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Campo reaches semifinals of NorCal regional volleyball tournament

By Karl Buscheck



Photo Gint Federas

The Campolindo boys volleyball team advanced all the way to the CIF NorCal Division II regional semifinals before their season came to an end in a 3-2 loss to No. 4 seed Saratoga on May 25 in Moraga.

For the Cougars, the defeat also brought an end to the team's 15-match win streak, leaving the group with a final record of 31-4 overall and 11-0 in DAL play. Head coach Dave Chen knew just the type of challenge

the No. 1 seed Cougars were in for in the NorCal championships, which pits the top programs from around the region against each other.

"The teams in the other sections have been battle tested through their own regular season and section playoff runs," Chen explained. "They all pose matchup challenges as each team has several top-caliber players that have helped to bring them to this point."

Campolindo had reached the NorCal semifinals after blitzing the No. 8 seed Rio Americano, 3-0, in Round 1 at home on May 23.

The squad had earned the No. 1 seed in NorCals after charging through the regular season and NCS. The DAL Foothill conference winners also claimed the No. 1 seed in the NCS D II bracket on their way to securing the section title. The Cougars buzzed through the NCS competition, winning 3-0, 3-1 and 3-1.

"The one seed is always an honor to get," Chen said. "It's nice to be recognized and that your regular-season accomplishments garnered the top seed. However, regardless of the top seed or not, the playoffs are a totally different story. Every team seems to step up their game a few more notches to a new intensity (level) and focus. As the top seed, the intensity level teams brought against us was very high."

For the Cougars, who ended the spring as MaxPrep's No. 39 team in the state, a pair of senior leaders guided the group to the finals stages of the NorCal regional tournament.

Zack Duffy was named a captain for his

ability to hold the team accountable on and off the court, while Gage Worsley impressed the coaching staff with his passionate yet light-hearted approach.

"We all know how dominant of a player he can be," Chen said of Worsley. "But for all of us behind the scenes, he has a way of communicating to all the players, new and old, and being relatable to convey his message."

While the Cougars played into the NorCals, Acalanes – the winners of the DAL Valley Conference – made it to the semifinals of the NCS D II tournament before bowing out of the postseason.

The Dons, who were seeded second in the competition, lost 3-2 to No. 3 seed Redwood (the team that would go on to lose to Campolindo in the finals) on May 16 in Lafayette.

Captained by the senior trio of Connor McCarthy, Bijan Shahabi and Carter Smith, the Dons arrived in the semifinals showdown after flying past No. 10 Drake, 3-0, on May 13 in their home gym in Lafayette. Acalanes ended the season with a 28-7 record overall and a 10-0 mark in DAL Valley Conference play.

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 quar-

terfinals.

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."

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