

Published May 26th, 2021

Lamorinda girls' volleyball builds foundation for future success

By Jon Kingdon



Three sets of sisters are on the Campolindo roster. Back row, from left: Molly Mitchell, Quinn Heydenfeldt, Kate Dendinger; front: Megan Mitchell, Ella Heydenfeldt, Anna Dendinger Photo Gint Federas

teams. "There are some players that are missing practice due to their club team commitments," Vuong said. "We're just glad to play, particularly for our seniors to finish their careers. I've had some of them since they were freshmen, and to have them not play this year would have been wrong."

It's a family affair for the Cougars with three sets of sisters on the roster - Kate (Sr) and Anna (Soph) Dendinger, Ella (Jr) and Quinn (Jr) Heydenfeldt and Molly (SR) and Megan (Jr) Mitchell. "This is the first time I've had three sisters and I wanted them to have the experience of playing alongside each other," Vuong said.

The veteran leadership has been crucial under these trying conditions, which Vuong has relied on. "All of our seniors have been leaders," Vuong said. "The younger players have particularly looked up to Kate Dendinger and Molly Mitchell for advice. "

On offense, Dendinger and Mitchell have been key players as outside hitters. Olivia Knutson and Erin Thomas, both of whom are all-around players, are also having solid seasons. Freshman Chilotta Bell has shown a lot of potential and will be counted on to do a lot more next season.

Senior Brianna Lee has been solid as the team's libero bringing a lot of playoff and state experience. Junior Olivia Wiseman provides good depth and will step in next year as the libero's starter.

Vuong made it a point to see that the seniors receive a large amount of the playing time. "I let it be known that this was a special year for the seniors because it's such a short season and because how much they had contributed to the team the prior three years. For the young players, next season will start in only a few short months."

Miramonte

The Matadors have only two seniors on the roster, libero Jenna Foster, and defensive specialist Nicolle Wagner. "It has been going smoothly," Ray said. "We have a lot of sophomores and juniors on the varsity this year."

Leading the offense has been sophomore Amber Chu and junior Natalie Kurtz. "Amber is more confident this year," Ray said. "She's starting to see the blocks a lot better when she's hitting. Natalie, our middle blocker, has also been an offensive threat this year."

On defense sophomore Annika Blas was moved to defensive specialist from the outside. According to Ray, "Annika's confidence has really improved as she is more comfortable playing in the back row. We also have some freshmen that are getting playing time there."

Foster's leadership on the court has been important to the team's stability. "Jenna is a hard worker and gets lots of touches. She brings the team together on the court," Ray said. "If we're struggling, Jenna will talk

Though some sports were able to transition, to a point, outside, it was not as simple for the volleyball teams. "We did everything outdoors," Acalanes head coach Haley Walsh said. "There was a lot more retrieving balls and dealing with the elements."

For Miramonte head coach Lindsay Ray, it was a matter of hitting the ground running: "We just started three weeks ago. We only had 2-3 practices prior to our first match."

John Vuong, Campolindo's head coach, focused on getting the team in shape: "We could not practice inside or outside, so we did a lot of conditioning and plyometric training to get into shape. We did a lot of stretching under the guidance of my assistant coach Dave Chan, who is a physical therapist."

Campolindo

There has been no shortage of players for Campolindo with 20 on the varsity, 12 on JV and 12 on the freshman

everyone through their mistakes and makes sure everyone stays calm. She communicates early which helps to avoid collisions and is a real strength in her game."

The short season has become even more abbreviated for Miramonte with two games canceled due to virus concerns with their opponents. With such a young team, Ray is optimistic about the team's future: "With such a short preseason, it's been a little tough. A lot of the girls don't play club, so they haven't had any indoor volleyball training for a while, but it's been coming back to them and we're working through it."

Acalanes

For the Dons, Haley Walsh has found things "a little bit easier because the team was exposed to my system last season." The start of the season constantly being delayed led to a lot of confusion. "We were practicing continually but not knowing we would even have a season," Walsh said. "Finding ways to help the girls face this adversity and building on our leadership were key areas of focus."

On offense, the team is led by senior Erin Meade who moved to setter after playing the right-side last year. "She took over in the setting role and has filled a needed role," Walsh said.

Annika Olson has worked well with Meade, according to Walsh: "Annika has been a strong outside and it's cool to see her and Erin work so well together this year. They are good friends, and that trust has solidified the chemistry on the team. Mackenzie Sauers has also been one of our top hitters and has become very aggressive."

Two sophomores, Katelyn Olin and Maya Paul, have stepped up in the middle and have proven to be vital players. "They have provided new blood into our team and are young people to build on for next year," said Walsh.

Senior Carly Coffee has been vital behind the service line and the return of libero Sydney Sowerby, who is just returning from an injury, has helped the defense. "We really needed Sydney to step up," said Walsh. "We went through all of our defense specialists and did not have anyone to replace her."

Walsh is already optimistic about the next season. "We're building a foundation here. Our players are buying into our program."

Reach the reporter at: sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA