

Published August 21st, 2019

Lamorinda football season preview

By Jon Kingdon



Grant Harper, Campolindo Photos Gint Federas

With an early start to the 2019 football season, hope springs eternal in Lamorinda. Campolindo and Miramonte return their starting quarterbacks for a second season. Acalanes has a senior four-year starter at running back. Still with graduation taking key players from each school, there are many opportunities for the underclassmen to step up and make names for themselves.

Campolindo

After a 10-3 season, Campolindo head coach Kevin Macy has the luxury of having his starting quarterback, Grant Harper, returning to lead the offense. Harper threw for 2,932 yards with 32 touchdowns and only six interceptions. The key for the Cougars is going to be keeping Harper on his feet and protected.

Senior Ryan O'Neil will be starting in the backfield after having gained 384 yards and scored 10 touchdowns last year. As for his backups, Macy is looking for help wherever he can get it: "Brandon Manty, who was a defensive end and did not play any offense last year, is being trained to play some running back. Everyone's being retrained."

Campolindo is going to have an entirely new offensive line this season with all five starters having graduated. Ty Bell is locked in at tackle. After that, it's anybody's guess, says Macy: "We're very thin at this time and we're still trying to put together a unit," said Macy. "We're looking at converting some of our defensive linemen but we're battling our way through it. Ty will be the leader on the line. He has good size and is getting his footwork down."

Harper is also having to acclimate himself to a new group of receivers as the top three receivers from last year have also graduated. Senior Rex Curtis (18 receptions/290 yards) is the receiver with the most experience and is also being counted on as the team's punt and kickoff returner. Junior Maxwell Weaver, a member of the state champion basketball team, did not play football last season, but is someone that Macy feels can be a factor this year: "Maxwell was a really good freshman player. We feel that he can be a deep threat for our offense and with his speed can make a difference in our passing game." Jackson Wheeler, a defensive end, and Will Windatt, who will be a starting linebacker, will also be tried as receivers as well.

There will be a number of players returning on defense for the Cougars. Defensive end Mason Mastrov led the team with 6.5 sacks and Brandy Manty had 4.5 sacks. Windatt and Charlie Craig head up the linebackers. Two players that Macy is hoping to return from injuries during the season are Jake Crumbaugh (broken arm) and Jason Vorhauer (torn patella tendon). The defensive secondary is going to be made up of all new players, led by Jean-Luc Axelrode who is being converted to cornerback from the linebacker position.

Campolindo, with a very difficult nonleague schedule, opens at home Aug. 23 against Montgomery (Santa Rosa), which was 8-3 last season. They will be playing Amador Valley (8-3) in the Honor Bowl as part of a tripleheader at James Logan High School the third week of the season. "The Honor Bowl is a prestigious event and is a showcase for three top games that day," said Macy. "It's a big deal to be a part of that." Other nonleague opponents are McClymonds (12-2) and Rancho Cotate (11-2). Clayton Valley was replaced in the league by Las Lomas (12-1).

Miramonte

Last season, Miramonte (8-4) split the quarterbacking duties between A.J. Frasier and Matt Meredith. Frasier has since moved out of state and Meredith was going to be the starter this season regardless, said head coach Jack Schram: "Matt did well for us in our tough league games and in the playoffs. He's a better runner now and has a firm grasp of our offense. He did a fantastic job at the Tahoe Camp we had and all through the summer running the 7 on 7's. He is throwing the ball really well and can be a good player on the next level."

With the graduation of Miramonte's three leading running backs, Meredith is also the team's leading rusher from last year with 119 yards. Aidan Browne and Jake Doren, both of whom played on JV last year, are being counted on to fill out the backfield.

Senior Reed Callister (45 receptions/639 yards/10 TDs) was the team's leading receiver last year while the next four receivers were lost through graduation. Tanner Zwahlen, who had 19 receptions and scored five

touchdowns, will be lining up on the opposite side. Schram commented on how "Zwahlen did a great job this summer."

There is some experience for the Matadors on the offensive line. Senior Joe McIntyre will be the leader for this group, as the only returning starter who played the same position (guard) all season. Greg Hemming also brings experience to the offensive line.

