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Acalanes Softball Hopes to Make its Mark in NCS Quarterfinals

By Karl Buscheck



Mary Keeler Photos Gint Federas

Even though star shortstop Zoe Marott never played a single inning, the Acalanes softball team managed to advance to the NCS division III quarterfinals.

"The day she got hurt on the field - it was a practice - and it was just like the whole team was quiet," said head coach Victor Silva, recalling the scene after Marott tore her shoulder. "And it took them a couple of days to recover. Everyone was just so down."

After earning the No. 11 seed in the NCS bracket, the Dons (9-11 overall and 4-8 in league), topped No. 6 Sonoma Valley 13-8 on the road on May 24. The playoff push - minus Marott who's headed to Cal on a full scholarship next fall - ended three days later when the team was shutout 13-0 by Analy in Sebastopol.

"It seemed like every time we won, it was someone different stepping up." Silva explained. "It was a team effort and I don't think I've ever had so much fun. The girls all got along and they all had a great time playing softball."

During the run to the postseason, a trio of senior co-stars emerged for the Dons - including Mary Keeler who shifted from center field to cover the vacancy at shortstop.

"Alex Grant-Hudd was the MVP for us for the whole year," Silva said. "But we also couldn't have done it without Mary Keeler and Kaitlyn Johnson."

While the Dons' roster was loaded with veterans, the Cougars trotted out one of the most youthful squads in DFAL.

"We had a very young team." said Campolindo head coach Wayne Stephens, who had just one senior and three juniors to call on. "So, next year we're going to have a much more seasoned team."

While the lack of upperclassmen resulted in an 8-15 mark overall and a 0-12 record in league, Stephens said there are still positives to take away from challenging campaign.

"It gave us the ability to get the younger kids in and playing this year," Stephens said. "So, it gave them the experience needed for the varsity level."

One of the players gaining that valuable experience was freshman Katelyn Poole, who took over as the team's new catcher and cleanup hitter. The Cougars needed Poole behind the plate because the old backstop had moved to the mound.

"She knew that we were going to be short-handed in pitching. So, in the offseason she decided to

take it on herself and put herself in a position that she ended up being our starting pitcher," Stephens said of sophomore Abby Morris. "She got us through the season."

Another sophomore ended up winning the job at shortstop - the most demanding defensive position on the diamond.

"Ashley Thoms, who is an all-around great athlete, stepped in and played shortstop for us," Stephens said. "She stepped into a position that we thought was going to be hard to fill."

Like the Cougars, the Mats also had a roster short on experience.

"We were predominately a young team that I felt was very competitive - by and large - when they needed to be," said head coach Steve Renfro. "So, I was very happy with them."

After falling to Acalanes 16-12 in extra-inning on May 19 in the final game of the season, Miramonte wrapped up the year with a 7-15 mark overall and a 3-9 record in DFAL action.

The Mats' top producer was the club's power-hitting third baseman.

"Megan Bower is - without a doubt - she's the difference maker on our team," Renfro said of the sophomore. "I think she ended up hitting something like 12 home runs. She just puts a lot of runs on the board for us. So, she's quite phenomenal."

According to Renfro, Bower wasn't the only Mats underclassman who emerged this spring.

"Overall, there's probably six or seven players that are really going to grow and make this team stronger as the years go by," Renfro said. "So, I'm pretty excited about it."



Alex Grant-Hudd

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[back](#)

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