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Lamorinda Boys Water Polo Preview

By Jon Kingdon

The Acalanes Boys Water Polo Team, following Miramonte's lead from last season, is celebrating its 50th anniversary this season. Coach Russ Stryker who played on two championship teams when he attended Acalanes understands and appreciates the history of the program and the responsibility and pressure for the team to have a successful year.

"We're in a tough league and our goal is to win the North Coast," Stryker said.

Having lost four starters to graduation, this is going to be a young team, although the team has a particularly deep junior class.

Stryker's main concern is the team's lack of experience, having to rely on eight new players coming up from last year's JV team. This is going to put some pressure on the team's seniors to provide the leadership for the underclassmen.

"The most important thing is for me to see the team coming together and I hope to see this in our scrimmages," Stryker said.

Acalanes will be utilizing a movement offense. The players leading the offense will be junior attacker Jake Stone who was first team all league last season. Other attackers who will be relied upon include seniors Bennett Winther and Jacob Parker, and junior Max Stryker.

Senior Jed Wood is going to be making a transition from field player to goalie and will be the key to holding the defense together.

Acalanes will be opening their season at home on Sept. 5 against Tamalpais.

On Oct. 6, the Dons will travel to Irvine for the Southern California Invitational.

Campolindo Coach Miles Price has lost four starters to graduation. Ironically he is excited about what he sees as a veteran team. "We have six seniors that should all contribute in one way or the other and seven juniors that will contribute as well. Depth is going to be our greatest strength. This team is more balanced than any I've coached."

With such a balanced roster, Price sees the team as "open for any of the players to step up as the season progresses."

Two of the players that Price is relying on for leadership are goalie Ben Miller and driver/attacker Michael Wheeler.

Campolindo will be utilizing a run and gun system. Price wants his team to press other teams defensively and to put them on their heels.

Even though Campo is a veteran team, Price feels it's important for the team to build cohesion. "We need the players to trust in each other."

Entering his sixth year at Campolindo, Price attributes the successes of his team to "bringing in a top staff and once that happened, a positive momentum grew with the players buying into our system."

Price is looking forward to major tournaments, opening the season on Sept. 7 in Santa Barbara and The San Diego Tournament beginning on Sept. 21, to measure his team against the top competition in the state.

Miramonte, a team with a strong tradition, having won the NCS 15 times since 1995, once again enters the season with great optimism, having lost only three starters to graduation.

Coach James Lathrop will be counting on his three captains to provide both talent and leadership for the Matadors. The three seniors are attackers Mikey Davis, Will Creed and goalie Duncan Creed.

Lathrop is still trying to establish who the rest of his starting team is going to be. "We're still trying to find out our team identity and am looking forward to the journey," Lathrop said.

On offense, Lathrop has a lot of options with a number of last year's substitutes looking to step forward as starters and he has a number of new players as well. "We're a young team. My job is to figure out each player's role. We have to improve as a unit and the key to this is that we be a team that is aware, focused and disciplined."

Defense looks to be the real strength of the team. As with each unit, Lathrop wants to establish the right attitude: "We want to get better, we want to always give a top effort and always want to win and the players take this attitude seriously."

With 25 players on the team roster, Lathrop has let the players know that there are a lot of open opportunities for the players to step up and establish themselves as contributors.

Lathrop appreciates the strong tradition of Miramonte Water Polo as they enter their 51st season. He feels that someone like Bill Brown who has been involved in some capacity with the team for every one of those seasons, epitomizes the culture that attracts so many players to his program.

Miramonte is playing two major tournaments: Opening their season at The Elite Eight at Harvard-Westlake High School in Southern California starting on Sept. 8 and The SoCal tournament in Irvine beginning on Oct. 8.

Lathrop believes that playing against the top teams in the state will "allow us to keep our focus and is great preparation for our league play in the NCS."

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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