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Lamorinda girls golf succeeds as teams and individuals

By Jon Kingdon



Acalanes team with one player from Campolindo at the NCS championship, from left: Ainsley Murphy (Campolindo), Emmi Cronin, Haley Chelemedos, Juliet Becker, Kendal Becker, Makena Chelemedos, Hana Chelemedos Photo Jon Kingdon

as a team since 2015 and Ainsley Murphy was Campolindo's sole representative.

Showing no ill-effects after going through a season where the pandemic was at the forefront of everyone's mind. The Lamorinda girls' golf teams just concluded the year with great individual and team success. The teams were well represented on the Diablo Athletic League Foothill Division All-league list.

Miramonte had six All League players (1st teamers - Kaylen Tu, Courtney Scheingart and Katherine Scheingart, 2nd teamer Lia Toyama and Honorable Mentions Vera Nguyen and Tallulah Brooks-Williams). Acalanes had three players (2nd teamers Makena Chelemedos and Haley Chelemedos and Honorable Mention Kendal Geddes), as did Campolindo (2nd teamer Ainsley Murphy and Honorable Mentions Chase Obsitnik and Anna Mooradian).

A week ago, the Division I NCS tournament was held at the Diablo Creek Golf Course in Concord. Miramonte, which had earlier won the Division II tournament, was ineligible to compete as a team but had all of their players represent the school as individual golfers.

Acalanes made their first appearance in the tournament

It was a dominating year for Miramonte and their first-year head coach Doug Senz. After going undefeated, winning the league dual match and tournament titles, and the Division II championship, their first since 2015, it was topped off by the team's performance in the NCS tournament. Since they were ineligible to compete as a team in the NCS Division I tournament, the Miramonte golfers were only able to compete as individuals and all shot very competitive scores: Tu-70, C. Scheingart-76, Toyama-82, Nguyen-82 and K. Scheingart-86. There was a great deal of satisfaction knowing that had they been eligible as a team, they would have placed second with a combined score of 396 behind the Foothill team which shot a team score of 388. Tu finished third overall individually, qualifying her to play in the NCGA/CIF Northern California Tournament which occurred after this issue went to press.

"We had a great group of golfers that were even better young ladies that were a pleasure to coach," Senz said. "They were a blueprint for teamwork and camaraderie. I was so proud of the girls, not only with their camaraderie but the way they would help out the players on the other teams with suggestions on club selection and where to hit the ball on our home course."

Besides the talent on the team, the unity of the team was also a strong factor in their success, said Tu. "I'm going to miss the camaraderie of the team and the dynamic that we have. We're all very close friends. Everyone can be funny. When you can hang out and joke around, we became more like family. It really made me happy to be on the team."

Toyama, also a senior, echoed Tu's feeling about the team. "It was the way that we worked together bonded as a team. It really helped and encouraged us to get to where we ended up as a team. We were able to communicate well and help each other in practice and in competition. Doug was always there for us, giving us lots of encouragement."

Senz also acknowledged David Solomon, the head professional at the Orinda Country Club and his staff and members, which allowed the team to use OCC as their home course: "The experience of being so warmly welcomed and then being able to play at such a quality facility made us a much better team."

Acalanes

Cassidy Mulholland and Ken Lorge, both teachers at Acalanes, have taught and coached for many years, but this was their first time coaching the golf team. Replacing longtime coach Tim Scott, they hit the ground running, winning 6 of 10 dual matches and qualifying for the NCS tournament for the first time since 2015. Egos were not an issue for them, Lorge said: "We just divided it up 50-50 with no definitive division of labor."

Historically, not a lot of girls would come out for the Acalanes golf team but this year the Dons had the

numbers and talent for each match. "We were able to run six players when needed (with the top five scores counting)," Mulholland said. "Some schools had as few as one golfer so to be able to line up six players was advantageous for us."

The Dons team was comprised of four juniors and two freshmen. With no seniors, leadership was key with co-captains, juniors Makena Chelemedos and Kendal Geddes. Juniors Emmi Cronin and Juliet Becker along with freshmen twins Haley and Hana Chelemedos filled out the roster.

Leadership was important for such a young team. "Our captains were able to help out the younger players and it was definitely a learning experience for the team," Lorge said. "It was nice for the players to learn and be successful at the same time. For Makena, with her two younger sisters, it did make for an interesting dynamic though the twins are both very mature for freshmen."

The most surprising development for the team was the play of Becker who took up the game for the first time during the pandemic. "Juliet made incredible progress in a very short time," Mulholland said. "She's already close to breaking 50 which is a pretty remarkable accomplishment."

After going winless last season, the team was particularly excited to be competing in the NCS tournament. "The girls were stoked and excited with their success and being able to reap the rewards for their efforts," Lorge said. "This is brand new for them and I think they like this much better."

The Dons finished ninth out of 21 teams in the tournament, with a combined score of 438. This was an 18-stroke improvement from the DAL championship two weeks earlier where they competed on the same course.

Makena Chelemedos particularly enjoyed the season after competing under such difficult conditions last season: "I liked being the captain, being able to help the team and especially my sisters. It all came together this year because we were all very close and with the work of our coaches Cass and Ken," she said. "We really did miss Tim for sure, but we were able to get more practice in and were a lot more committed. We just put in the hard work, and it really paid off in the end."

Campolindo

In team golf, you're only as strong as your weakest link. Unable to produce a competitive fifth golfer, it was not a successful season on a won-lost level for Campolindo but one with individual accomplishments.

Head coach Gary O'Neill was just one player short of being a consistently competitive team. "It was a tale of two cities," O'Neill said. "We had five excellent players but lost one with injuries. We were just short of a couple of players to be a competitive team. Our other five players (four who were freshmen) were brand new to the team. This was the smallest team I've had in terms of numbers in the eight years I've been coaching. Still, it was really a fun group to be with."

Senior Ainsley Murphy was a team co-captain and the only Campolindo player in the NCS tournament by finishing in the top 18 in the prior qualifying tournament. Chase Obsitnik, the other co-captain, was unable to play in the qualifying tournament, not feeling well that day and junior Anna Mooradian also played in the tournament but was done in by the wet conditions on the course. Senior Alyssa Lewis-Smith missed making it to the tournament by one stroke.

After battling through the bad weather at the NCS tournament, Murphy was still able to look back on her career with great affection: "It was great that I was able to make it to this tournament. One of the most special things for me was playing for Gary and John (Banister), my coaches for the past four years. From my freshman year, they helped me grow as a player. I learned a lot about myself, and I made a lot of good friends with my teammates."



2021 Miramonte Lady Matadors, North Coast Section Girls' Golf Division II Champions, from left: Courtney Scheingart, Vera Nguyen, Coach Doug Senz, Katherine Scheingart, Kaylen Tu, Lia Toyama Photo provided

Reach the reporter at: sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com

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