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Lamorinda Football Preview

By Jon Kingdon



Grant Harper Photos Gint Federas

percent of their receiving yards and 72 percent of their rushing yards. The Cougars have also graduated 11 of their 12 top tacklers on defense. Miramonte lost 82 percent of their passing yards, 73 percent of their receiving yards and 82 percent of their rushing yards. In other words, it's time to reload.

Each of the schools graduated its starting quarterback too, but Campolindo head coach Kevin Macy's team has taken a particular hit, having graduated 24 seniors which included his entire starting defense. The saying goes, cheer up, things could be worse. So, Macy cheered up and what happened? Things got worse. With so many players needing to step up and start, the last thing Macy needed was for the team to suffer any injuries. Campolindo right now has six projected starters on the sidelines with various injuries. If there is a bright spot to all of this, none of the injuries have proven to be season ending.

Despite so many changes in this year's team, Macy stays true to his philosophy that has worked so well in the past: "Our formula is to find a way to get better as the season progresses. We will be using the non-league games to get ready for the league season and to get mentally tough. With four tough, physical opening games, I'm looking for it to pay off in our league play. We just need to stay healthy."

Junior Grant Harper will be the Cougar's starting quarterback. With so many games decided early for Campolindo last year, Harper was able to get a lot of valuable experience, completing 64 of 98 passes for 836 yards with eight touchdowns and only one interception. Backing up Harper will be Stephen Westfall who may also see some playing time on defense.

Macy, who utilized two different offenses last season, a run-oriented one and then a pass-oriented one, will not be asking Harper to be the runner that John Torchio was last season, hoping to keep him healthy, relying on his passing skills to lead the team.

It is going to be a running game by committee led by Michael Brewer who gained 362 yards last season. Says Macy, "Michael is not that big but he knows how to follow his blocks and turn upfield."

Senior wide receiver Lucas Allen had 48 receptions and nine touchdowns will be starting on one side and Jackson Wheeler, despite limited playing time last season, are penciled in as the starting wide receivers though Wheeler is dealing with an ankle injury. Max Schoenberger is also being counted on in the passing game.

Senior Coby Schnayer, described by Macy as "the leader and the heart and soul on the offensive line," is going to be the glue that holds that unit together. As with so many other projected starters, Schnayer is currently out with an injury.

With so many new starters on defense, Campolindo will be relying on Ryan O'Neal at outside linebacker and Mason Mastrov at defensive end to set the tone for the unit.

Campolindo opened up with a 35-21 victory over Marin Catholic (12-1). Their other non-league games are at St. Ignatius (S.F.); Rancho Cotate (10-2), at Hayward and El Cerrito (7-2).

Going into his third season as the head coach at Acalanes, Floyd Burnsed will be hard pressed to improve on the team's 9-2 record from last season, particularly with the graduation of quarterback Robbie Rowell. Burnsed has coached a number of top quarterbacks over the years and has a simple solution in replacing them: "Always have a good backup."

With a combined 27-11 record and with victories in the playoffs last year, Acalanes, Campolindo and Miramonte can all lay claim to have had successful seasons. Acalanes and Miramonte both made it to the second round of the playoffs and Campolindo made it to the state semifinals. Each school has lost key players that have gone on to play college football, including Acalanes quarterback - Robbie Rowell (California); linebacker - Nick Henderson (California), linebacker - Ryan Nall (MIT); Campolindo free safety - John Torchio (Wisconsin), wide receiver - Ryan Regan (California); and Miramonte running back - Peter Stehr (Boston College), wide receiver - Ethan Fischler, and linebacker - Sam Walker (California).

Through graduation, Acalanes is losing 87 percent of their passing statistics and 66 percent of their receiving yards; Campolindo 80 percent of their passing yards, 77

Like Campolindo's, with so many one-sided victories last year, Acalanes' backup quarterback Nick Kresnak got to play in a number of games going 25 for 41 for 423 yards with seven touchdowns and one interception. Says Burnsed, "Nick has all the skills. He has a strong arm, a quick release and good feet. We're working hard on his decision making." Mike McDonald who was the junior varsity team's quarterback will be backing up Kresnak.

