

# Lauded local basketball player back in the Bay Area



Sabrina Ionescu

Photos Gint Federas

## By Jon Kingdon

A triple-double in basketball occurs when a player records a double-digit total in a game in three of the following categories: points, rebounds, assists and blocks. To accomplish such a feat requires a player with all-around skills.

As a sophomore at the University of Oregon last season, Sabrina Ionescu broke the NCAA triple-double career record for women with her eighth triple-double. This season Ionescu surpassed the men's record of 12 (BYU's Kyle Collinsworth) and currently has a total of 16 triple-doubles and is still going. When questioned about the accomplishment, Ionescu

shrugged and replied, "It's just another thing I do."

Having been named the USA Today High School Player of the Year at Miramonte High School, Freshman Player of the Year at Oregon, first team All-American as a sophomore and preseason All-American prior to this season, it's understandable how Ionescu would acknowledge such a record so casually.

On Feb. 8, Oregon played at the University of California, coming away with a 105-82 victory, with Ionescu scoring 27 points with 5 rebounds and 4 assists. It was something of a homecoming for Ionescu as she explained after the game: "Playing in Haas

Pavilion felt like being at home with so many of my family and friends and coach (Kelly) Sopak and the Miramonte girls basketball team in attendance." In front of an equally supportive group two days later, Oregon and Ionescu (27 points, 9 rebounds, 8 assists) defeated Stanford on their home court of Maples Pavilion for the first time in 29 years by a score of 88-48.

Ionescu attributes much of her success at Oregon to having played under Sopak at Miramonte and on his club team Cal Stars: "Playing for Kelly at Miramonte and with Cal Stars really helped me, coming from such a winning program, teaching me to strive for excellence."

The connection between Sopak and Ionescu began when she was 9 years old, says Sopak: "Sabrina was one of the better players when she began but it wasn't until she was in seventh grade when it became very evident that she was a very special player."

It's not just Ionescu's physical tools that Sopak admires: "In breaking the triple-double record, it's easy to explain. Sabrina has the ability, but it's that she has a true mind for the game and competes on every play."

Though right-handed, Ionescu prefers to dribble the ball left-handed and will shoot left-handed as well, having developed those skills at Miramonte, says Sopak: "In high school, most teams want to force you to go to the left so we practice and play where our point guards work hard to run out practice to the left so they learn how to dribble with their left hand as well as their right."

It's something of a family affair between the Ionescus and the Sopaks, says Sopak's wife, Beverly: "We've known Sabrina and her family since she was in the third grade.

She has been like family to us. We often had her and her family come over on Thanksgiving and Christmas. Sabrina still really cares about Miramonte and reaches out to the players on the team."

As a coach's wife, Beverly Sopak has her own opinion as to what makes Ionescu so successful: "She is her own worst critic. She is harder on herself than anybody, which is what drives her."

The Sopak's daughter, Lauren, who played with Ionescu at Miramonte, attends the University of Oregon and is also a roommate of Ionescu and Sabrina's brother: "Sabrina is like a mother to us, making sure that we eat right, go to sleep early and get to school on time. She has a great sense of

humor."

Ionescu has often spoke of playing basketball as a "blessing" and only reluctantly will leave the court. Lauren saw this firsthand in a high school game: "Sabrina loves to play the game and never wants to come out. One time she got a technical foul and my dad pulled her out of the game. She sat next to him and constantly nudged him to keep reminding him that she was out of the game."

Ionescu graduated from Miramonte with a composite won-lost record of 125-9. So far, in the nearly three seasons with Ionescu, the Ducks have a record of 79-20 and are currently ranked third in the nation with a 23-1 record. Like a fine wine, Ionescu only seems to get better with age.



## Girls soccer roundup



Sami Kolin

Photos Gint Federas



Sasha Sadoff



Celia Campo



Taylor Walthal

### By John T. Miller

Both Miramonte and Campolindo girls soccer teams advanced to the semifinals in the North Coast Section tournament with wins Saturday, Feb. 16. No. 1 seed Miramonte will host No. 4 Analy of Sebastopol, while No. 3 Campolindo travels to No. 2 Petaluma. Both matches will tip off at 7:00 p.m. Feb. 20.

