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Successful basketball season in Lamorinda led by Campolindo



Photos Gint Federas

Carter Mahaney, Campolindo



Scott Ruegg, Acalanes and Aiden Mahaney, Campolindo



Matt Meredith, Miramonte

By Jon Kingdon

With all three Lamorinda teams making it into North Coast Section, and Campolindo going on to the state tournament, it would have to be considered a successful season all around.

Campolindo

Campolindo head coach Steven Dyer has never been one to back down from top competition, using it as a tool to prepare his team for league and postseason play. The six losses so far this year came against Archbishop Mitty, Salesian, Archbishop Riordan, St. Mary's (Stockton), Bishop O'Dowd and Dublin. Those teams have a combined record of 164-36 and the Cougars averaged losing by only a margin of six points in each of those games. The strategy has been successful as evidenced by Campolindo's 23-1 record in league play the last two seasons, not to mention a state championship.

Campolindo was placed in the open division for the NCS playoffs which automatically puts them in the state tournament, despite losing to Dublin in the semifinals. "We proved that we belonged in the open division as one of the top teams in the NCS," said Dyer. "We were 12-0 in a competitive league and had a hard non-league schedule, defeating teams like Modesto Christian and Weston Ranch twice. Our next step is to beat a top

team like Dublin."

Against Dublin, whom Campolindo played in the NCS semifinals, they were once again led by Aidan (20) and Carter (2) Mahaney against the No. 1 seeded Gaels. Campolindo closed to within three points several times with the ball but were unable to close it out. Still Dyer felt that the team took away a lot from the game: "We saw that little plays add up. We had some mistakes defensively and we did not run our offense quite as crisply. We did not play poorly but we did not play great and you have to be firing on all cylinders at this point of the year if you want to keep winning. We were good but you have to be really good to defeat a team like Dublin on the road in the NCS open division."

The experience gained last year in winning the state tournament helps, but Dyer is keeping it in perspective: "Every year is different. We know the format but we'll be in a harder division and we have earned that right. At this point of the year, everything is challenging."

Acalanes

The award for most improved team would have to go to Acalanes, which improved from 9-17 last year to 16-11 this past season. Head coach Sol Henik attributed the turnaround to both the talent and character of the team: "Our goal was to make NCS and we achieved that goal. We had

great chemistry among the players. They all liked each other and they worked hard every day in practice and we got great leadership from Scott Ruegg and Aidan Bodner. I'm just really happy about how this year went, how all of the players came together."

Acalanes came up just short in their playoff game against Tamalpais, losing 70-64 in overtime. With Ruegg and Bodner getting into early foul trouble and Joey Carrillo fouling out in the fourth quarter, it was too much to overcome, particularly with the Dons going 10 for 20 from the foul line.

There were two freshman that played a substantial amount of time this past season that Henik is excited about seeing them take the next step as sophomores: "6'6" Jake Davis was a really nice surprise for us and he has a great deal of potential to have a great career at Acalanes. Theo Stoll got a lot of experience playing for both the varsity and the JV and we're counting on him and Jake to make improvements and big contributors next season."

With Acalanes returning six of their top seven scorers returning next year (minus Bodner), Henik sees even further improvement for the Dons, revolving around Ruegg, Carrillo and Jackson Aris-Dumas: "Those are the guys that have been with us the longest and they under-

stand our system and culture. They're guys that want to improve and get better with leading the way. Scott loves basketball and Acalanes. He is a leader on the court and in school. We will go as far as Scott can take us."

Miramonte

In his first season at Miramonte, head coach Chris Lavdiotis, bringing in a new system, made it to the semifinals in the NCS playoffs finishing the season with a 16-13 record.

Lavdiotis was able to hit the ground running due to the character and leadership of his senior class: "Even though I brought in a new system to the team, the thing that really worked this year was that the seniors really bought in to us. My first goal was to establish relationships with the returning players, especially the seniors because that's where the leadership comes from. In that regard, we put together a pretty nice culture and our seniors were so good, I believe they passed it on to the younger players and I believe that we have gained credibility with all of the players because of the success we had this season."

The Matadors were headed by senior Matt Meredith who led the team in scoring (13.8) and assists (2.8), but it was the overall team effort that Lavdiotis most appreciated: "These kids studied film and understood scouting reports better than any kids I

ever coached. We were able to usually take away the other team's best actions on offense. For example, in our semifinal game against Branson, we had them completely stymied but they had damn good defense and it made it hard on us to score as well. These guys put in the work and we got better and better and the last few weeks, we were really hard to contend with, developing a lot of trust between the coaches and the players and we had a lot of fun."

Along with Meredith, Miramonte is graduating a number of key players – Michael Giertz (8.1), James Frye (6.0), Quenton Breznikar (4.5) and Nick Watson (4.4) among others. The graduating seniors will be missed by Lavdiotis: "We're losing a quiet leader in Meredith, a vocal and enthusiastic, energizer guy in Quenton, and a real lead by example and fabulous captain in Nick."

The returning players for the Matadors are Niya Olabode (9.6), Ryan Schwarz (7.3), James Frye (6.0) and Tom Dutto (3.6). "We have a lot of talent and size but it just needs to develop into that leadership role," said Lavdiotis. We talked a lot about the need for the returning guys to not be reluctant to step forward and be a voice and embrace it. Schwarz really grew up as the season progressed and his 3-point shooting was terrific and Niya just needs to improve his outside shot and be more efficient in getting to the rim since he is so strong. He will be a terrific player next year."

Besides the upper classmen, Miramonte brought up three sophomores at the end of the season that Lavdiotis is confident will be contributing to the team next season: "Caden Breznikar is a really good player that shows no fear, Ben Murphy is a smart and savvy player and Andrew Sidlauskas is a great rebounder that shows a lot of heart and hunger in really going after the ball. Yes, you lose a lot of players but if the kids that are coming back are ready to take over, we should be successful next year and that's how we're looking at it."

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