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## Acalanes Girls Water Polo Wins NCS D2 Championship

Miramonte falls in D1 title

By Karl Buscheck



Photos Gint Federas

It was a season of growth for the Acalanes girls water polo team, who capped off the fall by beating Drake 7-5 in the Northern California Sectionals Division 2 title game on Nov. 12 in Lafayette.

"We played some of the bigger teams, the top teams, very early in the season in our own

tournament and weren't, to be honest, competitive," admitted head coach Misha Buchel, whose roster was stocked with freshmen and sophomores.

For the youthful Dons (17-10), the key to their rise was finding stability in the middle of the pool. Buchel described junior

goalie Ella Maisano and junior central defender Bella Wentzel as the team's defensive anchors.

"Our defense became better and our transition game became better," Buchel explained. "So, those were the two main areas that allowed us to improve as the season went on."

For Acalanes, who topped Piedmont, Justin-Siena and Livermore on the path to the NCS championship showdown with Drake, sophomore Lexi Rowell and freshman Brooke Westphal were responsible for the majority of the damage on the offensive end.

"Those are kind of our four

most indispensable players," Buchel said of the quartet of Maisano, Wentzel, Rowell and Westphal.

Playing in the NCS D1 bracket, the No. 2 seed Mats lost 8-7 to San Ramon Valley in the championship game hosted at Acalanes on Nov. 12.

"We just lost a barn-burner to the defending champions San Ramon Valley," said head coach Noel Murphy, whose team finished with a 22-6 record. "It was a great game by the Lady Mats, but we win graciously and we lose graciously. Great sportsmanship by my girls this year and (against San Ramon Valley)."

In the defeat to the top-seed San Ramon Valley, the junior Kelly Murphy poured in five goals, while juniors Grace Tehaney and Skylar Savar both chipped in a goal apiece.

"This is another 20-win season that this program has had back-to-back now," said Murphy, who praised co-coach John Felix and the rest of the coaching staff for helping the Mats win a second consecutive league crown. "It's exciting to see. The girls are buying into team unity."

The Mats advanced to the title game by beating Freedom and Amador Valley in the opening rounds and then topping Campolindo 8-2 in the semifinals on Nov. 9 in Orinda.

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Bella Wentzel



Ella Maisano

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