

Published November 29th, 2017

Miramonte wins NorCal CIF Championship

By Jon Kingdon



Kelly Murphy Photos Gint Federas

Another successful season has concluded for the Lamorinda Girls Water Polo teams. With a combined won-lost record of 69 and 11, the Acalanes, Campolindo and Miramonte high school teams can all lay claim to having had successful seasons.

All three schools made the playoffs: Acalanes (21-5) won their first two playoff games and lost 9-8 in triple overtime against Monte Vista, the team that made it to the NorCal CIF Championship game; Campolindo (18-6) won their first two playoff games and then lost to Miramonte 12-6, the ultimate NorCal CIF champion; and Miramonte (30-0) closed out their season defeating Monte Vista (for the fifth time this season) in the championship match 13-5.

Coming into the season, Miramonte coach Lance Morrison knew that he had a team with great talent and potential. Morrison understood the pressure he was facing: "The hardest thing is not getting to the top, it's

staying there that is the most difficult thing. Our coaches made sure that the kids stayed grounded and took care of business."

To win the Nov. 18 championship, Miramonte was going to have to play two games, first versus Davis, a team Miramonte had defeated by only one goal. This time, Miramonte prevailed over Davis 7-4. Morrison knew his team was ready for the rematch: "We had been missing two starters the first time we played. The girls understood how close it was before. We only gave up one goal per quarter versus Davis. Even though our offense was not clicking, we kept our composure on defense."

Having to play two games in one day can be a difficult task. Morrison actually saw this as an advantage for his team: "I believe this was actually an advantage for us for two reasons: we have such great depth and our goal from the first day was to be the most conditioned team in the pool."

This was the sixth time Miramonte faced and defeated Monte Vista, outscoring them by a combined score of 62 to 32. Morrison did not allow the team to get overconfident: "The girls' mindset was to accept the challenge and not give in to that pressure."

Defending a championship is never easy, but Morrison is up for the challenge: "Replacing the seniors is going to be hard but we have a lot of young talent. If they put the work in during the offseason, we will continue to be a force to be reckoned with. This is a very competitive league and Acalanes and Campolindo should have qualified for the NorCal Championships.

We look forward to the new challenges."

The cliché that sports is a game of inches was driven home to Acalanes coach Misha Buchel. In their playoff loss to Monte Vista, a last second shot in regulation by his team hit the bar of the goal and then caromed off the goalie and somehow did not end up in the goal. Buchel was somewhat philosophical over losing such a game: "You never want to lose a game like that but if you're going to lose, you'd rather lose in a great game."

Playing in such a competitive division can bring out the best in some teams. Buchel finds great satisfaction in his team: "It was a successful season. It's the best record we've had since 2005. Talent wise, we were as good as we have been. Our only disappointment was not being able to play in the big tournament."

Buchel brought a philosophy of "versatility" to his players that he feels attributed to the team's success: "I try to make sure that, outside of the goalie position, we develop the whole, well rounded player. They have to be able to move to another position as needed."

Buchel is optimistic for the future: "We only lost a couple of seniors and are primed for a nice run of success. We will miss Bella Wentzel who will be going to UCLA next year but we will have a wide cross section of leadership for next season led by Lexi Rowell, Jewel Roemer and Brooke Westphal."

Campolindo head coach Kim Everist accepts the challenge of being in such a competitive league, with two playoff victories prior to the loss to Miramonte: "I would call it a successful season. We are always disappointed to not be in the NorCal finals but there are a lot of things that we strive for outside of wins and losses."

Coming into the season with a number of new players due to senior graduations, Everist stressed the philosophy of "Team First - Self Last." She credits her six seniors, particularly the team's captains, Katie Klein, Erin Neustrom and Sidney Vranesh for much of the team's success: "A big part of what we needed this season was the right chemistry. Their leadership was great and held everyone accountable and kept everyone on the same mission. They were able to find those things within themselves. We had great consistency and I am super proud of this team."

Replacing Katie Klein, a staple on the team since her freshman year, is going to be the most difficult task for next year's team. Campolindo will be returning 13 seniors all of whom Everist feels will contribute to next year's team in one way or another, singling out Jessica Henningsen, Christina Crum, Zoe Crouch and Camryn Sutter to lead both in and outside the pool.

Even with a large number of seniors, underclassmen Nina Munson and Lola Ciruli with other underclassmen are being counted on as well. Everist describes next year's team as being "senior heavy with a young group."



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