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Acalanes and Campolindo lead boys soccer into the playoffs

By Jon Kingdon



Nick Geannacopulos (Acalanes #23) and Gio Sponzilli (Miramonte #9) Photos Gint Federas

Once again, Acalanes head coach Paul Curtis has led the Dons to another season with double-digit wins (12-3-4, 8-1-3 in league games) heading into the playoffs. "The success of our season has been about the boys focus and discipline," said Curtis. "They execute what they can do well and not trying to do too much, fulfilling their roles on the team."

Senior co-captain Nick Geannacopulos, who was second team all-league last season, has been the leader both on and off the field said Curtis: "Nick has been our key playmaker. He runs the middle of the field and does a great job there. He's very composed and is able to get the boys around him to relax, whether it's a senior or a sophomore. They respect him and he respects them and he is able to direct traffic pretty easily. He's a very inclusive young man, communicating with our freshman and JV squads."

It's been a group effort that Curtis attributes to the overall success on the offensive side of the field: "In general, we're very balanced on the attack and that's been one of the keys which makes it hard for anyone to concentrate on any one particular player. The boys have really developed a nice balanced attack."

The defense has been led by the center back senior Owen Hansen: "Owen is the real leader back there and has done a very good job in organizing the team," said Curtis.

Senior Will Easley has been a solid force in the net. The Dons have only given up 13 goals in 19 games, working out to be only 0.68 goals/game which included nine shutouts and not giving up more than two goals in any game. "Giving up so few goals almost meets our standards, but not quite," said Curtis with his tongue firmly ensconced in his cheek. "We have not seen a better goalie in the matches that we have played."

Acalanes lost only once in their last 10 games (6-1-3) which Curtis feels bodes well for the playoffs: "We have continued to build going into the playoffs. We've played a lot of quality teams but the boys have concluded that they have not seen a team that they cannot beat."

Miramonte

Evidencing how competitive the Diablo League is was Miramonte's 5-0-1 in non-league games and battling to a 5-6-1 record in league games. "We are in a tough league and a number of our losses were close and could've gone either way," said head coach Masood Ahmed. "We have a lot of underclassmen that have stepped up big time and gotten experience this year and they've done great things throughout the matches but it's been a learning lesson for us throughout the season, things we can take away in looking forward to the playoffs and overcoming the obstacles in front of us."

The offense has been led by senior Kent Barbir and junior Simon Neuwirth-Stein. "Both have been on the varsity since their freshman year," said Ahmed. They are great attack minded players that have done well for us over the last couple of years."

Ahmed also cited seniors Greg Kornguth and Gio Sponzilli, juniors Adrian Argast and Gio Donofrio, Marco Rodriguez and freshman Nick Govea: "They have helped to create the chances for the scorers."

It's been a team effort in the goal with senior Ethan Luckenbach and junior Benjamin Persinger with each alternating as starters throughout the season. "It's a unique situation where you can share minutes with each of them and they both have great skills. Ethan and Benjamin both bring different dynamics to the game. They both have their strengths and weaknesses and they are committed players with great attitudes."

With the playoffs coming up, the injury bug has caught up with the Matadors. With injuries to Kornguth, Argas, Sponzilli and Donofrio, the backups are going to be asked to step up while relying on team leaders to help pull the team together, something Masood feels good about: "Overall we have had great senior class leadership. Sponzilli and Barbir are our co-captains and Cayden Weiszmann is the one that also steps up for the emotional support of the team, picking up the boys and giving the emotional speech before the games."

Campolindo

Beginning the season with a major diminution of the team's roster and the loss of the team's head coach, it was no surprise that the Campolindo soccer team began the season with a 1-9-1 record. However, with co-head coaches Jose Kalipo-Diaz and Juan Mendez-Sanchez, the Cougars never let up, winning three games in January and staying in competition for a playoff spot for most of the season.

Though it was a slow process, Kalipo-Diaz attributed the turnaround to the inner strength of the team: "They just improved mentally and physically and we were playing more as a team now with less individual play and more team building with the team. The character has been great. Everyone improved a lot. It's been that way better since the start of the season. The players just worked hard in practice and in the games. We did a lot of team building activities and bonding practices which helped a lot."

The offense was led by Luka Brassinga and Justin Truax. "Both were super quick and confident on the ball so they took their chances very well, taking shots whenever needed which was good," said Kalipo-Diaz. "We worked hard on attacking and taking shots and it constantly got better."

The defense only gave up an average of 1.8 goals per game and were led by Jamiel Liu and Chase Giglio who were the key players on the Cougars defense said Kalipo-Diaz: "They were both great and really stepped up on defense. Taj Smith-Vuong who we brought up from the JV also stepped up big and started every game." The team lost nine of their games by only two goals or less.

Nathan Pearce was solid in the goal, coming back from an injury and showed constant improvement. In the last eight games of the season, Campolindo scored 11 goals to their opponents' 10 goals, losing three of those games by only one goal.

Senior Shawn Donovan, who Kalipo-Diaz called the heart of the team was the team's captain and helped to hold the team together. Donovan gave a lot of credit to the coaches: "Our coaches did a pretty incredible job. They stepped in on short notice and earned the respect of the players quickly. They've done well allowing the players to do what they wanted to do and we looked up to them a lot."

Donovan also gave much of the credit to the support of the players that were no longer on the team: "Those players have been there supporting the team at all times made a huge difference for us this year, always being there for us. That kept us rooted and humble and focused on one goal which was doing the best we could to represent those who couldn't go on the field."



Will Easley (Acalanes #1) Photos Gint Federas



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