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Girls' basketball season successes



Emily Huston

Photos Gint Federas



Mariella Crudele



Kate Schirmer

By Jon Kingdon

With Miramonte once again making it to the state tournament, and Acalanes making it to the second round of the North Coast Section playoffs and winning the league tournament for the first time in recent memory, it was an overall successful year for the girls basketball teams. Campolindo, having lost two key players to graduation, was a

team in transition that is looking to a more successful season next year.

"And just like that, the next season begins." With that statement, Miramonte head coach Kelly Sopak has moved on from the Matadors loss to Bishop O'Dowd in the second round of the state tournament by a score of 72-50. O'Dowd has proven to be an Achilles' heel for Miramonte, having lost to them three

straight games going back to last year's NCS final, this year's NCS final and in the final game this season.

In the loss to O'Dowd in the state tournament, Miramonte trailed at halftime by a score of 37-23 but battled back to tie the game at 48 all, after a layup by Emily Huston. O'Dowd went on to outscore the Matadors 24 to 2 the rest of the way. Senior Erin Tarasow led Miramonte with 13 points and Rebecca Welsh added nine points.

This was the first season that Miramonte played as an independent team and it, by all standards, should be considered successful, having finished the year with a 28-4 record.

As is his wont, Sopak went deep in his bench every game which enabled the team to withstand losing point guard Amerika De Los Santos to a knee injury and go on a 19-game winning streak prior to the initial loss to O'Dowd.

The success of the team was due to many factors, according to Sopak: "The team had tremendous character. We were all on the same page. We were a very resilient team with great kids. We played like we practiced. The team had a number of leaders by example but I will be looking for more vocal leaders that can take control."

Miramonte will be losing only two seniors, captain Emily Huston and Ashley Miller. Leading the returning 12 players will be Mia Mastrov, Erin Tarasow and Rebecca Welsh. It will be a

very mature team that will have eight seniors.

Head coach Michelle Sasaki concluded her second season at Acalanes with a 19-8 record and won the Diablo League going 9-1 in league play and making it to the second round of the NCS playoffs, losing an overtime game to Redwood.

With three more wins than last season, Sasaki attributed the improvement to the maturity of the team: "A lot of relationships were built and that was the foundation that we started with, getting to know each other. What I really enjoyed about the season was how the girls put the time in, taking it day by day and trying to evolve on a consistent basis and having one goal with everyone riding in the same direction."

With only nine players on the roster, the Dons were still able to utilize both size and three-point shooting to great effectiveness. Sasaki credited point guard Kaylee Pond with being the team's leader: "Kaylee brought a high basketball IQ and competitiveness to the court, constantly setting up the other players."

Complementing Pond in the backcourt was Lauren Kobashigawa. Sasaki saw great improvement in her game: "Lauren stepped into a leadership role this year. She peaked right when we needed her to and became more than a great shooter. She really improved getting to the rim and finishing and also defending well."

Acalanes will only be graduating one senior, Kate Schirmer, and will have a very mature team next season with six seniors: Kobashigawa, Pond, Lauren Frechman, Mikaela Valerio and Daphne Ganter. Along with underclassmen Gabby Schneider, Grace Gebhardt and Michelle Goll, it will be a squad with a great deal of experience.

"We want to move from good to great," says Sasaki. "It will take a lot of sweat and commitment from all of the returning players and the JV players that will be promoted to the varsity. It will take a lot of practice — there's no way around it starting in the spring through the summer and fall."

Sasaki is hoping that the success of this season will translate into a larger turnout for the team: "We had great student support this year, particularly for our last game against Redwood and I hope that type of energy will carry over and materialize with more people coming out to tryout and support the team."

Campolindo head coach Matt Kirby knew it was going to be a transition year having graduated last season's top two players, Haley Van Dyke and Ashley Thoms.

Though all the schools were limited at the start of the season from practicing due to the smoke from the fires, the Cougars were particularly hurt by the lack of practice, leading to a 7-19 record, said Kirby: "We were a team with a new coach and a lot of new players. It took a long time for the team to come together. Combining that with a very tough opening schedule really set us behind. Despite all of these things, the girls put forth a great effort in games and in practice."

Led by senior Mariella Crudele, the Cougars, after losing their first five games of the season, went on to win six of their next nine games. Kirby cited the character of the team: "Our seniors (Sara White, Jasmine Xiong, Zoe Crouch, Melia Van Kirk and Crudele) brought a great attitude and good leadership to the underclassmen."

Kirby remains optimistic for next year: "We'll be better just because the players will be more comfortable in their roles and will know what is expected of them. We will also have a more favorable schedule."

Despite losing a number of players to graduation, two key players will be returning, Kiana Thorson and Kate Brown. "Kiana showed great improvement and should be a force next year," says Kirby. "Kate was the brain trust of the team. The players looked to her to run the team and will be a returning captain. There are also players from our JV team that should be real factors next season."

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