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Burnsed opens third season with Acalanes football

By John T. Miller



Floyd Burnsed and Nick Kresnak

Photo John T. Miller

When Solano Community College dropped its football program in 2012, and then offered a generous buyout and bonus to retiring teachers in 2016, it looked like the end of a distinguished career for head football coach Floyd Burnsed.

Instead, Burnsed saw that Acalanes was looking for a head football coach with the resignation of Mike Ivankovich and decided to apply for the job.

Now in his third year with the Dons, Burnsed is head of a thriving program and is excited to begin the season. "The program is healthy and we have a real good turnout," he says. "The administration is supportive and sees the value of athletics."

Burnsed taught physical education and coached Miramonte for 20 years, leading them to 10 league championships and four North Coast Section championships and an overall record of 154-62-2, before taking on the job of rebuilding the Solano program.

He was named Contra Costa County Coach of the Year three times, 1983 Champion Coach of the Year, the San Francisco 49ers 1996 Coach of the Year, and the North Coast Section Coach of the Year in 2000. At Solano he led the team to three Bay Valley Conference championships and four bowl games before the program was discontinued. He was named California Community College Coach of the Year in 2010.

After going 4-7 his first season, the Dons rode the arm of Robby Rowell, now at UC Berkeley, to a 9-2 record, losing in the North Coast Section quarterfinals to Bishop O'Dowd.

At 71 years old, Burnsed says he'll keep coaching "as long as it's fun. It helps to have the manpower and assistants to help carry out the program." It also helps that he can devote all of his time to the program, since he no longer teaches P.E.

His staff is virtually handpicked and consists of some talented personnel. David Ortega, the defensive coordinator and linebacker coach is Cal's all-time leading tackler; Mark Vicencio (defensive backs and special teams coordinator) and Kurt Piper (wide receivers) played for him on Miramonte's NCS championship team in 1983; and Bryce and Roman Hawthorne (defensive line and running backs) played for Burnsed at Solano. Rounding out the coaching staff is Adam Schneider (offensive line), a former Clayton Valley and Diablo Valley College standout.

Burnsed sees many changes in the game over the years. "It used to be more run oriented. Now with the spread offense, it's more 1-on-1, rather than 11-on-11. Football is more of a cerebral game. Teams that can execute well can be more successful than teams with superior talent." He adds that a good quarterback must be extremely intelligent and looks forward to developing his current QB, Nick Kresnick, a junior this year.

With concussions being a major concern, the method of tackling has changed dramatically. "We use to teach players to tackle with their head straight on. Now most teams are following the Seattle Seahawks technique, with the head behind the ball carrier."

One problem he sees is the decline of participation in the sport. While the Acalanes program has over 40 students on the freshman team, many schools are having to collapse their freshman teams and cancel games. Only three of the 13 schools in the Diablo Athletic League have Frosh programs, making it difficult to find games.

What gives Burnsed the most joy is the development of the players. "It's great to see them go on and be successful," he says. "I still get tons of calls from former players. We're just like teachers like that, but our classrooms are out here on the field."

Miramonte sophomore lacrosse player named to All-American team

By Jon Kingdon

Midway through the 2018 girls lacrosse season at Miramonte, Anna "Boo" DeWitt went down with a serious knee injury forcing her to miss the rest of the season. Though only playing 12 of the team's 21 regular season games, DeWitt, a midfielder, still led the team in goals scored with 31, scoring on 58 percent of her shots on goals.

Despite her absence, the Miramonte team went on to win the NCS tournament and DeWitt was named to the US Lacrosse High School All-American team. The award is voted on by Northern California coaches and is all the more impressive in that DeWitt has only just finished her sophomore year and is in fact the first ever All-American from Miramonte.

Miramonte head coach Jackie Pelletier attributes DeWitt's success to an amalgam of athleticism, commitment and a passion for the sport. Says Pelletier: "I have never seen a player as passionate as Boo. She works extremely hard and is the first player that I have ever seen that wanted to get up early and run sprints."

DeWitt suffered a torn anterior cruciate ligament that required surgery and a long rehabilitation but DeWitt has not taken the time to feel sorry for herself: "The injury has made me appreciate the sport more than I did previously and it made me realize how much I love the sport. It's been tough but my knee pushes me to work harder to get back out there and play. Everyday, I do wall ball (throwing the ball with your stick against a wall and catching it) even as I am rehabbing."

Says Pelletier: "Even after she was hurt and on crutches, Boo would sit on a chair and play wallball."

Boo, who got her nickname from her father, began playing lacrosse in the sixth grade: "I had been playing ice hockey but after going to the Lamorinda fall ball clinics for lacrosse, I found lacrosse to be very challenging. Once I was able to catch and throw the ball, I fell in love with the sport because even though it's such a skill sport, it also rewards athleticism, speed and physicality."

It was immediately clear to Pelletier that DeWitt was a special player: "As a freshman, her talent was clearly evident but she is so humble that she was even worried about making the varsity even though it was clear that she was one of our best players even then. Boo is left-handed which is rare in the sport and is a real advantage for her. Defenders are not used to defending left handers. She has worked to hard on her stickwork that she is equally adept either right or left handed. If teams prepare for her as a left hander, she can switch to her right hand."

Though DeWitt is well aware of her physical talents, she does not live on her laurels: "I'm left-handed so that gives me an advantage but I have also worked hard on my right hand so the opponent never knows which way I'm going to go. My speed is an important component and I hustle and never give up

even if we're down. I always try to keep my head up and am constantly hunting down the opponents."

With all of the effort expended by DeWitt on her lacrosse game, academics is certainly not overlooked: "Balancing school was hard even before the injury. The key for me is that I don't procrastinate. When I have a lot of games upcoming, I try to get the work done ahead of time. With practice from seven to nine in the evening, I always made it a point to do my homework prior to practice."

Though her season was cut short, DeWitt was still able to display her talents earlier in the year on her club team, Tenacity, where she was first exposed to the sport. The team's coach, Theresa Sherry who coincidentally was Pelletier's coach at the University of California, saw early on DeWitt's potential: "Though new to the sport, Boo was obviously athletic. Her work ethic and the tenacity she displayed in her preparation in learning to play is what started to set her apart. Part of what we do is train the girls to train themselves so it is important that they take ownership of the process and Boo took it to heart. In fact, I would have to tell her to take a day off and not go to so many of the camps. Boo thrives on working hard and wants to be the best athlete she can be."

Though still two years away from college, DeWitt has already attracted the attention of the recruiters: "I have received general interest from some schools but I cannot be officially contacted until my junior year but I do want to play for a Division I school."

Pelletier and Sherry both appreciate the rare qualities that DeWitt brings to the game combining a love of the sport, a competitive attitude, the athletic skills and an incessant drive to constantly improve.

Oddly enough, Sherry sees DeWitt's injury as a way to further impress the colleges: "College coaches want to know how an individual handles pressure situations and how you handle adversity. The way that Boo is handling her injury is very telling as to how full a package she is. The knee injury will give her the final piece."

Next season at Miramonte, DeWitt will be taking on a new responsibility. Along with three seniors, DeWitt was unanimously named co-captain, the first non-senior to be accorded such an honor. Says DeWitt: "I'm excited about being chosen one of the team's co-captains for next year. I want to be there for the underclassmen, answering any questions they might have and leading the team by example."

It is an honor well deserved according to Pelletier: "Boo puts the work off the field and is a natural leader on the field. Boo makes stick trick videos which has led her to want to push her teammates and is very welcoming to the newcomers by showing them her love of the sport. She is the nicest, most inclusive teammate and has been a pleasure for me to watch and coach."

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