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Volleyball Teams Gearing up for NCS Action

By Karl Buscheck



Tommy Graham Photos Gint Federas

With the DFAL season drawing to a close and the NCS tournament set to begin on May 10, the future looks promising for all three Lamorinda boys' volleyball squads.

"The team is always looking to return to the title match," said Campo head coach David Chen, whose Cougars own a 14-6 record overall and a 4-4 mark in DFAL play. "This group has a lot to prove to others but mainly to themselves. We have gone through a lot of battles this season in order to become a tough team for the postseason."

Campo had won five of six matches before falling to rival Acalanes 3-0 (25-21, 25-22, 25-23) in Lafayette on April 27.

"The team is working hard to fight and compete for every point," Chen said. "(They) value the experience of competition and their time with their teammates, all while maintaining a rich past and continuing to leave behind a lasting legacy for our young players. (It's) no small task."

As the playoffs approach, the Cougars, who sit in third place in the DFAL standings, won't be leaning on any stars.

"All of our athletes have stepped up to bring us to where we are this season," Chen said. "They have all embraced the challenge to step out of the shadows of the past teams and engage in the barrage that will be coming at them."

The young Dons' win over Campo on April 27 snapped the team's three-game losing skid and pushed their record to 3-5 in league play and 12-10 overall.

"This year my goal was to be .500 and try to get into the playoffs," said head coach Mason Mulvaney. "So far, we're ahead of my pace which I'm very happy with." Acalanes, currently fourth place in the standings, one spot behind the Cougars, has just two seniors on the roster in Tommy Graham and Joey Moran.

"He's a phenomenal setter," Mulvaney said of Graham. "He's made second-team all-league the last three years. I'm hoping he makes first-team this year. He's a great server. (He's a) good setter (and he's been a) really positive."

Meanwhile, Moran has emerged as the Dons' Swiss Army knife.

"He's consistent in all six positions and has been a really good leader on the team." Mulvaney said. "And (he's) someone I feel confident in encouraging the other kids and making a real difference on the court."

Acalanes has also relied heavily on junior Bijani Shahabi, whom Mulvaney singled out as the most-improved Don.

"He went from a player who really didn't get much playing time last year to being my most consistent outside hitter," Mulvaney said. "And he's leading our team in kills."

After winning the DFAL opener, the Mats have lost each of their last six league matches. Even with the team stuck in a rut, head coach Lisa Bachtold has found positives in the defeats.

"(The team is developing) better chemistry and has gained a bit more experience," Bachtold said. "There are always things to improve on, but we're heading in the right direction."

Miramonte (1-6 in DFAL and 5-7 overall) has received major contributions from players all across the roster, but no one has been more valuable than a pair of senior veterans.

"A lot of players have stepped up and contributed," Bachtold explained. "Mitch Brooks and Mitchell Tang have stepped up as captains and have shown a tremendous amount of leadership."

Before making any postseason plans, the Mats will face a challenging end to the league campaign, including a trip to Acalanes to play their neighbors on May 4 and a jaunt to Dougherty Valley to face the co-DFAL leaders a day after that.

"The league is extremely competitive this year with many match ups going to 5 sets," Bachtold said. "It's tough, but we hope to make it to NCS and finish the end of the year strong."



Joey Moran (10) and Chad Abbott (7)

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