

Published May 31st, 2017

Miramonte and Campolindo set to meet in NCS baseball semifinals

By Karl Buscheck



Tim Tague Photo Gint Federas

In his 26 seasons in charge of the Miramonte baseball program, head coach Vince Dell'Aquila had never piloted an undefeated team.

That was, until this spring when the Mats raced through the DAL Valley Conference with a spotless 10-0 mark and entered the NCS D III semifinals with a perfect 26-0 record.

Recognizing the gravity of what his team was achieving, Dell'Aquila has made a point - from the opening weeks of the seasons - to make sure the Mats have been enjoying the ride.

"I tell the guys after every game that I'm really proud of them," Dell'Aquila said. "It seems like as we got started, every four or five games, I'd be telling them that because it really is amazing. We got to game eight, game 12, game 16 and I knew that the pressure was probably mounting on them. And I just wanted them to know that I was really proud of them no matter what happened next."

Headlined by star pitchers Tim Tague (senior) and Sam Liang (junior), the Valley Conference winners entered the postseason as the No. 1 seed. They proceed to dispatch No. 16 Las Lomas, 5-2, in the opening round on May 23 in Orinda and handle No. 8 Albany, 12-3, on May 25 at home in the quarterfinals.

That set up a semifinals clash with neighboring Campolindo (13-12 overall, 5-5 in league), on May 30 in Orinda. The Cougars, who are the No. 5 seed in the bracket, opened up NCS by topping No. 12 Arcata, 7-6, at home on May 24, and edging past No. 4 Kennedy, 7-6, in Fremont on May 27. Head coach Max Luckhurst couldn't point to any particular players powering the club's postseason run, instead offering credit to the roster at large.

"We don't have the standout guy on the mound. We don't have the standout guy at the plate," Luckhurst said. "We're just competing. We just ask them to compete."

As the final stages of the playoffs approach, Luckhurst is also asking his team to have fun.

"Oh you get down to this. This is why you play the 24 games (of the regular season)," Luckhurst said. "This is why you've been practicing since February 6."

While the Mats and Cougars are playing in the D III bracket, the Dons took part in the D I competition. Acalanes earned the No. 7 seed, exiting to No. 10 Berkeley, 2-1, in Lafayette in the opening round on May 24.

For a Dons team anchored by senior outfielders Will Rembac and Daniel Kim, simply advancing to the top tier of NCS play was far from a lock throughout the spring.

Playing in their first season at the D I level, Acalanes had the second-highest strength of schedule rating in the section - behind only De la Salle. The team also had to dig its way out of a big hole after a slumberous beginning to the spring.

"The most impressive part was that we started the season off 4-9 and really looking like we may not qualify for playoffs," head coach Justin Santich-Hughes said. "The fact we finished 12-12 and alone in second place in league speaks volumes to the character this team has."

"It could have been really easy to crumble under the 4-9 start," Santich-Hughes added. "But credit to kids on our team they just kept working and that to me is what makes the No. 7 seed impressive."

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA