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Lamorinda girls soccer battling in challenging Diablo League

By Jon Kingdon



Photos Gint Federas

The Lamorinda girls soccer teams have a combined non-league record of 15-1-3 (Campolindo 4-0-2; Acalanes 7-0 and Miramonte 4-1-1). It's become a bit more difficult early in the competitive 13-team Diablo League with the teams in fifth, eighth and 10th place (Campolindo 4-1-1, Miramonte 2-1-3 and Acalanes 1-3-1).

Miramonte

Coming off a championship season, winning the North Coast Section and the Northern California Regional Championship, Miramonte head coach Barry McQuain understands the difficulty of being at the top of the mountain: "We'd love to repeat and that is our goal for this year but I know that the other teams have us in their sights, which means they are all going to be playing harder against us. It's been and will continue to be a competitive season and I like to think that we have a chance of doing well."

Despite losing five players to graduation and some who have opted to play for club teams, this is still a veteran team, says McQuain: "The eight seniors are the most that we have had in the last four years."

The offense is led by seniors Jordan Goularte (16 goals, 7 assists), Bea Whitaker (5 goals, 5 assists), co-captain Olivia Grillo (3 goals, 4 assists) and co-captain Juliet Adams (1 goal, 5 assists).

"As our center forward, Jordan makes it happen on offense due to her speed and ball skills," says McQuain. "She is also leading the team in assists because of her ability to find the other players and they have also found her. The negative is that she is now often double- and triple-teamed, though it does provide openings for her teammates."

The defense is led by senior co-captain Sabrina Grant and freshman Tahra Minowada, a combination that works well for McQuain: "Sabrina runs the defense and is one of our strongest and fastest players and I'm really happy with her performance this year. It's good have her working with Tahra."

Minowada is fourth on the team in scoring and has been a pleasant surprise for McQuain: "Tahra has the talent for defense and offense. She has such good ability to score in a crowd. When she scores, it means that we really have good control of the game, allowing her to move up the field."

Miramonte has the benefit of two goalies that have both been effective in the net " senior Mikayla Smith and sophomore Rowan Blacklock. "We are just lucky to have them both," says McQuain. "They're both skilled and athletic. Mikayla has very good experience and Rowan has had a lot of training at the club level. They work well together, training each other."

Freshman Lola Kassella has become a factor on the team as well, says McQuain: "Lola has done a nice job in adapting to varsity soccer and the bigger opponents. Though she is not that big, she gives as good as she gets."

With limited time in preseason, it's an ongoing process for the teams to come together and the Matadors are still looking to continue to develop by getting back to basics, says McQuain: "If you're just standing there, you're probably in the wrong position. If you're moving, it's probably the right thing to do. Give up the ball when you know the other player has a better position and know that you will get the ball when you have the better position. We're having a fun season and the girls all get along. We just want to make sure everyone stays as healthy as possible."

Campolindo

After making it to the second round of the Northern California Regional Tournament last year, Campolindo head coach Luis Pinto had reason for optimism this year: "We only lost three girls to graduation and have 16 returning players so we were able to pick up at a higher point than last year and have been a more consistent team."

The offense is led by two sophomore attacking midfielders, twins Mia and Ella Colombini, said Pinto: "They work well together and their transition speed is insane, being able to get back on defense and put in that extra work."

On defense, it's been the work between the defensive midfielders and the two center backs that has allowed only 12 goals in their 11 games. Senior Devon Ortman, Junior Kendall Runckell and sophomore Sami Kolin are all returners from last year's team and have coordinated well in keeping the defense performing so well.

Senior Mallory Louis also is very much responsible for the low number of goals given up, says Pinto: "Mallory is having her best year so far after having established herself as the starter."

Two freshmen, left wing Audrey Le-Nguyen and midfielder Coletta Tuba have provided top performances for Pinto and the Cougars: "Both Audrey and Collette have been a big part of the team and always make a positive impact when they have come into the game."

The co-captains are Louis, Ortman and Celia Campo and have been a big help for Pinto: "They have

done a good job in taking charge of the team. They have the respect of their peers and have helped us to maintain a fun and competitive culture."

Still there is room for improvement, says Pinto: "Our transitioning back to defense could be sharper. It's been more reactive than proactive so that has made us a little late at times."

This past week, Campolindo had four games and will have two games each week for the rest of the season so depth is going to be a key, says Pinto: "It's important that we avoid injuries with so many games in a week. I will be rotating a lot of players in to avoid injuries and burnout for the players."

Acalanes

On a veteran team with 15 seniors and four juniors, the leading scorers for the Acalanes Dons this season have been two freshmen. Addie Bailey (8 goals, 1 assist) and Tatum Zuber (7 goals, 6 assists) have combined for 37% of the team's goals. "Both of them have come in and really pushed the upperclassmen and really given us a lift," said head coach Nick Barbarino. "I know that the team has really welcomed them and I'm excited at what the future brings for them and the team."

It's far more than a two-girl team with the upperclassmen playing key roles on both offense and defense. Seniors Molly Broad (1 goal, 2 assists), Eliza Parry (1 goal, 3 assists), Julia Pratt (3 goals) and junior Emily Keeler (5 goals, 1 assist) have all been contributors.

"We have a lot of seniors and they have been great," said Barbarino. "There is a lot of leadership on this team. They have been very welcoming to the younger girls and are really keeping us together. Our attitude, work ethic and team chemistry are very good. We love to have fun and the seniors do a great job seeing that everyone is included."

Leading the defense have been juniors Aliye Wingate, Sam Hansen and Olivia Parnell. Parnell in particular has made big strides after being injured last season.

In goal, senior Kate Carter has taken charge both physically and verbally, says Barbarino: "Kate has been rock solid in the goal. She consistently makes great saves and also does a great job helping our offense, coming out to get the ball and then distributing it which has been a key for us."

The co-captains for the Dons are seniors, Carter, Dylan Hagglund, Ivy Souza and junior Aliye Wingate who represents the underclassmen on the team.

The key for the rest of the season? "Staying positive," says Barbarino. "We're still looking to improve in all areas. We've gotten better with every single game that we have played and I think that we're going to continue to gel as we keep getting used to each other."



Photos Gint Federas

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