

Published June 10th, 2020

Filling the sports void for Lamorinda athletes

By Jon Kingdon



West Temkin Photo Gint Federas

It's been a particularly topsy-turvy spring, particularly for high school students who were quarantined and forced to take their classes online, and with the cessation of all spring sports.

This spring was supposed to be a capstone to a great athletic career for Nick Kresnak, a graduating senior at Acalanes who will be attending the University of Washington in the fall and will be on their baseball team. With the Dons baseball team starting the season off 3-0-1, things came to a sudden halt. "We got a call from our athletic director and had to stop in the middle of practice," said Kresnak. "We just packed up and went home and that was the last time we were on a baseball field. We never through it would last for the remainder of the season."

The Campolindo baseball team which had begun the season with a 4-0 record, saw their season conclude the same way it did for Acalanes, said head coach Max Luckhurst: "It was on Friday, March 13th. We were about to start practice and they told us to shut it down immediately. When the season was officially canceled, I felt really bad for the seniors. We had a great group of kids."

The Campolindo community did what they could to acknowledge the senior players. On what would have been the last home game, parents had the seniors come on the field one-by-one for 15 minutes where they had their pictures taken with their banner and their moms so they could have these memories down the road, said Luckhurst. "Besides that, we did have a 'parking lot pickup' with social distancing for the kids to pick up their stuff which allowed the coaches to say goodbye."

There are optimistic plans for various types of summer baseball. "At this point, it's not going to be a game setting," Luckhurst said. "It will be more like workouts with 12 or fewer players with social distancing just to get the kids out there, throwing a baseball, batting and running."

West Temkin, an upcoming junior at Campolindo, is a goalie on the Cougars water polo team that won the NCS this past fall. At this point in the year he would normally be practicing with the Contra Costa United team which, said Temkin, "is one of the best teams and we were really preparing for a tournament called the junior Olympics, and were odds on to win it, but it was canceled which I was pretty sad about."

Though group training is not available at this time, Temkin has taken it upon himself to find a way to maintain his personal training by going to Aquatic Park in San Francisco for morning swims. "I've been driving in with Marcus Longton (a Campolindo graduate who is on the USC water polo team). It's open swimming in the bay and it's not too crowded. I've been able to fit it in with my video classes at Campolindo."

Club teams have long been an essential tool in the development for so many athletes during their school team's off-seasons. Kim Everist, Campolindo's head coach for the girl's water polo team and a coach for Lamorinda Water Polo Club, has been equally frustrated at the suspension of her club team.

To maintain contact with their swimmers, Guy Baker and Bill Brown of the Lamorinda Water Polo Club responded within 48 hours of the shutdown to set up a home water polo program on Zoom for the club, said Everist. "We began a training program consisting of dry land training and water polo training along with a speaker series and with practical training sessions."

As a coach, the quarantine is as tough on Everist as it has been on the players: "It has been a shock to my system being unable to coach. We miss the kids a ton and having those connections. It's become an alternate universe only being able to provide training in conversations via the internet. We may be getting pool access in June and will be following the guidelines set by the Lamorinda school districts to create a safe program for the kids related to all the COVID guidelines. We are seeing the light at the end of the tunnel and we're excited at hopefully seeing the kids soon and getting back into the pool regardless of whatever that looks like."

The Acalanes girls volleyball head coach Haley Walsh has also taken advantage of the current technology in lieu of having any spring or summer workouts: "We have been having virtual workouts and lessons for our players which began in May. Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, we lead them through a workout for 30 minutes and then we have a skills workout for 30 minutes. Mastering these skills now, our players will

already be familiar with our strategy and technique so we can save 10-20 minutes at practice. At that point, with we can just play and focus on implementing those skills."

The coronavirus has made things particularly difficult for Adam Cooper, the head coach for the Saint Mary's Men's soccer team. With many of his players who come from overseas, it's not just a matter for them showing up on campus: "We felt the best things was for all of our players was to go home and be with their families. However, getting them back from overseas may be a little tricky. We don't know what that will look like this fall regarding U.S. travel rules and quarantining but it may take as long as a month in some cases."

Cooper is doing whatever he can to maintain contact with his players: "We have Zoom meetings each week with our team. They cannot consist of actual training, according to the NCAA. It's been more of welfare checks on the guys, making sure their academics are in order, they're healthy and just keeping in contact with everyone. We've been able to get all the guys joking and laughing and having some fun. It just our way of staying connected."

It's more than the high school and college athletes that feel the loss of sports activity due to the virus. Longtime Moraga resident, Nick Marnell, has recently been playing in the Redwood Empire Baseball League in Sonoma County and various other adult leagues since the 1980's. "I just love to play baseball," said Marnell. "There nothing like getting out on the field and I will do it as long as I can." Except this summer with the leagues, at best, on hold.

Still Marnell remains cautiously optimistic: "We're at the mercy of the Sonoma county public fields. Until they reopen, there's nothing we can do. When the games do start up, there may be changes to the game due to the virus such as umpires not standing behind the catcher, only have the next four batters in the dugout, no stealing so the first baseman does not have to hold the runner, the batters and the catcher wearing masks and hand sanitizer being omnipresent. However, as with everything else at this point, it's all up in the air."

Most overlooked in the sports world during this hiatus, have to be the umpires and officials who have been out of work since spring. There were over 80 umpires that were expecting to work the baseball and softball games in Contra Costa County this spring and summer. Dave Cutaia, a longtime official and supervisor speaks to the loss felt by the officials: "We started the season early in March and then the games and revenue went away. For some officials, the revenue is critical, for others it's supplemental and there is a third group that does it as an avocation. With all three groups, it's a huge hit because you've gone from regular sports officiating to nothing."

It's also the intangibles that are felt by the officials, says Cutaia: "It's a huge loss. There is a lot of camaraderie among the officials - not just among themselves but with the coaches, staff and even with the players. We are making occasional Zoom calls for training and other things but there is a big void in the officials' lives because these people are very good friends and that interaction is not there. Things have stopped and all you can say is `Now what?'"

Will all of the disappointment at what has happened in the world of sports, Max Luckhurst sees the need to put it all in perspective: "There's a lot more suffering going on outside of the world of sports. All the cancellations are disappointing, but we all need to take a step back. We can feel bad, but we have to see the big picture with how many people are struggling and losing their lives."



Nick Kresnak Photo Gint Federas

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