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Lamorinda Girls Water Polo Preview

By Jon Kingdon

It's been said that no good deed goes unpunished.

The Acalanes Dons, coming off a very successful season as NCS Division II champions, don't feel they are being punished but rather are being rewarded by moving up for the first time to the more difficult Division I level.

Normally there is some pressure on a team when they win a championship to repeat that success. However, with the step up in competition, Coach Misha Buchel says that the team is able to "avoid the pressure of being the hunted. It's a different type of challenge but the girls are excited at the opportunity and this was our goal prior to last season."

The Dons come into the season with a great deal of confidence, having graduated only one starter.

However that starter was the team's goalie. The battle for that position will be between junior Laurie Garfein and freshman Ava Donleavy. This is a key position not just for preventing goals but the goalie is essential to making the long passes and taking advantage of the opportunities as they come available.

Buchel feels that the team needs to "find more consistent offensive play to go along with our defense."

Senior Bella Wentzel is one of the leaders Buchel is counting on to maintain the team's top defensive play.

On offense, the Dons will be relying on attackers, senior Ryan Hagglund, junior Lexi Rowell and sophomore Brook Westphal.

The team opens their season against Tamalpais on Sept. 5.

Buchel is also pointing to the Acalanes Girls Invitational the weekend of Sept. 11 when they will be hosting a number of teams including Campolindo, Miramonte, San Ramon and Monte Vista. It will be a full weekend with each team playing four games. The games will be played at both Acalanes and Campolindo high schools.

Coach Kim Everist, beginning her 13th year at Campolindo, faces the challenge of replacing four starters lost to graduation. Playing in such a difficult league with so much parity does not make it any easier.

Everist is relying on character and fundamentals to bring the team together: "We are stressing breaking habits, being in top condition and developing great team chemistry. We want a great culture where everyone will be held accountable. We simply want the players to play to the best of their ability."

When asked to describe her offensive philosophy, Everist puts it very simply: "Attack - Attack - Attack. We want to engage with the defense and we will always be working for positive possessions."

Leading the offense will be senior attacker Katy Klein and center Erin Neustrom.

The same aggressiveness should be evident on defense as well as Everist is stressing a press and drive defense, an attitude of grit and guts.

Everist attributes the success of her teams to having the players buy into the philosophy of "Team First - Self last."

Miramonte, coming off a second place finish in their first year in Division I last season, enters this year with a very optimistic attitude, having lost no starters to graduation. In fact, five of these players have been starters since their sophomore season. The five are attackers, Kelly Murphy and Carson Broad, lefty center, Grace Tehaney, center Katrina Drake and center-defender Skylar Savor.

This will be Lance Morrison's first season as the Matador's head coach, having been promoted from last year's JV team and he appreciates what a rare opportunity it is to take over such a veteran, talented team. "Our offensive power is huge," Morrison said. "I've never seen a team with this much power. We can score from any position in the pool."

Handling such talent should be difficult but Morrison said that "the girls have all been very adaptable to whatever systems we have installed. I am trying to work to the strengths of each of the girls."

Holding the team's defense together will be junior goalie Savannah Sherwood. According to Morrison, "Savannah has shown amazing growth since her freshman year. She brings great length, height and athleticism to the position. She helps to direct traffic on the defensive end."

Even with such an impressive group of starters, Morrison said, "We are going to need our underclassman to be ready to come in and spell the starters."

There are a number of players that should be able to fill these roles. Two-meter sophomore Sally Fellner and utility freshman Fiona Young are just two of many underclassmen that will be competing for playing time.

Morrison says the ultimate key for the team is to get on the same page in the pool and maintain the right attitude out of the pool as well. Most importantly, Morrison wants the girls to "appreciate how rare an opportunity this is to play on such a potentially successful team."

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