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High school basketball league season ends

By Jon Kingdon



Trevin Kroichick Photo Gint Federas

At the beginning of the season, there was one constant among the Lamorinda coaches: they were playing in a very difficult and competitive division. With the top two teams Las Lomas and Clayton Valley finishing the regular season with 25-2 and 24-2 won lost records respectively, the battle for the locals was to make the North Coast Section playoffs. Acalanes, Campolindo and Miramonte had a combined league record of 8-22. As a testament to the strength of their division, these three teams had a combined non-league record of 37-16. If there was a particular highlight of the league season, it would have to be Campolindo's double overtime victory over Clayton Valley by a score of 100-98.

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche said, "That which doesn't kill us, makes us stronger."

Campolindo head coach Steven Dyer has taken that philosophy to heart and appreciates how it has turned out so far: "We had a very challenging schedule. We had a difficult nonleague schedule and played in a very competitive league as well."

Making it to the NCS finals before losing to Salesian College Prep 67-53, Dyer stayed true to his coaching schemes that have enabled Campolindo to be so successful in the postseason: "We just stayed the course. We did not make a lot of adjustments during the

season, knowing our league and nonleague schedule was preparing us for the playoffs and now the state tournament."

Four teams Campolindo played - Clayton Valley, Las Lomas, St. Joseph and St. Mary's (Stockton) - went well into the playoffs, certainly evidencing the point Dyer is making. How well the competition has prepared Campolindo for the post season is shown in how they have dominated their prior playoff games, with victories over San Marin (83- 39) and Albany (64-43), prior to the NCS championship game.

Relying on his core seniors, Trevin Kroichick, Will Cummins and John Torchio enabled the Cougars to handle any setbacks, according to Dyer. "These three-year varsity players brought a lot of experience to the team and we looked to them as our main leaders. We did not let a loss spill over into our next game and we came away with a lot of good wins."

Sophomore Carter Mahaney has stepped in as the leader on the floor, running the offense and David Ahazie has proven to be the most consistent player on the team in his overall play.

Campolindo has called up five players from the JV team for the playoffs and with such one-sided victories, Dyer has been able to utilize these players: "They have gotten some good experience. We will be strong in the future but by no means are we looking beyond this season."

Acalanes' head coach Sol Henik had to hit the ground running, having lost two key players early in the season due to injuries, co-captains Mitchell Smith and Carson Etnyre. Henik sang the praises of his team and its ability to adjust to adversity: "Our guys came together and we grinded out a number of wins playing our style. We used a slower-paced tempo, which gave us the best chance to win. The team bought into the system and believed in each other and the coaches."

With a 12-4 non-league record and a 3-7 in league, it certainly spoke to the strength of the league with Acalanes making the playoffs, losing to Alameda, a team finishing with a 24-5 record.

Henik saw this as a successful season: "We experienced a lot of success. We made the playoffs and earlier in the season we made four championship games in four tournaments and won two of them."

While losing so many seniors to graduation, Henik is counting on two returners, point guard Ian Archer and guard Matt Healy. Says Henik: "Ian was one of our most improved players. He took over the starting role and handled the responsibilities quite well. We are looking for him to improve his game even more. Matt provided so much effort and spark to our team. He just loves to play and I look forward to him really stepping up next season."

The Dons will be counting on several players that played on the JV team this season. Henik is particularly looking to forward freshman Scott Ruegg who Henik describes as "a great outside shooter with a very high basketball IQ."

In spite of the Don's league record, the league did not overlook his team according to Henik: "With Aidan McNamara and Robbie Rowell both named second team all-league, it shows the respect the other coaches had for our team in spite of our league record."

Miramonte head coach Wayne Hunter said entering into league play in such a tough division, "It's a good way to get battle tested." And sometimes it's a bad way to get battle tested. Going winless in league play was likely not the type of test Hunter was looking to confront.

Hunter approached the league season with some optimism with a 9-7 nonleague record. Though lacking in a division win, going 0-10, Miramonte did not go down easily, losing four of these games by five points or less.

Despite utilizing a number of seniors, the Matadors will be returning a number of underclassman that played a great deal of the season.

Junior captain and point guard Jayson Fernbacher will be counted on for his leadership both on and off the court.

Freshman Niyi Olabode was called up early in the season and showed constant improvement throughout the season and should certainly prove to be a force next season.

Reach the reporter at: sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com

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