

LAMORINDA SPORTS

Acalanes Baseball Wins NCS Title

By Karl Buscheck



Acalanes baseball team celebrating their title win.

Photos Gint Federas

The Acalanes baseball team capped off an undefeated league campaign by claiming the NCS division III crown with a 4-1 win over Analy on June 4.

"I don't know if I've ever been more proud of a team that I've coached," head coach Justin Santich-Hughes said after his championship club went 30-2 overall and a perfect 12-0 in DFAL play. "It's just an amazing group of guys who are very selfless."

In the title matchup at Saint Mary's Louis Guisto Field, senior ace Grant Young pitched a complete game and recorded five strikeouts in the process.

"Pitching wise, Grant did exactly what we wanted to do," Santich-Hughes explained. "We knew that Analy liked to take walks and kind of look for the other team to give them stuff. So, Grant just pitched to contact and let our defense work. And thankfully our defense played a really good game."

After falling into a 1-0 hole in the top of the first, Tommy Henderson connected on an RBI double to even the contest the bottom half of the inning.

"[Seniors] Jake Berry and Tommy Henderson were absolutely huge [this year]," Santich-Hughes said. "Our offense was very good, but they were kind of the leaders of a very good offense."

Junior Daniel Kim gave the Dons a 2-1 edge with an RBI single later in the first, and Young never gave the lead back.

"Daniel Kim had a very nice postseason," Santich-Hughes said of the outfielder. "I think he had four RBIs against Miramonte [in the semifinals and] two more against Analy."

The No. 1 seed Dons, whom MaxPreps ranked as the 30th best team in the state, had to get past both of their local rivals before arriving at the championship game.

In the quarterfinals on May 28, Acalanes blanked Campolindo 5-0 at home to put an end to the Cougars' season.

"I thought that we never reached our absolute full potential as a team," explained Campolindo outfielder Max Flower who will be

playing for Cal next season

After the Cougars went 15-11 overall and 8-4 in DFAL action, Flower pointed to the club's resiliency as its greatest attribute.

"I think we did a great job of battling back all year and never giving up," Flower said.

Four days later, the Dons dumped Miramonte out of the post-season with a 6-2 win in Lafayette.

"Acalanes was a really good team and we knew we'd have to face them sooner or later," said head coach Vince Dell'Aquila, whose Mats earned the No. 12 seed after posting a 16-11 record (6-6 in DFAL). "And I think we showed really well against them. But we came up a little bit short."

Dell'Aquila was left to wonder how the season would have worked out if his staff ace hadn't been hampered by shoulder problems.

"James Vaccaro had some arm

issues," Dell'Aquila said of the USC-bound starter. "So, he kind of just gutted through the season and gave us everything he had. But, healthy, it might have been a little bit different."

With Vaccaro limited, the Mats leaned on the likes of Tim Tague, Zach Wong, Garrett Johnson, Sam Liang and EJ Hodges bolster the pitching staff.

Next year, the Mats will once again be able to call on a strong core as the team aims for yet another NCS run.

"We had 12 juniors and sophomores that were contributors," Dell'Aquila noted. "So, as I said at our banquet, our seniors laid a great foundation and a benchmark for our players for next year. I think our players next year, if they can get to the semifinals, I think that they feel pretty good about it."



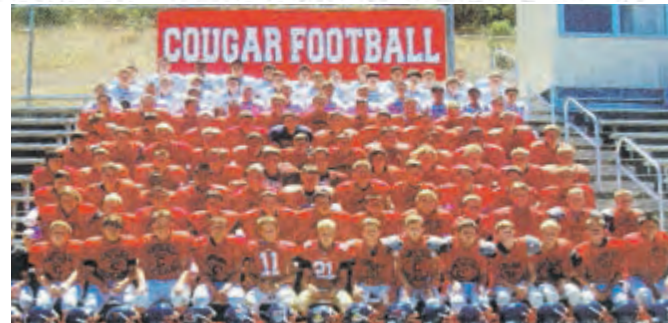
Grant Young



Daniel Kim



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