Acalanes returns its starting running back, junior Jake Delaney who gained 264 yards and scored four touchdowns. Burnsed is very pleased in the growth he has seen in Delaney from last year: "Jake is more physical and faster than last season and has really matured and should have a top season."

Senior Chris Rogers was the second leading receiver last year for Acalanes with 53 receptions and nine touchdowns. Senior Anand Patel has shown well so far in camp and Burnsed is looking for any of a number of underclassmen who have shown well in camp to step up and contribute as well. Tommy Thrasher with 12 receptions last season will be the team's starting tight end.

Without a big offensive line, Burnsed is adjusting his offense to the players' abilities: "I adapt my offense to the players, putting them in position to be successful." Senior guard Eric Larsen will be counted on to provide the leadership and stability for this unit.

The Acalanes defense, lacking somewhat in depth, took an unexpected hit when defensive linemen Seth Pezman's family moved to Houston.

Senior linebackers Alex Cortessis (62 tackles and three tackles for loss) and Nicholas Bettencourt (51 tackles and 4.5 tackles for loss) will be the leaders up front.

The defensive backfield is very young with juniors Ben Clark and Nick Pearson and sophomore Dane Jensen. Senior Scott Brydon (52 tackles and 3.5 tackles for loss) is going to be the leader in holding this unit together.

Acalanes lost a tough home opener against Las Lomas 12-7 and play Vintage (at Napa), Rodriguez (Santa Rosa); Archbishop Mitty (San Jose) and El Cerrito prior to the league schedule.

Miramonte coach Jack Schram came into last season with two seniors (Will Cassriel and Xavier Clark) battling to be the starting quarterback and made it to the second round of the playoffs, finishing the season with an 8-4 record. This season, it is two juniors that are vying to be the team's quarterback - Matt Meredith and A.J. Frazier. Last season, both Meredith (13 for 29 for 153 yards, two touchdowns and two interceptions) and Frazier (13 for 25 for 176 yards, two touchdowns and two interceptions) got some valuable experience and had great success in the summer 7 on 7 leagues with Miramonte winning 15 straight games. Though appreciative of their performances this summer, Schram understands that the summer passing league is much different from the games in the fall: "We threw the ball very well but in real games, there is going to be a pass rush and we're not going to get four seconds to stand in the pocket and make our throws."

Senior Keilan Stone, the team's third leading receiver from last season with 17 receptions and three touchdowns is the only receiver returning with more than five receptions so there is ample opportunity for last year's JV players to step up as the complements to Stone.

Matching the 1,693 yards gained last season by Peter Stehr will not be easy. Seniors Henry Vacakis who gained 442 yards last season, Tyler Lowe and Guy Barrons to fill that gap. Says Schram: "Since we are thin in numbers here, we have to be smart how we use our backs."

All this is well and good but the key for the offense according to Schram is the development of the team's offensive line: "The key for our offense is pass protection. We have to stay healthy and gain experience here through the nonleague games and come together as a unit."

Miramonte's defense carries more experience than the team's offense. Says Schram: "We have more experience here with a solid linebacking crew."

Ben Schmeidt returns at middle linebacker after compiling 61 tackles and nine tackles for loss last season.

Charlie McIntyre and Henry Conners, both water polo players, are being counted on to solidify the defensive line on the outside along with Zach Barker holding up things inside at defensive tackle.

Schram sums it simply: "We have to hit the ground running and develop as the year progresses."

Miramonte won their home opener against De Anza 32-20. Their other non-league games are at Hillsdale (7-3), at Las Lomas and at Brookside Christian (Stockton).



Matt Meredith (5) and Justin Alvarado (55)



Acalanes team at practice



Henry Vacakis (24) and Reed Callister (8) Photos Gint Federas



Lucas Allen

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