

# LAMORINDA SPORTS

## Dons aim for top spot in DAL standings

By Karl Buscheck



Megan Bower



Sydni Gordon



Marina Carr

Photos Gint Federas

Not even Victor Silva, the head coach of the youthful Acalanes softball team, could have imagined just how much his club would grow in the opening months of the 2017 season.

"Believe me," Silva said. "If you had (told) me at the beginning of the season that we'd be (4-0 in league and 12-2 overall), I'd say, 'No way.' Because we're so young."

Asked to explain the success, Silva points to the facts that the Dons are always serious and ready to learn on the practice diamond and that the group has been busy building camaraderie off the field with an unprecedented amount of team dinners, lunches and bonding.

It also helps that the team can lead on the guidance of a trio of senior captains in first baseman/outfielder Marina Carr, outfielder Jazz Boynton and pitcher/second baseman/outfielder Brooke Panfili.

"They've made my job really easy," Silva said. "If the kids get out of line, they rein them in quickly. It's just gone so smoothly - I can't tell you. It's been a pleasure."

The Dons topped Campolindo 13-6 in eight innings on April 25 in Moraga, blanked Mt. Diablo at home a couple of days later and pay a visit to their other rival - Miramonte on May 9.

"Those games mean a lot. They mean more than any other individual game," Silva said of facing off with the Mats and the Cougars. "But our goal is to win as many games as we can."

In the race for the top spot in the DAL Valley Conference, the fiercest competition will come from co-leader Las Lomas, who also has a perfect 4-0 mark. The Dons and Knights conclude DAL portion of the schedule with a meeting in Lafayette on May 18 in Walnut Creek.

"Every game's a battle, but

Las Lomas looks like they're going to be our toughest foe," Silva said. "After league, we'll focus on NCS, but right now we're just trying to win league."

With a 2-2 mark in league (4-4 overall), the Cougars own the third spot in the Valley Conference. Campolindo has navigated a tumultuous start to the season, losing seven players off last year's roster - including three starters.

As a result, the Cougars are fielding a starting nine that features four players who entered the spring brand new to the sport.

"It's been a different year from what we expected," head coach Wayne Stephens admitted. "But actually, it's been a very good year because right now in league we're 2-2. So, even though we do have girls who are without experience at the varsity level - or any level period - we're actually doing pretty well."

Due to the dynamics of the roster, Stephens has counted heavily on the help of his three captains. Sydni Gordon - an infielder/outfielder - is the only senior on the roster, Katelyn Poole is a sophomore returner and the starting catcher and Tara McAteer is a sophomore transfer from Las Lomas who pitches and plays first.

"A huge credit for them for being able to not only help us coaches but help the girls who are not experienced at all and making sure they try to get them up to speed as much as possible as quick as possible," Stephens said.

Over in Orinda, the Mats have produced a 1-3 start in the Valley Conference and a 3-11 record overall, but head coach Steve Renfro isn't letting the struggles bog down the squad.

"Our measurement of success is not our win/loss record," Renfro said. "Although we enjoy winning, our success is about the process of learning and growth. This team of girls has demonstrated excellent work ethics and attitudes and are determined to give everything they have. Truly, they have been a joy to coach, and I enjoy watching them achieve incremental successes."

As the Mats build for the future, the team's up-and-coming players need look no further than junior Megan Bower when it comes to being a star on the field and leading off it.

"Megan Bower has been our team leader in production since arriving at Miramonte, shattering all known hitting records," Renfro said. "As an early commit to Santa Clara University, Megan is one of the best hitters I have had the privilege of coaching, and is an all-around great player."

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