

Published December 25, 2018

Lamorinda boys soccer preview

By Jon Kingdon



Photo Gint Federas

Last season, the Lamorinda boys soccer teams played in the Diablo-Foothill League which had six teams. This year they are in the Diablo League which has 13 teams. The schools that have been added are Ygnacio Valley, Concord, Clayton Valley, Berean Christian, Northgate, Mt. Diablo and Benicia which has created a new dynamic for the teams.

With a six-team league, the teams would play away and home games. With a 13-team league, it's now a one and done schedule. Miramonte will be playing Campolindo twice though only one of the games will count in the league standings. Only playing each other once will give advantage to the teams that are best able to manage the one game, the schedule not allowing them to adjust to their opponent in a second game.

Acalanes

Coming off a successful season (17-8-1), Acalanes hasn't missed a beat through the early season. With a 5-2-1 record, the Dons have scored 16 goals and only given up 5 goals. It's been the ability of the individual players to work as a team that has led to their success, says head coach Paul Curtis: "It has been their willingness to work together as a unit rather than as a bunch of individuals. They have come together early in the season and it's been great. With as many as a dozen of our players playing on different club teams, my main challenge has been to get them on the same page and the sooner the better."

Senior midfielders Travis Stevenson and Christian Ramsey and junior Nick Geannacopulos have been the key players on offense. Says Curtis: "Travis is an aggressive and elusive player. He is more of a slasher and is very focused and intense. Nick is technically sound with great vision and is a solid playmaker. He makes the players around him look good. Christian has had a lot of experience. He is a playmaker who handles and distributes the ball very well."

With both of goalies for Acalanes graduating last season, junior Will Easley and sophomore Owen Myall, two goalies, have stepped up and proven to be very effective in shutting down their opponent's offenses. "We're really glad to have Will starting in goal," says Curtis. "He is extremely athletic. He is a great study and is willing to do anything to be successful. He has played a lot of club soccer and is an exceptional young man. Owen has a lot of experience and just has to develop further."

The overall defense has been a strong unit that is led by co-captain Bernard Adri and has as many as six different players Curtis can call upon depending on the matchups.

Acalanes also has two freshmen that have stepped up and shown the ability to play with the upper classmen, midfielder Rhett Skrvana and defender Matt Walner.

Curtis appreciates how well things have developed: "We are a little light on experience but we are gaining it as we go. There have been no real negative surprises. Our co-captains Eric Voss, Stevenson and Adri have done a great job in leading the team. The boys are a good group that like each other and are willing to work hard and they bring a great attitude about learning."

Campolindo

After coaching Campolindo to a 130-46-32 record in seven seasons (2010-2016), Shane Carney took a year off due to the birth of his child. Last season, the team went off the rails with a 6-13-4 record. So many people prevailed upon Carney to come back that he chose to return as the team's head coach. There has been an immediate turnaround for the Cougars going 8-2 so far this season.

Carney immediately saw a need for a change and attacked it with a real vigor: "The culture last year was really bad. I had to go in and get everyone to get back to working hard and putting the team first. It helped that I was able to start the process in the summer and let the team know that things were going to change to where it was before. The players came in this year with a better attitude and understood the need for commitment."

Both the offense and defense for Campolindo have proven to be dominating. After seven games, the Cougars have averaged over 3.2 goals a game and are only giving up a half a goal per game. An attitude change has proven to be the difference, says Carney: "We have a good group of guys that are putting in the

work with no selfish attitudes. Our seniors want to leave their imprint on the program. How well we play together is going to make or break our season."

Last year's leading scorers Jose Carra-Hernandez (11 goals, 6 assists) and Kellen Clancy (6 goals, 3 assists) continue to lead the offense. Nathan Links and Riley Breul are also key players in the Cougars offense. Carney is constantly stressing unity: "The general theme is team work. There is no individualism. We're working hard on the movement of the ball and we have a lot of quick players that get into the spaces to attack. There is not one player that our opponents can defend. We come in waves instead of relying on one or two scorers."

The smothering defense has been led by goalies Lucas Allen, who was all league last season, and Joe Etheridge. Carney appreciates the value of both of his goalies: "Lucas is extremely athletic and he can make any save. Joe has been solid in goal when called upon. He is good with his feet and can also play on the field. Overall, we defend very well and it has been a good team effort. Center back Conner Gregg has been our vocal leader on the field and has been pulling more than his weight."

Despite the team's initial success, Carney is keeping things in perspective: "With 13 teams in our league, there are any number of schools that can win the league. Anybody can beat anybody else on any given night. We're taking it a game at a time. As long as we're up near the top of the standings, we'll talk about it at the end of the season."

Miramonte

Coming off an 18-4-2 season and having graduated four of their top five scorers, it is taking Miramonte some time to adjust. The Matadors have started the season off with a 2-3-2 record. Head coach Masood Ahmadi knew that it was going to take time for this season's team to start to gel: "We lost a core of senior players. We are a young team that is getting used to each other and the players are learning their roles. It's putting the pieces of the puzzle together. The players are working hard and we lost one game, Acalanes (1-0) and tied Los Lomas (2-2) due to a late mistake in each game. The team has shown lots of promise and energy."

The offense has been led by midfielders Kent Barbir and Giovanni Sponzilli. Says Ahmadi: "Kent is very strong with the ball and can be both a playmaker and a finisher. Giovanni has really grown and improved. He leads by example and has been a great leader. He is good coaching up the younger players and is always positive." Conor Roemer has also been a force on the offense along with Luca Argast who is also going to be used on defense.

Junior Ethan Luckenbach has taken over as the team's goalie with the graduation of Cole Kelez said Ahmadi: "Ethan has had big shoes to fill. He is gaining experience but he is not afraid to make mistakes and learn. He is very coachable without a big ego. He is all about the team."

The defense is led by Eric Heillman who was also a lineman for the football team, Simon Neuwirth-Stein and Cayden Weiszmann. Says Ahmadi: "Eric is doing very well. He is a great decision maker and runs very well for someone so big. We moved Simon to fullback from offense and he has made the transition very well. Cayden has shown a good learning curve as well."

Having played seven games in 14 days, Miramonte does not play another game until Jan. 9. Ahmadi sees this as a way to help the team come together: "The air quality issues set the team back because we were making so many position changes. This big break in our schedule will allow us to focus on training hard and to continue to work on our team chemistry."



Photo Gint Federas

Reach the reporter at: sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA