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Campolindo, Miramonte boys' hoops teams bow out of NorCals

By Karl Buscheck



Lev Garcia Photo Gint Federas

Following Campolindo's near upset of the favored Vista del Lago in the second round of the CIF State Boys Regional Championship, the Cougars were left to wonder what could have been.

Playing in Folsom at the home gym of the No. 2 seed Eagles, the seventh-seeded Cougars carried a 57-45 advantage into the final stanza on March 11 before falling in overtime, 70-66. The late loss put Campolindo in an ambivalent state following their NorCal exit.

When asked if the lost opportunity against the highly rated opponent had the Cougars feeling encouraged or extra frustrated, head coach Steven Dyer said, "Prob-

ably some of both.

"It's a game that our guys expected to win and we felt like we played well enough to win it," Dyer added. "But we did not play a great fourth quarter and that kind of led us to not winning that game."

Campolindo finished the year 20-11 overall and 7-3 in league play, which was good for a second-place tie in the Foothill division of the DAL.

"We definitely represented ourselves pretty well going up to a school that was a No. 2 seed and a very good basketball team," Dyer said. "It was probably the tallest team we'd seen all year."

Campolindo advanced to the second round of the competition after handling the No. 10 seed Sanger, 58-53, in Moraga on March 8.

"Ultimately, we look back on it (and think), 'Yeah, we're pretty pleased with how we did, but not satisfied because we feel like we could have won,'" Dyer said.

After the overtime buzzer sounded following the Campolindo's second-round defeat, Dyer gathered his team to thank the veterans and inspire the young Cougars.

"It's tough because this is the last time this team will ever play together," Dyer said. "But mainly I was just thanking the seniors for all contributions this year because they won't be playing with us anymore. Also, I was encouraging the younger guys that there's more (to come) and telling them to remember this feeling and hopefully we can get past this round

in coming years."

Dyer highlighted the play of Lev Garcia – one of the team's departing seniors – junior guard Trevin Kroichick and the other three members of the starting five.

"In terms of impact for the season, (freshman) Hunter Clarke, (senior) Chris Wright and (junior) Will Cummins were, from Day 1 to the end, probably our three most consistent guys throughout the year from a production standpoint."

Clarke is one of two Cougar freshman – along with Carter Mahaney – who promises to be a building block for years. In the loss to Vista del Lago, Clarke and Mahaney were Campolindo's two leading scorers.

"We knew these guys were very talented coming in, and Hunter from Day 1 has really been a high-level player," Dyer said. "And I think Carter, the light kind of turned on about halfway through the season."

"The sky's the limit for those guys as long as they keep working hard," Dyer added. "So I'm really looking forward to their progression in the offseason here heading into their sophomore year."

Like the Cougars, Miramonte played in the Division 3 NorCal postseason, landing the No. 11 seed in the bracket. To cap head coach Wayne Hunter's first season with the program, Miramonte fell in the opening round, 63-57, to six seed Monterey on March 8.

"It was huge for us," Hunter said of the NorCal appearance after only taking over in October. "I talk about the circumstances, the



Charlie Hocking

late start, not being able to build in the spring.

"I thought my boys competed and they gave it their all," Hunter said. "And, obviously, they were just couple of plays short of winning a few more games, but just making it to the playoffs in general, that is a huge accomplishment."

The Mats, (16-13, 5-5), will lose senior captain Charlie Hocking among others, but Hunter believes a culture has been established which will ensure future success.

"I want to highlight my returners," Hunter said. "So I want to highlight (junior wing) Nikhil Shastri and (sophomore point guard) Jayson Fernbacher."

Baseball squads use preseason slate to gear up for league play

By Karl Buscheck

The Miramonte baseball team has never cared much about what outsiders think of the program. Last spring, the Mats landed the No. 12 seed in the NCS Division 2 playoffs only to advance all the way to semifinals where they lost to Acalanes, the eventual champs.

"If you ask me who is going to win NCS, I'll say that I'll tell you the day after," head coach Vince Dell'Aquila joked, as he recalled last spring's run.

"That's kind of always been my mantra with the kids," Dell'Aquila explained. "They're like, 'Oh, we're ranked this we're ranked that.' And I'll say, 'You know what? I'll tell you what the rankings are at the end of the season.'"

This time around, the Mats have been buzzing past the competition in the early going, posting an unblemished 8-0 record in non-league play.

Miramonte boosts a deep pitching staff headlined by senior captains Tim Tague, Casey McGonigle and EJ Hodges. Hodges also spends time in the outfield for the Mats,

who begin DAL Foothill Conference action by paying a visit to Las Lomas on April 18.

"We know we're going to get better as the season goes on," Dell'Aquila said. "That's the way it's always been because we do the right things – give the boys a day off here and there – so when they get into late May they're still loving it. They're still playing hard."

Before league play commences, the Mats will once again match up with Acalanes, a member of the Valley Conference, in Lafayette on March 28.

"It's always fun to play against Miramonte," head coach Justin Santich-Hughes said. "I'm glad we were able to make that happen even though we are now in a league where we don't play each other. Vince's clubs are always well coached and prepared, which is good for our guys to play against because it forces us to have a high level of focus."

The Dons, who went 26-2 overall last season (12-0 in DAL) on the way to NCS and league titles – as well as the No. 15 rank-

ing in the state, per MaxPreps – have been bumped into D1.

"We are the only team (out of all sports) district wide that is competing at that level," Santich-Hughes explained. "With that said our expectations don't change, we set out to win an NCS championship but the road will be extremely difficult."

In the quest for yet another section title, the Dons will lean heavily on a cavalcade of veterans.

"Josh Candau (UC Santa Barbara commit) was an all-state pitcher last year who returns for us and we hope has a great season for us. Seniors Matt Burns, Will Rembac, Ty Ewing and Daniel Kim should lead us offensively while Seniors Matt Vicencio and Kevin McConnell (Utah Valley Commit) will be great compliments to Candau along with Junior Brian Merken."

Like the Dons, the Campolindo Cougars are one of six members of the DAL's Foothill Conference. Campolindo, who entered the week of March 19 with an 3-2 record, is still searching for its identity as a squad.

"The goal right now is figuring ourselves out," explained head coach Max Luckhurst.

After previously overseeing the Cougars' program for 16 years, Luckhurst is back at the helm for the first season of his second stint.

"We're very young and not very experienced," Luckhurst added. "So we're using the early part of the year – and obviously the rain was an issue so we got a late start – but the goals are to get better every day and be able to put ourselves in a position to be able to compete for championship at the end of the year."

The Cougars begin league on April 18 with a trip to Northgate, and in the interim, the team's emerging hitters and pitchers will get the chance to earn at-bats and innings.

"There's a lot of different guys who are getting opportunities to play and trying to figure out roles and who's able to step up in certain positions," Luckhurst said. "By the time we start league, hopefully we're a little bit further along and putting ourselves in a good position to be able to compete after the 24 games."

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