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Campo volleyball tops Foothill Conference, Acalanes leads the Valley

By Karl Buscheck



Gage Worsley Photos Gint Federas

Campolindo - the leader of the DAL Foothill Conference - and Acalanes - the frontrunner in the Valley Conference - could be headed for an NCS showdown.

The Cougars, who sport an unblemished 10-0 mark in league (25-3 overall) ended up on the right side of the score line in the regular-season meeting, handling Acalanes 3-0 in Moraga on April 26.

"I feel that only recently, and I mean within the past week recently, we have started to find some stability and understanding of the path we need to pursue in order to be as successful as possible for the post season," head coach Dave Chen explained.

Ranked No. 44 in the state by MaxPreps, the Cougars have a simple plan for the spring: advance to the NCS Division II championship, secure a title and compete in the NorCal tournament.

No player has been more essential to the success of the high-powered club than the Cougars' senior outside hitter.

"Gage Worsley, is easily the most dominant player in the area," Chen declared. "I'm not saying that because he will be playing for the University of Hawaii next year, and I'm not saying that because he's on our team. Through his volleyball lifetime, he as devoted himself to his craft and it shows."

Aside from his in-game excellence, Worsley has also made his mark on the Cougars behind the scenes.

"His ability to communicate and be there for his team this year parallels his athletic prowess on the court," Chen said. "Especially with a young group who is looking for guidance and direction his leadership has been a focal point for us this year."

Like the Cougars, the Valley Conference-leading Dons (7-0 in league, 24-6 overall) have lived up to the hype.

"I had pretty high, but I thought, realistic expectations of us being a top two or three team in North Coast and giving us a good - especially in Division 2 - shot of getting to the final and hopefully winning it," head coach Mason Mulvaney said.

While the league schedule has yet to conclude, Mulvaney knows his Dons could get a second crack at the Cougars in the weeks to come.

"I think it's probably going to be a highlight of the (regular) season," Mulvaney said of the recent matchup. "Hopefully we'll see them in the playoffs as well."

Mulvaney's squad has called on two stars, the first of which is Connor McCarthy - a senior captain and a four-year varsity player - who the coach plans to vote for as league MVP.

"The team all around has been phenomenal, but especially Connor McCarthy," Mulvaney said. "He plays opposite on our team and he's probably our strongest all-around player."

The second is Carter Smith, a middle hitter who only started playing volleyball as a sophomore.

"He's 6-foot-7. (He's a) physically dominant player," Mulvaney said of the senior captain. "I think if you talk to the Campo program or anyone that knows they're going to play us, that's the person they'll focus on and kind of game plan around."

Miramonte, owner of a 2-13 record overall (0-8 in Foothill Conference play), also calls on a pair of veteran captains to pilot the team.

"(Junior) Nick Luckenbach is a co-captain and has shown a tremendous amount of leadership this season," head coach Lisa Bachtold said. "He brings the team together and keeps them focused. (Senior) Sam Foster, the other co-captain, has been very productive for us in the middle. He definitely has a presence on the court and comes up with amazing blocks and is one of our main offensive weapons."

The Mats will cap off the league slate by hosting Campolindo on May 4 in their home gym in Orinda.

"We went to five (sets) with Campo last time we faced them," Bachtold said. "We look forward to senior night being a competitive match."



Connor McCarthy

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