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Lamorinda girls lacrosse

By Jon Kingdon



Susie Bush Photos Gint Federas

In her second year as the head coach at Acalanes, Courtney Neff, an Acalanes graduate herself, has set a goal for her lacrosse team: "It's about having fun and growing as a team. That's my main priority, everyone enjoying the sport and happy to be on the team." An 11-3 record certainly facilitates the process.

Neff shares the credit for the success of this year's team with her assistants: "I have an attack mind and work with Mark Rurka in developing our offensive game plans and with Mary Doyle in developing our defensive game plans. I like to hear all their ideas."

Senior co-captains Susie Bush, Jenna Kisner and Katrina Lee are the leaders on a team that Neff feels has a great, natural chemistry: "Everyone gets along. The upper classmen have been so welcoming to the young players. Everyone brings something unique to the game."

The Dons have been averaging 13 goals per game. Leading the offense has been Bush, Lauren Westergren and Emma Workman.

On defense, Acalanes has been limiting their opponents to only 7 goals per game. Protecting the goalie so effectively has been Isabel Rurka, Coco Fellner, Cate Goodman and Lee.

Jamie Wendt has been a force in goal. Says Neff: "Jamie has stepped up her game to a whole new level this year having put in a lot of time. She is fearless and does everything in her power to stop the ball."

Neff appreciates that this is "a team of fighters. They want to win and are willing to do anything to win the game."

Still there is room for improvement, particularly in closing out games. Says Neff: "We have to work remaining calm in close games, playing the way we know how to play and to not get emotional in a tight game. It's easier to make a mistake when your mind is thinking about the score and not focusing on our game. Our losses have been learning experiences."

Despite losing two key players to injuries, Miramonte head coach Jackie Pelletier has led her team to a 12-3 record this season. Captain and defender Olivia Gittings, who will be playing at Occidental next year, suffered a knee injury prior to the season and sophomore midfielder, Boo Dewitt was also lost to a knee injury suffered last week. Working with assistant coach Michaela Guerrero, they have had to do much shuffling of the team's personnel to be so successful this season.

Pelletier appreciates the depth and character of her team: "We have a deep roster and the kids have stepped up. We play as a family and it's the closest team I've ever had. They all have each other's backs. The adversity has made the girls work harder."

When Pelletier refers to the team as a family, she means it literally as well as figuratively. The Matador roster has four sets of sisters - Alex and Alyson Eversole, Shaun and Perrie Lundstrom, Grace and Macy Mills and Sally and Kat Peterson. To carry the point further, freshman goalie Mina Jenab's older brother is the goalie on the boys' team.

With 11 freshmen and sophomores on the team, many of the seniors have taken on the leadership role necessary for a team with so many young players. Co-captain and four-year starter Perrie Lundstrom, a 4-year player, has been a force on the field. Says Pelletier: "Perrie is a workhorse. She provides the spark when needed. She will carry the team on her back, making defensive plays and finishing."

Leading the defense is Maisy Mills, the team's defensive quarterback who Pelletier describes as both "tenacious and strong." Freshman Libby Hawkins has been effective in filling in for the injured Olivia Gittings with toughness and tenacity. Despite being lost for the season, Gittings has not forfeited her role as a leader says Pelletier: "Olivia is at every practice helping out with the goalies and the defense. She is a special person who really cares for the team."

The goalie position utilizes two players: senior Brianna Fick and freshman Mina Janeb. "Our goal play is

coming together," says Pelletier. "They work together very well pushing each other in practice." Goalie coach Mike Gittings (Olivia's father) gets much of the credit for the play of Fick and Jenab, holding their opponents to an average of 8 goals per game.

On offense, senior attacker, Frankie Veverka has been a force, utilizing her ability to play several positions. When Dewitt went down with her injury, freshman attacker Alex Eversole became the starter and despite her youth, has brought lot of toughness to the field. Pelletier is particularly excited at the ability displayed by freshman Emerson Bohlig: "She is the fastest player I have ever coached. She is very young and is going to be great as she develops."

Pelletier still sees room for improvement by "just getting the young players more field time."

Coming off a championship 2017 season, Campolindo head coach Jess Mucci has not found similar success this season. Even with a mature team of 14 seniors and juniors, the Cougars bring only a 7-5 record into the heart of the season though a 4-1 record in league play should still lead to the playoffs.

The Cougars have been scoring 15 goals per game and giving up 9 goals per game, the numbers somewhat inflated with league wins over Clayton Valley (20-0), Las Lomas (16-5), Northgate (14-1) and Ygnacio Valley (22-0).

With a nonleague record of 3-4, the tougher competition should provide Campolindo with valuable experience once out of league play if they are able to make it to the NCS playoffs.



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