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Lamorinda girls volleyball preview

By Jon Kingdon



From left: Jade Profilio, Georgia Winkles, Hanna Hageboeck, Apple Walton, Emma Johnson, Gianna Manzone, Isabela Yanakieva and Aly Kirke Photo provided

John Vuong: "Right now we're still learning. We have a lot of young players and new faces in the varsity program. They're good, skilled players but they're still learning to work as one, finding that connection among the players."

Acalanes

Despite a slow start to the season (0-3), Walsh, in her third year as the head coach of the Dons, has a team that has completely bought into her system. "It does feel like they're a cohesive unit whereas it hadn't felt like that in the past," Walsh said. "We're doing things that we've talked about and we're seeing a lot of success. At this point, it's just tweaking some unforced errors."

This is a very mature team, with 14 juniors and seniors and one freshman, that Walsh feels was stronger for what they all went through last season. "Our seniors are leading the team and the program," Walsh said. "It feels that those things that we worked on last year in terms of facing adversity are showing in the growth of our whole team right now."

The offense has a lot of strength on the front line. Aly Kirke and Katelyn Olin have been very strong in the middle. Despite being under 5'9", Hanna Hageboeck "is a phenomenal hitter and is one of our key players," Walsh said.

As the season progresses, freshman MaeLin Mason, should be seeing a lot of playing time. "MaeLin is a great player and is just learning our system and once she learns it, she will be a valuable piece in our offense," Walsh said. "She has such an aggressive swing, it's just a matter of getting her timing on the set and once she gets it, she will have a monster attack."

The Dons are running a 5-1 offense, using only one setter, 5'1" Rachel Zhang who will play in the front row. "It's great that Rachel can do that and adjust to our new system as we wait for our second setter, Mara Korzeniowska to return from a concussion which will allow us to run a 6-2 (2 setters) offense."

Lyanne Wang was being counted on at the key libero position and as a defensive specialist but suffered a hand fracture in the second game and will be lost for an indefinite time. Senior Georgia Winkles will now be filling that role. Senior defensive specialist Kira Wood has been solid on defense and Emma Johnson has been a double threat, Walsh said: "Emma has made some big defensive plays along with being an offensive threat."

It's addressing the little things that need to be addressed for the team to be successful, according to Walsh: "We just need to see more fire from the players on the court and be more aggressive with our swings and passes. If we keep our foot on the gas, we'll start to see a lot of positive results."

Miramonte

With the preseason and an opening game victory over Berean Christian (3-0), Ray has come away with a positive perspective of the team. "These girls are relentless," Ray said. "They come into the gym and get the job done. Practices are game-like and with so many upperclassmen, they're all competing for positions and

court time."

There is a lot of strength in the front line for Miramonte with outside hitters, junior Amber Chu, and senior Casey Roy. Junior Camryn Hirst who played JV last season and senior Natalie Kurtz are the starting middle blockers. "Amber and Casey will be big impact players on the outside and Natalie and Camryn will be strong players inside as well."

Junior Julia Berg, who has been on the team since she was a freshman, will be running the Miramonte offense. Senior, Catherine Devlin will be the second setter when the Matadors go to a 6-2 lineup and has the versatility to play different positions. "When we are playing a 5-1 offense, Catherine will have a huge impact on our defense," Ray said.

Nicole Tuszynski, who played as a freshman last season and junior Annika Blas-Cedeno are both competing to be the team's libero. Both can also fill the role as defense specialist.

It all seems to be coming together for Ray who came to Miramonte two years ago: "When I started here, we had a big freshman class, and they have all prepped during their club seasons and they're all ready to go. It's all about playing for each other as a family and as a team. We just need to stick to our goal which is to finish at the top of a very competitive league."

Campolindo

After a victory over California and a loss to top ranked Marin Catholic, the Cougars are still determining the character of the team. "It's a matter of defining ourselves and determining who our players are going to be," Vuong said. "Our numbers were short this offseason because a number of the girls were focusing on beach volleyball."

It's the lack of competition early in the season that has handicapped the development of the team with Campolindo playing fewer pre-league games and tournaments than usual. "Normally we would play in a number of local tournaments but most of them have been canceled and we pulled out of a tournament in San Diego out of concern with the coronavirus," Vuong said. "The pandemic may have set back our team in their ability to communicate and play as a team. There has been some carryover from last year though we're starting to get back to some normalcy. It's knowing how to gel and play with each other. We don't have that yet but it's going to build as the season goes on. It's just a matter of when."

After graduating eight seniors last season, the team is comprised of six seniors, six juniors, two sophomores and two freshmen.

There is a lot of size on the team though it's a young group in the front line. Freshman Emma Knutson and sophomore Hannah Bjornson are the leading outside hitters and junior Brittany Soun will be a top player as a middle blocker. Freshman Aveya Stone is just returning from a hand injury and should play a substantial role as well.

Using a 6-2 scheme, the starting setters will be junior Olivia Woo who played for the JV last season and senior Ella Heydenfeldt. Senior Gracie Doane will also see time as a setter.

The defense will be led by junior libero, Olivia Wiseman who has been on the varsity since she was a freshman. The leading defenders will be Megan Mitchell and Samantha Brouhard. Front liner, Hannah Bjornson will also be counted on to play defense as well. This is a key area of concern for Vuong because "even though we have a lot of good hitters, if we don't defend the ball, we won't get to hit the ball."

With so many players on the varsity for the first time, Vuong is looking for leaders to step up and has named Grace Doane and Megan Mitchell as the team captains, though he will have individual captains for each game. "It's a challenge because we have a lot of young, dominant players," Vuong said. "We want the leaders to support the team on and off the court, which is what a true leader does, leading by example. It's on them to get the younger players to buy into what they're saying."

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