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Lamorinda boys volleyball roundup



Colin Kirbach



Ben Blakely



Christian Roy

Photos Gint Federas

By Jon Kingdon

Since Mason Mulvaney took over as the head coach at **Acalanes** in 2016 and took a 2-16 team in 2015 to a 13-13 record, the Dons have improved on their won-lost record each season and currently are 18-4 this season. How did he turn the program around so quickly? It's simple yet not so simple, says Mulvaney: "We've gotten a lot of kids to buy in to the program and we've established a big JV team. I'm getting more players to want to play volleyball and for members of the team also to play club volleyball."

After winning the North Coast Section championship last season, the Dons are finally being acknowledged, says Mulvaney: "We did not get a lot of respect last year being the fifth seed in the NCS tournament which forced us to win every playoff game on the road. We're not sneaking up on anyone this year. We're in a tough, great league. It's a challenge every week. I'd rather play tough teams and lose a couple of matches rather than walking over easy opponents. We're excited to defend our championship."

Acalanes started off the season with a 9-1 record prior to league play. "We've gotten really good progression from our younger guys," says Mul-

vaney. "Our seniors have stepped up with good leadership."

Senior Colin Kirbach, who was chosen Most Valuable Player in the Valley Division last season, has been very effective as the team's setter and as a blocker. Sophomore outside hitter Austin Kinnear, the team's leading scorer and senior middle blocker Alex Franke were both named first team all league last season as well. Junior Nikolai Heffernan who only began playing volleyball last season has been a real force, says Mulvaney: "As a lefty opposite, he is a matchup nightmare for the other teams."

Senior Lane Altbaum, the team's libero, was named second team all-league last season and, according to Mulvaney, "has drastically improved his game." Kirkback and Franke, the team's co-captain, have been key factors in the team's success, says Mulvaney: "They have provided great leadership on and off the court."

Mulvaney still sees ways for the team to keep improving this year: "We have to have more communication on the court and we're still looking for more depth in our lineup."

Campolindo

Campolindo head coach David Chen has led the team

to a 21-6 record so far this year and is third in the league behind Northgate and Acalanes. It's been a work in process for Chen and the Cougars: "The players are starting to be very coachable, following game plans and trying to adapt to what other teams are doing."

Sophomore Ben Blakely, second team all league last season, and freshman Josh Ewert have been real forces on the front line, says Chen: "They have been a real luxury for us. They have been very open to moving along the front line and not just on the outside and that has been helpful to us. Still we are looking to diversify and not just make it a two man show."

The Campolindo defense is still trying to find its identity, says Chen: "We're evolving on what other teams have, matching up against our opponent's strength and weaknesses. We're always trying to figure it out and constantly evolving."

Sophomore Justin Lineweaver, as the team's libero, has been learning more and improving as the season has progressed. Freshman middle blocker, Patrick Volk, has stepped up and contributed as well.

Chen sees this as a team of individuals that takes a lot of responsibility: "We don't have

one leader and we do not have captains so it distributes the responsibility to everyone; whether it's one-on-one with their teammates or leading by example. It's a matter of everyone playing to their strengths. It seems to be working."

Still, Chen is looking for more from his team: "I want the team to have passion and emotion on the court, putting value in everything they do. I need tough players, not just when times are tough. We have the skills and I want us to work on competing and showing more emotion. Some players think that emotion can be a weakness, showing vulnerability. I want our team to have great toughness, passion and to be emotionally ready. That's what we're looking for."

Miramonte

After two seasons in which they won a total of three games, Miramonte looked within to find the right man to turn the program around. That person was the girls volleyball coach, Peter Chao, who led the girls to the NCS championship game and to the third round in the state championship last fall. Chao took an optimistic perspective about the last two seasons: "We have nowhere else to go but up."

With five wins so far this

season, playing in the Diablo Valley League, Chao is positive about the team's short and long-term expectations:

"We've got it pointed in the right direction. We have a lot of kids that have a huge thirst to learn and get better. They just did not have the proper training before but they are very eager to improve. We are getting better, having ironed out the technical stuff, so we can just focus more on playing which is giving us more hope."

The offense is led by two senior middle blockers, Evan Barrie-Kivell and Daniel Lucas, and junior co-captain outside hitter Christian Roy. Another senior, co-captain Michael Ishizu has been very effective as the team's setter. Junior co-captain Ethan Luckenbach has been doing a solid job as the team's libero.

Freshman Nicolai Bell has moved over from the basketball team and has stepped up as the team's right-side hitter and should be a force in the future.

Chao is also coaching the boys JV team: "so I get to groom them for the varsity as well. They are undefeated in league play which gives us great optimism for the future and something to look forward to."

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