beat Sonoma Valley 7-0 and swept Amador Valley 7-0. In the semifinals on the morning of May 16, they beat No. 3 Monte Vista (EBAL) Mustangs 4-3 in thrilling fashion. Senior doubles partners Ian Dao and Preston Tso pulled off a thrilling victory over Monte Vista's No. 1 doubles team, tipping the overall contest in their favor. "The doubles win versus Monte Vista was huge," explained Lawrence. "It wasn't necessarily expected, but they came through."

In the finals, Dougherty Valley proved to be too difficult an opponent. Lawrence didn't mince words about the strength of their opponent: "Dougherty is one of the best teams in the country."

The Dons' No.1 singles player, Kyle Everly, ended his match early Saturday due to a leg cramp.

Everly, a junior, earned third place in the boys' Division I singles tournament the weekend before. He lost to eventual champion and No. 1 seed Kevin Ma of Dougherty Valley.

Although the NCS title escaped them, the future of the program is bright. All four of Acalanes' top singles players will return in 2016, and the Dons were ranked Top-10 NorCal team after winning a 117-team tournament in Fresno earlier in the season. The team had strong chemistry this year and expect to carry that over to next season. "It's a great team. The seniors and the freshman root for each other, which isn't something you get to see in a lot of sports," Lawrence said.

The team planned its year-end banquet for Sunday, the day after the NCS finals, but, as fate would have it, their season hasn't ended. Their second-place NCS finish promised a berth - their first - in the CIF NorCal tournament, which begins next Friday. They will meet Granite Bay in the first round, a team Lawrence is quite familiar with from her days coaching in the Sac-Joquin Section. "They've been a nemesis of mine for a long time. This is going to be a very exciting tournament," she said.

No. 4 seed Miramonte (15-5) fell to South Bay powerhouse Mission San Jose 4-3 on May 15. It all came down to No. 1 singles player Peter Martin who played Mission San Jose's Viam Aurora in the contest's rubber match. Both sets were eventually settled in tiebreaker fashion - 7-6 (7-5), 7-6 (7-3). Martin and No. 2 singles player, junior Alex Hwang, were fresh off winning the NCS doubles title, a tournament in which they didn't cede a single set.

Miramonte's senior doubles team, Kyle Rechnitv and Bryce Hummer, were the highlight of the afternoon for the Mats, beating Mission San Jose's No. 1 doubles team in straight sets (6-3, 6-1).

It was not the way that the senior class, winners of two NCS titles and second place finishers in 2014, had hoped to conclude the season.

Martin is going to Middlebury College in Vermont to play tennis and a number of the other players are headed to elite colleges for academics.

Head coach Mike McCollum spoke glowingly about his senior class. "This is the greatest tennis group we've ever had," he explained. "They're all great kids: we're talking excellence in the classroom, on the tennis court and as teammates ... they're off the charts."



Photo Gint Federas

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