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## Lamorinda girls volleyball preview

By Jon Kingdon



Theresa Nevins Photos Gint Federas

Coming off a very successful 2016 season with a state championship, Acalanes High School girls volleyball faces a real challenge to match that success having graduated four starters. Knowing that the Dons are going to be targeted due to their prior success, Coach Ernie Rodriguez is trying to keep it simple: "I expect the girls to play hard and to do their best. I want us to work well as a team and be cohesive. Just as important, I want the players to enjoy our team as a team. All the players are involved with each other. There is a great commitment from the players."

Rodriguez is relying strongly on the talent and leadership of seniors, middle blocker and three-year starter Theresa Nevins, three-year starter setter Maddi Kalil, and Zoe Mc Phail, the team's libero. New starters, junior Grade Higgins as outside hitter and Kaitlyn Mckendell as a defensive specialist, will also be key players on the team.

Rodriguez wants his team to "manage situations - putting the ball where it needs to go. Our front line needs to understand the other team's defense and get kills. I feel that we have depth at all positions, however we need to make sure that we finish games when the game is on the line."

The defense may well be the strength of the team, as the team will be carrying four defensive specialists this year.

Rodriguez is pointing to the Nike Tournament, which will be played in Arizona. The team departs for the tournament on Sept. 28. "There will be 98 teams from 33 states and three countries. Due to our success last season, we were honored (to be part of) this tournament. It should be a great tune-up for us."

After another successful season at Campolindo High School, having won the NCS championship, the Cougars have lost six starters to graduation. Such a loss of so many starters would keep most coaches up nights, but head coach John Vuong just rolls with the punches and reloads with another group of seniors.

There were 80 players who tried out for the Campolindo volleyball teams and Vuong had the difficult task of cutting the teams down to 16 on the varsity and 12 each on the JV and freshmen teams. With so many players, Vuong is able to use a lot of rotation and "we have some very competitive practices."

On offense, the Cougars will be led by outside hitters Vanessa Vaisnor and Cameron Blakely.

Sophomore Audrey Pak will be counted on as the team's setter.

Though smaller than last year's team, Vuong believes the team's strength "will be more quickness and our tempo game. Our defense should be very consistent as well."

Vuong is confident that this team will be able to come together in spite of all the new personnel: "The girls have all been playing together for the last three years and I feel that we are ahead of where we were in many other seasons. We have had a lot of success bringing the girls together with team bonding sessions, retreats and even meditation exercises."

In spite of playing in a very competitive league, Vuong welcomes "the bulls-eye on our back. We will be playing in the Nike tournament down in Torrey Pines against a number of top teams, but that's how we learn to compete."

Miramonte High School head coach Lisa Bachtold comes into the season having to replace four starters.

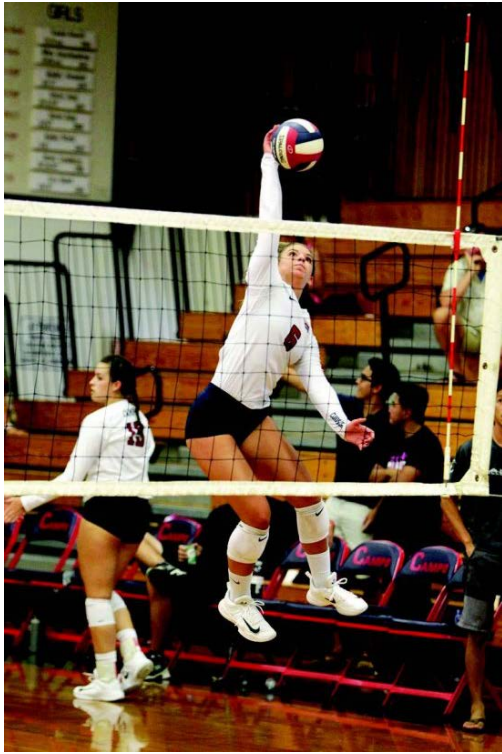
Having lost their main offensive weapons, Bachtold's first goal is to come up with the right combination of players to fill out the starting lineup.

The two senior co-captains this year, middle Claire Swan and setter Tatiana Lucvano, bring a combined

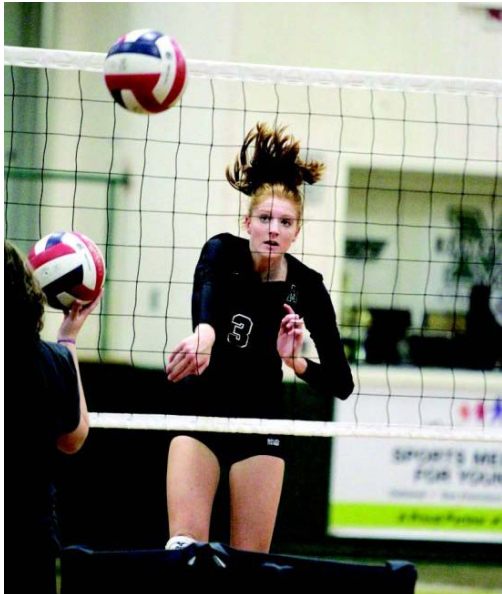
seven years of varsity experience.

Bachtold will be looking to a collection of returning players and the new additions to step up and fill open roster spots. With so many potential new players, Bachtold says, "It will be important for all players to contribute this season. Our philosophy is to work hard and have fun while being mindful of the situation at hand."

When faced with any type of adversity this season, the Matadors can always fall back on what they feel is the strongest aspect of their game: excellent ball control.



Vanessa Vaisnor



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