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Lamorinda girls tennis dominant as a group

By Jon Kingdon



Photo Gint Federas

There are positives and negatives to having the Lamorinda girls tennis teams being so talented. It makes for very competitive matches but it will also make it difficult for all of the teams to thrive record wise.

Campolindo

After the Cougars compiled an 8-7 record last season, Campolindo head coach Steve Robinson has seen his team take the next step into being a top team this season after having defeated Miramonte and College Park in their opening matches: "It's going well. We have a very good group of girls that are serious about their tennis and they're working hard. We're getting better every week and we're looking forward to see how the season turns out for us."

The Cougars are a team with more depth than any one outstanding player, says Robinson: "The girls are fairly even from top to bottom and we are working really hard at doubles where we have had a lot of success. Even at times with three girls out with illness, we have had strong backups to step up and do well."

Isabelle and Francesca Restrepo, a senior and sophomore respectively, who played together as a doubles team last season, are no longer one doubles team with Francesca playing No. 1 doubles with Julia Barlier and Isabelle playing No. 3 with Alex Bonardi. Both pairs are playing well with great results. Sarah Vranesh and Sarah Warner moved up from last year's JV team and have been the No. 2 doubles team.

With seven seniors on the team, it has made for a good mix with the underclassmen. "The seniors have shown a lot of leadership and good mentorship for the girls," says Robinson. "They work hard in practice and compete as a coach would want them to. They show great sportsmanship and battle to very end, win or lose, supporting each other."

Kate Brown is playing No. 1 singles and Claire Ross is No. 2. "Kate is always facing the top players but she is enjoying it and fighting hard," says Robinson. "Claire has been very solid for us and is having a good campaign." Paige Davis, the only freshman on the varsity, has played No. 6 singles at times along with being an effective doubles player.

Robinson is very confident in approaching the rest of the season: "We just need to keep doing what we're doing. It's exciting for the team. I want to have the girls be confident at all times, whether there are good or bad results."

Acalanes

In his second year as the head coach at Acalanes, Drew Diefenbach has found it to be an easier situation for the players and himself as they are now familiar with each other. After a successful 16-5 record in 2018, the Dons have picked up where they left off.

Besides the talent on the team, Diefenbach speaks most highly about the quality of the players: "No matter what happens this season, we're going to end up a great team, regardless of what the finals results are. The character of the team is important. We're very unified and supportive of each other. Overall, team atmosphere is very positive, so everybody is working hard and we understand how to be a team."

The singles players are led by juniors Eliza Bates, Jasmine Toni and senior Zoe Cate. After graduating seven seniors, the Dons have received a real boost from their underclassmen, with three freshmen filling out the singles roster - Analese Ruczynski, Martha Burns and Kate Condy - which has been a pleasant surprise for Diefenbach: "I did hear about some of them through the grapevine but you don't know for sure how good they can be until they come out. They have done phenomenally well and they've picked up on the culture of the team right away, so there haven't been any issues with the new freshman."

The doubles team has been led by senior Madi Price along with a number of girls from last year's JV team.

Diefenbach is taking nothing for granted with the successful start to the season: "You can start well but we want to play a complete season this year and if we can do that, we should do really well but I just like to play as a team the way we have been since we started this year. So far so good."

Miramonte

After his team dominated in 2018 with an undefeated regular season, Miramonte head coach Mike McCollum has not found that type of success so far this year, having already lost to Acalanes and Campolindo: "Every year is a new year. Sports has never been easy. If it's easy, I don't want to be involved. We've fought hard every match and we'll try to figure out how to beat these teams the next time we face them. We had a great team last year and we have fabulous kids and a number of those players have returned, but injuries and life gets in the way. The results have been just a little less than we dreamed they'd be."

Junior Amber Lee, clearly the number one player on the team has not always been unavailable and Macey Dowd, normally the No. 2 player has been asked to play number one and has not missed a beat, says Mc Collum: "Amber is a brilliant player and student and has been going to national tournaments. Macey has playing No. 1 for me all year and has only lost two matches and that was at the Stanford Tournament against the best players in California. Valerie Swe has been playing No. 6 singles and has been coming on like gangbusters."

Leadership when things are not going well is crucial and the co-captains, seniors Payton Smith, Anna Hyman and Shaili Lakhotia have stepped up to keep the team focused, says McCollum: "Our captains and the assistant coaches have done a great job in trying and finding new goals and places to go. It's an academically brilliant bunch and they are competitive. We're trying very hard. Most every match, we've had to make a shuffle move to someone not being there whether they were sick or hurt and it's one of those years."

McCollum has not given up on the season but can't help looking for better times: "With our league the way it is, with only 10 matches, you get a couple of losses and it's pretty hard to find a way back from it but it's not impossible. It's a challenge in front of us and that's what sports is supposed to be about. We have a good team and they'll be better next week and we'll be better next year. I told the kids that expectations often get in the way of success. You're better trying to find the way to stay focused on the challenge in front of you, not what you thought was the challenge. Be here and be present."



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