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Acalanes Baseball Tops DFAL as NCS Looms

By Karl Buscheck



Tommy Henderson Photos Gint Federas

With a 20-2 record overall and a perfect 10-0 mark in league play, Acalanes is carving through the DFAL slate as the postseason approaches.

"Our team is really focused on the goal of winning an NCS championship and playing very well into the playoffs," said head coach Justin Santich-Hughes, whose Dons rank 36th in the state according to MaxPreps.

Santich-Hughes' squad has been anchored by three seniors. Jake Berry and Tommy Henderson propel the Dons at the plate, while ace Grant Young sets the tone for a talented pitching staff.

"We've been resting him to make sure he's sharp for the playoffs," Santich-Hughes explained of Young. "So, it's really been our whole pitching staff that's stepped up."

Acalanes not only has a talented roster, but also has demonstrated an impressive knack for staying

loose on the diamond.

"We don't put too much pressure on ourselves in any one game," Santich-Hughes said. "Every game is important and I think they understand that and that's how they approach each game."

That ability to never get too hyped up - even for a local rival - helped the Dons edge past Campolindo 6-4 on May 3 in Moraga.

"This year with this group, they treat everybody the same," Santich-Hughes explained with the team in midst of seven-game winning streak. "Any opponent we play we know we have to respect and we try to play our best baseball. And this is a really focused team."

For the Cougars, it was a lack of focus and execution that cost them in their meeting with the league leaders.

"We thought that we made some critical errors that if we eliminated them we would put ourselves in a better position to win," said senior outfielder Max Flower, who will be playing for Cal next spring. "And [we] just look forward to hopefully seeing them again in the playoffs."

Campolindo, who defeated Alhambra 5-1 at home on May 12, sit in third place in the DFAL standings with a 6-4 record (12-10 overall) The Cougars have reeled off three league wins in a row following the loss to Acalanes.

"I think the key to success in the playoffs will be to continue to hit the ball like we are," Flower said. "And play cleaner and more efficient defense."

Miramonte (6-5 in league and 14-9 overall) have won five of six games to push into fourth place in the standings, a game behind the Cougars.

One of the reasons for the midseason turnaround is that the Mats finally have a park to call home.

"We played our first game on our field about a month ago, and since then, we've been playing better," said head coach Vince Dell'Aquila. "And I think that had a lot to do with it - more than I probably wanted to admit. So, it was nice to be able to get on our field and for the kids to be able to get more acclimated to a normal baseball practice routine and not be away so much."

The UCSB-bound James Vaccaro leads the Mats' group of pitchers which also includes senior Tim Tague and sophomore Zach Wong who closes when he's not playing shortstop.

Before the postseason arrives, Miramonte will get a crack at spoiling Acalanes' unblemished campaign, hosting their rivals in the final DFAL tilt on May 19.

"It will be a big game for the boys. They'll be pretty excited about playing," Dell'Aquila said. "Obviously, we didn't show real well the last time we played them, but that's been the case with a couple of teams we played. So, we'll go out there and hopefully give them a good game."



Zach Wong



Max Flower

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[back](#)

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