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## Local Powerhouses Dominate DFAL Girls' Basketball Landscape

By Karl Buscheck



Sabrina Ionescu (20) scored 39 points with 10 steals and 8 assists against the Dons.

in USA Today's Super 25 national rankings by having just one name on the marquee.

The supporting cast includes senior Uriah Howard who is headed to Eastern Washington, senior Keana Delos Santos who will be suiting up for Utah Valley State next year and sophomore Clair Steele and junior Elle Louie.

Sopak's team has risen to national prominence thanks in part to a daunting non-league schedule. On Jan. 16, the Mats will travel to Stockton to take part in the MLK Showcase, which will also feature heavyweights like Mater Dei and the hosts, St. Mary's, who dumped the Mats out of the CIF Open Division NorCal regional finals last spring.

Like the reigning NCS Division III champion Mats, Campo also has lofty objectives for the season.

"Some of our team goals are to win 20 games, make NCS and also the NorCal playoffs," head coach Art Thoms said. "Those are our three major, long-term goals."

Haley Van Dyke will play a crucial role in achieving those goals, as the sophomore leads the Cougars in points per game (17.1), rebounds (13.2) and assists 4.6. Sophomores Ashley Thoms and Jessi O'Reilly rank second in scoring and rebounds, respectively, but it's an upperclassman who represents the team's true heartbeat.

"This group of girls really cares and supports each other," Thoms said. "We also have great enthusiasm at practice every day. Senior Captain Emily Lyall has done a great job leading the group."

As the DFAL season ramps up, the Cougars can't help but look ahead to their Jan. 22 meeting with Acalanes in Lafayette.

All three Lamorinda girls' basketball programs are flooded with talent, but right now, there's no match for the Miramonte Mats.

"We've got a once in a lifetime team here at Miramonte," head coach Kelly Sopak declared after his team dismantled its local rivals - Acalanes and Campolindo - by a combined score of 184-84 in the opening week of DFAL play. "I don't know if we'll ever be this good again. And I think you've got to take advantage of it."

After drubbing Acalanes 89-34 on Jan. 5 at home and cruising past Campolindo 95-50 on Jan. 8 in Moraga, the Mats have now reeled of 52 DFAL wins in a row and sit at 12-0 on the season and 2-0 in league.

Sabrina Ionescu, whom ESPN tabbed as the fourth-best senior recruit in the nation, is the star of the show. But Miramonte didn't climb to the No. 6 spot

"The kids and coaches are very familiar with each other," Thoms said. "Both teams are evenly matched, which makes for a great competitive local game."

It's also the kind of matchup that can serve as a valuable learning experience for both sides.

"You look at teams like Miramonte, Campolindo, Dublin, Dougherty Valley," Acalanes head coach Chad Wellon said. "We're going to have tough competitive games in league, which I think is a good preparation piece for going into the postseason."

The league season will be a grind, but ultimately it's all just building toward the postseason.

"The big picture is the playoffs," Wellon explained. "So, obviously, always league is important to us, but really we're approaching league as like a stepping stone. As a program, we're hoping that we can make a deep run into the playoffs - both from an NCS perspective and a NorCal perspective."

On Jan. 8 in Lafayette, the Dons throttled Las Lomas 91-15 to improve league mark to 1-1 and the team's overall record sits at 12-3 after Acalanes edged Elk Grove 64-58 in the Pittsburgh Shootout on Jan. 9.

For Acalanes, all those wins have been the product of a true team effort.

"Emma [Godfrey] and Brooke Panfili have carried the load from a scoring perspective and they've been really consistent there," Wellon said of the juniors. "[But] really my starting five, Julia Lyons and Taylor Jones from a defensive perspective have done incredibly. And Roni Marrone is our player that can play every position. She can play point guard. She can play the five spot."

And then there's senior three-point specialist Alex Grant-Hudd, who Wellon said "has been [a] huge" part of the team's success.



Aubrey Wagner (10), Ashley Thoms (23) and Jordyn Bryant (33) Photos Gint Federas

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