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Lady Mats Secure First NCS Title in 17 Years

By Spencer Silva



Miramonte celebrates its first championship in 17 years Photos Gint Federas

Throughout the season, coach Murphy has emphasized the importance of steely defense. Once again, versus Campo, defense took the day.

"Defense was key," Murphy said. "We were able to lock down their key players for most of the match."

The centerpiece of the team's defense, senior Paige Miller, was at the heart of the team's success all season. On Saturday, she tallied 13 saves, including a 5-meter penalty block with time expiring. Miller is headed to San Diego State for water polo next fall, so notching an NCS title after coming up short the last two years was particularly special.

Asked of the difference between this year's team and previous ones, Miller said: "The team chemistry this year was unbelievable."

It was a charmed season for the Matadors, and first-year head coach Murphy was quick to point out that number 17 is not only his lucky number, but also the number he wore on his cap at Cal during his playing days.

"It's a really special moment for this program," Murphy added. "It was just our year, it was our turn."

Coincidentally, the last time the Lady Mats won the NCS Championship, a familiar face was coaching the team: Cougars' head coach Kim Everist.

"It's been a long time coming for the Mats," Everist said after the match. "I'm excited for them."

The Cougars had a tough season in 2015, by their standards. They graduated much of the talent that netted them three straight NCS titles (and four in five years), and failed to eclipse the 20-win mark for the first time since 2010.

"Our team motto this year has been: improvise, adapt, and overcome," Everist explained. "That's the kind of season it's been."

The road to the NCS Championship was a roller coaster ride. The season reached a low point when the Cougars dropped consecutive matches to Acalanes and Miramonte in DFAL play. Everist was ejected from the double-overtime, sudden death loss to the Lady Dons, which meant missing the following match against Miramonte: the first absence of her 24-year coaching career.

In the semifinal, the Cougars found themselves in another thriller with the Dons. This time, it

After a 17-year drought, the Miramonte Lady Mats (21-5) finally won the NCS Division II water polo championship. On Saturday, Nov. 14, the Mats ended rival Campolindo's hunt for its fourth-consecutive NCS title, winning by a score of 9-4.

The Mats jumped out to an early lead with goals from Katrina Drake, Skylar Savar, and Carson Broad. At halftime, the Mats held a comfortable 6-2 lead, and by the fourth period, the Mats held a commanding 9-2 lead.

The win over the Cougars (16-10) was a team effort. The team's five sophomores - or, as head coach Noel Murphy likes to call them, his "Super Sophomores" - all left their mark on the championship match. Drake and Savar led all scorers with three goals; Broad had two; Kelly Murphy notched three assists; and Grace Tehaney drew two crucial ejections. Senior Hailey Eberle also scored and junior Rose Tuttle had two steals.

was the Cougars that came out on top in overtime, winning by a score of 6-5.

The Cougars graduate just two seniors, Tal Shoshan and Ellen Gerst, and a number of its key players - including junior attacker Olivia Price, who scored three of Campo's four goals Saturday - will return to the pool next fall.

With both teams returning the bulk of their talent next season, the classic Miramonte-Campolindo rivalry has the potential to reach all-time heights in the coming years.

"North Coast always comes down to your rival games," Everist said. "We're always going to do our best to beat Miramonte and Acalanes, and I would expect nothing less from them."



Cougar freshman Zoe Crouch rips a shot in the second half

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