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Lamorinda tennis teams sport winning records in playup to NCS

By Jon Kingdon



Photos Gint Federas

Historically, the tennis teams in Lamorinda have generally been successful. This year has been no exception with all three teams sporting winning records. With so much rain this spring, the teams have been forced to play as many as four matches in a week to make up for the matches canceled due to the weather. As the teams are competing to win their division to get the automatic entry into the North Coast Sectionals, there are still aspirations to receive an at-large bid.

Despite losing some top players last season, Miramonte head coach Michael McCollom entered the season with typical optimism. With a 12-5 record (7-2 in league play), the Matadors have been able to overcome some serious injuries and are in good a good position to compete for the Diablo League Championship.

Miramonte's top player, captain Nico Haet, who will be playing at St. Lawrence next year, suffered a left shoulder injury, only recently returning to competitive play, having played just two matches. McCollom speaks admiringly of the effort Haet has displayed to get back on the court: "Due to his shoulder injury, Nico can't lift his left arm and is serving underhanded and utilizing a one handed back hand. Still he won both matches. He is a brave kid that wants to play. Everyone's amazed at how he is performing and he is being supported and cheered on not only by his teammates but the players on the opposing teams as well. Without the injuries, he would have been our number one player."

Micah Elias missed a month with an abdominal tear but since coming back has only lost one match. Though only a sophomore, Elias has evolved into one of the leaders on the team, says McCollom: "Everyone looks up to Micah due to his effort and how he puts himself on the line for the team."

Also stepping up to lead the team has been Liam Dowd and co-captain William Hwang. Says McCollom: "Liam has been our most solid and consistent player with a 12-3 record this season. Along with William, who will be playing at Vasser next year, they have really helped to hold the team together as players and leaders on the team."

McCollom has come to rely on the play of his doubles teams: "They have really stepped up and been outstanding. This season we have won 84 percent of our doubles matches."

Seniors Bryce Radlow and Alan Tang have teamed up with great success and the No. 2 doubles team of Dominic Davidson and Kush Subramanian have only lost one match this season.

McCollom has rotated several freshmen at the number six spot in singles and Max Levy and Ben DeLange have shown constant improvement throughout the season as well. With a strong JV team as well, this should more than compensate for the six players that will be lost next season due to graduation.

McCollom does not hold back on the reasons for the success of the team: "We've been blessed with great players and parents committed to the sport. They are all great kids and students."

Injuries have been a concern for Campolindo this season as well. Cal Hunter, a junior and the team's No. 1 player suffered a rib injury in a match against Las Lomas and missed a few weeks. Co-captain Zach Goldman was also lost for a time with a broken wrist.

Fortunately for the 11-8 Cougars, they are a very deep team. Says head coach Alan Weissbaum: "There is a lot of depth here. If asked to, we could field eight singles and three doubles teams. This is a very resilient team and their spirit is good. Off the court they are really good friends and this unity carries on to the court with confidence."

Campolindo began the season with a difficult schedule, playing top teams like Redwood and Amador Valley which is how Weissbaum planned it: "I wanted us to play tough teams providing our players with experience and getting them ready for league play."

Eight of the 16 players on the team are seniors, which has certainly added a great deal of maturity and stability to the team. Weissbaum has come to rely heavily on his team captains, Goldman and Seren

Tochikura: "I talk with our captains about our drills and the lineups for the matches. I very much value their input."

Hunter and Goldman have both returned from their injuries with some limitations. Hunter initially was only able to play doubles and is just returning to singles play. Goldman, unable to hit a two-handed backhand, has been limited to playing doubles.

The doubles teams have proven to be an anchor for the team. Tochikura has been the team's top doubles and juniors Nick Bohm and Harry Curtiss have yet to lose a doubles match.

Junior Eden Yu, who played JV last season, has been a pleasant surprise for the team. Says Weissbaum: "Eden came to play and made the transition very well to varsity. He plays anywhere (singles or doubles) I ask him to play."

The Cougars have won nine of their last 10 matches. Says Weissbaum: "The team has just gelled and is playing better and with more and more confidence throughout the year. I just want them to enjoy themselves."

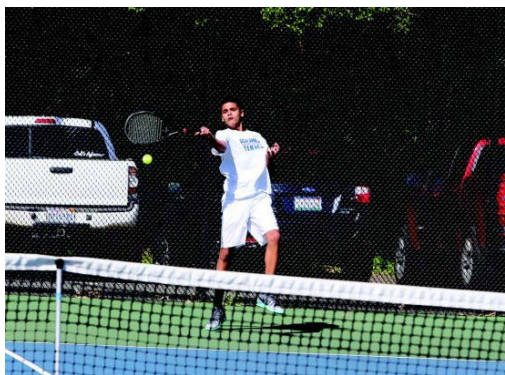
Acalanes head coach Valery Jorgensen, an Acalanes graduate herself, knows what it is like to play in such a difficult league. Battling the top teams in the league, College Prep, Miramonte and Campolindo, the Dons bring a 5-4 record into the home stretch of the season. Jorgensen appreciates the effort her players put forth each match: "They really enjoy winning and they are always competitive and fight in every match. We have had a lot of close matches and we have fought for every point. Through hard work and dedication in the off season, we've seen a lot more consistency than last season."

Unlike Miramonte and Campolindo, who both have strong doubles teams, Acalanes relies more on their singles players. Says Jorgensen: "Singles are our strength though we are a team of depth. We have a lot of similar talent but we just to find consistency and the combinations in our doubles play."

The Dons top two players have been Trenten Tso and Ryan Everly who have been playing 1 and 2 singles and are also the leaders on the team says Jorgensen: "They have carried the team winning almost all of their matches. They along with Cole Brightbill have taken it upon themselves to organize extra practices and bring camaraderie to the team. On the court, Nick Broback and Ed Collinson have been a constant support for the players."

Freshman Alex Thornton has been the most pleasant surprise on the season, according to Jorgensen: "Alex was new to me though not to his teammates. Alex played soccer, so he came to the team a couple of weeks into the season. He was initially a little nervous, but he has stepped up and played in some top doubles and singles matches."

The Dons are hoping for an at-large bid into the NCS tournament. Says Jorgensen optimistically: "What helps is that that we and Campolindo are the only teams that have defeated College Park and if they win the league, it would help us in our at-large bid."



Photos Gint Federas



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