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Acalanes, Miramonte advance to semifinals in NCS Tournament

By Emily Dugdale



Senior Regan McQuain and junior Allison Merrill each scored a goal – along with sophomores Emily Smith and Kierra Krawec – during the Lady Dons' 4-0 win over Newark Memorial last Wednesday.

Photos Gint Federas

It's crunch time for girls' soccer this week as rivals Acalanes and Miramonte both advanced to the semifinal rounds of the North Coast Section (NCS). The Lady Mats ousted the Lady Dons in the semi finals of last year's Division II tournament, but this winter, the Mats moved to the newly minted Division III bracket.

No. 2 seed Acalanes (11-2-2) faced No. 15 Newark Memorial Cougars (8-9-6) in its first-round matchup last Wednesday, and handed their opponent a 4-0 shutout loss. Despite playing on a flooded, soggy field, the team "did a good job to keep their heads above and pull it out," according to head coach Evan Sassano.

Wednesday's match proved the Lady Dons' offensive depth. Each goal was scored by a different player: senior Regan McQuain, junior Allison Merrill and sophomores Emily Smith and Kierra Krawec.

"It's always a good sign when that happens – as a coach, you're happy," Sassano said. "Our style is very much the collective way of playing - we try to attack in a lot of different ways and not give it just to one player."

The Lady Dons had a reserved confidence heading into their quarterfinals match last Saturday against No. 7 Tamalpais.

"We're confident with ourselves, but we definitely don't get ahead of ourselves," Sassano said. "They're a strong team, and we're just focused on getting better this way and making our way through with the same focus – taking it one game at a time."

Their focus paid off, as the Lady Dons beat the Red Tailed Hawks 2-0 that evening, moving on to a semifinals match-up against the No. 3 Las Lomas Knights (16-1-5) – the team that handed them their first DFAL loss in two seasons earlier this month. The two teams will meet Wednesday, Feb. 24.

Sassano was optimistic but measured when

asked about his team's chance of winning its first sectional title. "Anything could happen," he said. "We're trying to stay really organized and do a good job at that defensively, and also work hard together offensively."

Reigning Division II champion Miramonte, entered the Division III tournament as the No. 3 seed. In the first round, the Lady Mats took care of No. 14 Encinal (7-11-1) with relative ease, winning 5-1.

Despite a few late-season losses for the Mats, head coach Mark Daus felt his team was well prepared before the match. The second half of season league play was "some of the best soccer we have played this year," he said. "I think getting positive results against good teams at the [end] of conference play is good for our team's mentality."

With their shutout against Encinal, the Mats were confident for their Saturday's quarterfinal match-up against No. 11 Ygnacio Valley Warriors (9-7-3). The girls prevailed with a 2-0 shutout. They will now meet No. 3 Saint Mary's (Berkeley) in the semi final on Wednesday Feb. 24.

"The big thing for us was trying to enter the tournament on an upswing, which I think we have accomplished," Daus said.

He credited the team's upperclassmen with preparing the younger players for a successful playoff run. "Towards the end of the year the seniors and captains have really stepped up and took control of this team not only on the field but took control of the locker room as well," he said. "I have no doubt their experience winning NCS last year will help carry younger players who haven't been here yet."

Campolindo (7-12-3) won the tournament in 2014 and reached the finals in 2015, but did not qualify for NCS this winter. The Cougars were young, graduating just four seniors. Head coach Ernesto Silva believes a more experi-

enced group of returning players will "give us the continuity we need," for years to come.

"I feel we were able to be competitive

throughout the season, [and] our young players will take this experience and come back stronger next year," he added.



Kyra Rossiter



Gina Crosetti (9) scored the game-winning goal against Campolindo in last year's Division II NCS final. Isabel Fine (8).

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