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Will youth be served in Lamorinda softball?

By Jon Kingdon

The Lamorinda softball teams are all relying on various freshmen and sophomore players to step up and mature quickly. Hopefully this will all happen prior to league play.

Coming off a successful 2017 season (16-5), Acalanes head coach Victor Silva enters this year with a very young team, having only five seniors on the roster. With three juniors, five sophomores and three freshmen, Silva understands that his team will be going through a maturation process: "We are really young. The talent is there but we're making mental mistakes. We're still trying to figure out how to win and finish which his hard with so many sophomores and freshmen. We're trying to get them to believe in themselves."

As an example of this, Acalanes lost to Encinal 7-6 in a game where they committed seven errors, many of which Silva said were mental mistakes.

With such a young team, the leadership of the seniors becomes even more important. Co-captains Kylie Berry and Rosetta Shackett along with Alexis Carlson are being counted on to provide direction.

Despite playing so many underclassmen, Silva is excited about the talent on the team: "We're just going through growing pains. Last year I knew what to expect. I'm not sure about this year's team, but we have the potential to be better than last year."

Berry is being counted on as the ace of the staff. "Kylie is our one pitcher with experience and has to stay healthy," Silva says. "She is a very consistent pitcher that throws strikes and has good movement on the ball." Backing up Berry is freshman Ellie Palma who is "still finding her way."

Leading the offense is shortstop Morgan Salmon, despite only being a freshman. Salmon also plays on the Junior British Olympic softball team, bringing international experience with her. Shackett and Carlson are the other leaders on offense.

Despite some early season missteps, conceding that "defense is the area we need to improve," Silva expects his defense to become more consistent. "Every position is solid and we have good speed. We should be able to improve our defense as the year progresses."

When sophomore Kaylee Pond went down with a major knee injury last December, it was a blow to both the Acalanes basketball and softball teams. Pond, who has already committed to Iowa State University upon graduation, would have been the Don's third baseman and will be counted on for next season.

As young as Acalanes is, Campolindo takes it a step further having only one senior on their roster, four juniors and 11 sophomores and freshmen. Head coach Wayne Stephens appreciates the effort being put forth by the team: "It's a very hard-working team. All the girls are doing what they can to get better trying to get to the highest level. It's getting them exposed to the speed of varsity level softball."

Leading the team on the field are juniors, pitcher Tara McAteer and catcher Katelyn Poole, who led the league in hitting last season.

Like Silva, Stephens is also relying heavily on a freshman, shortstop Abbie Lee. Says Stephens: "Abbie has been huge for us. She is the key to our infield and I am confident in her play. She has had a lot of experience in tournament ball and is already a leader on the team."

Looking for more depth in his offense, Stephens is counting on two other freshmen, Kaitlyn Dowdall and designated hitter, Jordan Roberts. Roberts is playing organized softball for the first time after focusing on tennis. According to Stephens, Roberts' tennis stroke has proven to be a natural transition for her baseball swing.

To Stephens, the key for a successful season is simple: "We have to stay healthy. With the girls working hard and showing constant improvement, our goal is to compete for the league championship and go deep in the NCS playoffs."

Taking on the responsibility of leading the Miramonte team, first-year and first-time head coach Melody Wall is flashing back to her days on the softball field at Encinal High School. Fortunately for Wall, the players are rallying around her, much to her appreciation. "The girls want to be out there and improve," she says. "They very much love the game and have been very helpful to me in our practices."

With neither a freshman or JV team to allow their players to develop, the Matadors are also playing utilizing several underclassmen.

In such a situation, leadership from the senior captains become crucial. Senior captain Cassidy Wall and sophomore vice captain Genevieve Rovetti set the tone for the team. As battery mates, Wall as pitcher and Rovetti as catcher will be the glue that holds the team together.

Coach Wall is particularly familiar with Cassidy, who is her daughter and wears the same number 18 that she wore in high school. Coach Wall is relying on Cassidy to be her ace pitcher: "Cassidy has great accuracy. She is confident and is not afraid to throw strikes. At this point, we are still looking for another pitcher to step up and establish themselves as our second starter."

Crucial to the staff is the play of Rovetti. Says Wall: "Genevieve really knows the game and does a good job making the calls behind the plate."

Wall is very confident in her defense: "We have great fielding. They are confident and smart."

Sophomore Maddie Webber has been moved to shortstop for the first time and has taken on the role of the leader in the infield on the field and, says Wall, "keeping everyone's spirits up."

Securing the defense up the middle is second baseman Ellie Sinha. Though only a freshman, Sinha brings a lot of experience to the team, having played a lot of travel ball.

Junior Carly Johnson is set in centerfield due to her speed and the ability to cover the whole outfield.

On offense besides Wall and Rovetti, sophomore first baseman Madison Lehman should be a threat as well. With so many of the young players being thrown into the deep end of the pool, it should at the very least bode well for the Lamorinda teams down the road.

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[back](#)

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