Miramonte defeated Sir Francis Drake of San Anselmo 2-1. Senior Taylor Walthal answered an early goal by Drake with a powerful clean shot in the first half for the tie, and junior Jordan Goularte added the go-ahead goal.

Coach Barry McQuain was pleased with the team's effort: "We made some adjustments at the half to control the middle of the field and had as many as 15 shots on the goal." Acalanes played into the semifinal round with a 3-0 defeat of Encinal High Feb. 13. Sasha Sadoff, Lara Disman, and Maddie Zuber scored for the Dons, filling in at goalie for Pellegrini - while junior Olivia Pellegrini - while in at goalie for the injured Kate Carter - shut

out the Jets.

With 15 minutes left in the game against Campolindo, Pellegrini was forced to leave with a gash above her eye that required stitches. The ensuing red card left Campolindo down a player, but they prevailed. Aliye Wingate scored for the Dons, while Sami Kolin, Celia Campo, and Ella Colombini scored for Campolindo.

The following is a brief wrap-up of the Lamorinda schools' regular seasons:

**Miramonte** (13-3-3; 9-1-2 league)

McQuain, in his third year as head coach at Miramonte, nearly accomplished the team's preseason goal of winning the league, eventually finishing second to the top-ranked Division II team, Northgate High.

Miramonte was led this year by a strong core of seniors. McQuain praised center defenders Alison Whipple and Taylor Johnson who anchored the defense along with midfielder Isabel Fine. McQuain called Taylor Walthal an offensive threat. "She was de-

ceptively fast and shot with both feet equally well."

McQuain gave special recognition to senior Teveen Aghababian, who was out the entire season with a torn ACL. She came to every practice and helped manage and keep teammates on track.

Aghababian was named a co-captain along with Whipple and Johnson.

Miramonte outscored their opponents 53-13, with Angelina Basso (8 goals, 9 assists) and Alex Ziem (7 goals, 7 assists), both sophomores, leading the way. A pair of juniors, Mikayla Smith and Kate Blanchard, split time in the goal, producing 11 shutouts. Juniors Olivia Grillo and Sabrina Grant also played well defensively.

"Northgate was clearly one of our best efforts this season," said McQuain. "I felt good about the game, as neither team dominated. By tying the league champions, we kind of put an asterisk by them."

The toughest loss was to Campolindo. "We outshot them 15-5, but they had a beautiful combination pass

that went in to beat us 1-0, said McQuain.

With 15 girls returning, the Matadors expect to compete for the title next year, also.

**Campolindo** (11-4-3; 8-2-2 league)

In his first year at Campolindo, Luis Pinto led the Cougars to a third place finish in the tough Diablo Athletic League, giving them a huge boost going into the NCS playoffs.

After six years as an assistant coach, Pinto took over the program, saying, "I hope to pick up where Ernesto Silva left off and continue to build the program."

Juniors Celia Campo and Devon Ortman headed the Cougar offense, with Campo, from her left forward position, leading the team with 11 goals, while Ortman provided six assists. Pinto praised Ortman, saying "She adapted to a new position this year as a midfielder and was the key to the start of every transition."

Mallory Lewis, a junior goalie, started the last eight games of the season and con-

tributed strong performances in 1-0 shutouts over Clayton Valley and rival Miramonte.

The three graduating seniors - Savannah DeCarlo, Nicole Huebner and Julia Colombini - served as co-captains for the team. "They did an excellent job leading the team and helping us to peak at the right time," says Pinto.

The Cougars went 8-1-1 over the last 10 games to climb into third place in the league.

Pinto also credits the six juniors on the team for being a strong influence and being able to lead without having the title of captains.

In addition, four freshmen improved dramatically and took over starting roles this year, giving Campolindo strong hopes for another competitive season next year.

**Acalanes** (10-5-5; 4-4-4 league)

First-year head coach Nick Barbarino, who worked the previous few seasons as a Miramonte assistant helping out with all levels, led his team to a No. 6 seed in the NCS playoffs this year.

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