Having graduated 10 of his top 11 tacklers, Schram has been working hard to put together his defense. The strength of this group is going to be the defensive line with Hemming, Stradley Foutch, McIntyre and Sean Turney.

With a whole new group of linebackers, the leaders are coming from the defensive backfield: Zwahlen and Reed Callister. "Callister went to the BYU camp and was great at defensive back," said Schram.

Ray Vallee returns as the team's placekicker.

With the shuffling of the league and teams pulling out of their contracts, Schram's hardest job may have been putting together a 10-game schedule, which was finally completed only recently. Miramonte opens their season at De Anza (El Sobrante). The Matadors will be traveling to Stockton to play Brookside Christian and to Santa Rosa, playing Piner High School. In the middle of their league schedule, they will be heading to Tracy to play Millennium High School. Fortuna returns the favor to Miramonte by traveling five hours to Orinda for the second game of the season.

Acalanes

Coming off a 4-6 season, head coach Floyd Burnsed was counting on having a quarterback with a year's experience as the team's starter. However, Nick Kresnak, who will be playing baseball next year at the University of Washington, opted to not play football his senior year.

There are big shoes to fill as Kresnak threw for 2,542 yards and 25 touchdowns. Mike O'Donnell will be given the first opportunity to take over the starting position. O'Donnell was primarily a linebacker last season, averaging 6.7 tackles a game. If O'Donnell can match his passing performance from last season, things should take care of themselves. O'Donnell had a maximum quarterback rating last season of 177.1 though he only threw two passes (2/2/95 yards/1 TD)

Also competing for playing time is junior Brady Huchingson who has moved up the system, having played quarterback the last two seasons for the Dons' freshmen and JV teams. Burnsed is optimistic about the potential for both quarterbacks: "Mike is a really good player that makes good decisions and will also be lining up as a linebacker. I also have a lot of confidence that Brady can go in and play, though he has no experience as yet at the varsity level."

The receiving corps took a big hit with the graduation of Chris Rogers who will be on the Cal roster this year. Senior Lucas Eppinger was solid last season with 47 receptions and nine touchdowns (long of 95 yards), averaging 16.7 yards per catch. Jack Muren who only played three games last season due to a shoulder injury is back and Sam Heyman who was a force on the JV team last season should make the transition to the varsity level. Senior Matt Hess who has not played football since he was a freshman (playing lacrosse) could be a factor as well.

Senior Jake Delaney, who will be starting for the fourth year, is being counted on to carry the load in the backfield. Delaney, who also runs for the Dons' track team, led the team in rushing last year, gaining 414 yards, averaging 5.2 yards per carry and caught 25 passes as well. "This should be his year," said Burnsed. "We're expecting big things out of him."

Backing up Delaney will be juniors Nic Rossi and another trackman Dane Jensen, who only played cornerback last season.

Leading the way up front is an offensive line that brings a lot of size this year, which Burnsed intends to take advantage of: "Our offensive line is better this year. We are putting more emphasis on our run game and hopefully this will play out." Heading up this group are seniors Carson Burrell ("a really good player") and 6'5" Taylor Clark ("one of our big guys"). Junior Billy Brown (6'6") is playing varsity for the first time. "It's a group with some new players and some players with experience," Burnsed says.

The Dons' defense has good experience. The defensive line is led by 6'4" John Kalil who had 41 tackles last season. Linebacker Tommy Thrasher led the team with 101 tackles last season and the aforementioned O'Donnell was the team's fourth leading tackler.

Senior Nick Pearson, who led the team with four interceptions last season, will be starting at one of the cornerback positions and junior Dane Jenssen will be on the opposite side.

Junior Hunter Ridley will be handling the kicking game again and Pearson will be the team's punt and kickoff returner.

Acalanes opens their season at home on Aug. 23 against Armijo (Fairfield).

The key to the season for Burneds: "We have to stay healthy. We have 48 players, but not a lot of depth at certain positions."



Tanner Zwahlen, Miramonte



Mike O'Donnell, Acalanes Photo Gint Federas

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