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Acalanes Girls, Campo Boys win NorCal Championship

By Jon Kingdon



Jewel Roemer scored three goals and blocked a number of Sacred Heart shots at NorCal Championships. Photo Gint Federas

How do you improve on an undefeated season where you win the North Coast Section championship? If you're the Acalanes girls water polo team, you extend your unbeaten streak to 57 games, you win the NCS championship and you then win the NorCal Championship, a tournament that was canceled last year due to the fires and air quality, dominating Sacred Heart Prep by a score of 10-4. "Winning the Norcal Championships this year gave us a capstone to the season," head coach Misha Buchel said.

In playing their most complete game of the season, Acalanes jumped out to a 4-0 lead over Sacred Heart and led by as many as nine goals. "Our defense was unbelievable," said Buchel. "It was our most complete game of the year. We emphasized not relaxing or letting up and taking care of the defensive side of the pool and as a result of that, the offense would come."

Junior Ava Donleavy has been a real force in the goal, said Buchel: "Ava's saves on the inside are incredible. She has a real intuitive sense and does a great job of adjusting to what the other team is doing, whether to play farther out from the cage or dropping back."

Sacred Heart did not score on any of their seven power play opportunities. It was a group effort, said Buchel: "Jewel Roemer, (who scored three goals) blocked a number of the Sacred Heart shots, Claire Rowell was fantastic leading the counter-attack. Brooke Westphal and Mary Beth Heffelfinger and the seniors had careers that were unparalleled with three championships in four years."

It was a combination of offense and defense that worked so well for Acalanes all season, according to Buchel: "We created a lot out of our hard counter-attacks and our offensive sets enabled us to put our players into positions where the defense was at our mercy. When we got back on defense, we did a good job of managing the games."

Buchel says, without fear of contradiction: "We have the best shooters in the country." One of those shooters, first team All-American, Roemer, who will be playing for Stanford next year, emphasized the totality of the team: "These past two undefeated seasons were amazing. It was not just a couple of players. Everyone on this team was contributing. We all had our own roles and everyone did those roles really well to make a really good team."

Senior Brooke Westphal shared that assessment: "My teammates have made this so special every year. The chemistry on the team has been like no other and I have played on club teams and national teams and I always look forward to playing for the Dons. Misha and (assistant coach) Pat Reid always got us working hard. We were always grinding hard in practice but they have such a fun attitude that you always want to come to practice and continue to work hard. They push us but they were so supportive and I believe that all the girls would say the same thing."

Buchel does not take for granted how special his team has been: "We have had this incredible generation of talent that is coming through and I am so fortunate to be with a group like this. I told the girls to just enjoy every second of it. It doesn't happen all the time. They're an incredible group."

(See Campolindo boys' water polo story on Page C1.)



Photo Gint Federas

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