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Two finals and a semifinal for the Lamorinda boys' water polo teams



Photo Gint Federas

By Jon Kingdon

At the beginning of the season, Miramonte Coach James Lathrop made it a point to downplay expectations, saying, "This is the youngest team I've had in 19 years. Hopefully, we'll be in a good spot at the end of the year."

The Matadors (16-11 and ranked 17th nationally) made it to the final of the NorCal Championship against the No. 1 seed and fourth ranked Sacred Heart Prep. Miramonte kept the game close for most of the first half but ended up losing by a score of 17-4. "I know the score was lopsided tonight, but we played very tough against a very talented team," Coach James Lathrop said. "It didn't help that we only had one day to prepare for and we got into foul trouble. They made the shots, and we didn't, but we competed like hell and I'm really proud of the guys."

After the game, Lathrop spoke to the team about how far they had come from the beginning of the season: "I reminded them about the journey that we have been on. We set a goal at the beginning of the year, acknowledging that we were a young team and yet this was the first Miramonte boys team that made it to an NCS championship game."

Lathrop shared the credit for ultimate success of the team with the seven seniors on the team and the roles they filled, in and out of the pool. "We had great leadership from all of our seniors, not just the captains," Lathrop said. "They would not wait for me to ask them to be leaders but took it upon themselves to hold the team accountable and having a good time doing it. They're all quality young men."

The high points of the season for Miramonte came in the semifinal games of the NCS and NorCal tournaments, when they were playing at an optimal level, Lathrop said: "We played our best games of the year in the post season, defeating Campolindo in the NCS semifinals after having lost to them twice previously and then defeating De La Salle in the NorCal semifinals after being down by two goals in the last three minutes. Coming back to win that game was a testament on how far we had come as a team."

For Lathrop, the performance of the team was not at all dampened by the loss to Sacred Heart: "By making it to the finals in the NCS and NorCal championships, this year was a success by far because we maximized how good we could be as a team. We hold these kids to high standards and support them to reach those levels. There is a tradition and legacy that comes with Miramonte. We're continuously just trying to write the next chapter."

Campolindo

With a record of 16-11, Campolindo still made it to the semifinals in the NCS and NorCal tournaments, losing in a battle against Miramonte in the NCS and then to the ultimate NorCal winner, Sacred Heart Prep 9-6.

For the senior class, it was end of an arduous two years following a NorCal championship in 2019. "They've been through a lot with the COVID," Coach Miles Price said. "After losing (starting center) Ben Larsen for the season due to an injury, it's been an up and down year."

The offense scored at least 13 goals nine times but only finished the season averaging 10.2 goals per game and the team lost four games by one goal and two games by two goals. "We weren't inconsistent, but we did not play to our potential day in and day out," Miles said. "When it all came together, we were really talented and there were games where we weren't, where we really struggled."

The defense only gave up an average of 9.4 goals per game led by Grant Roesch along with Reid Thorson and William Vranesh among a strong group of defensive players.

Once again, Senior West Temkin proved to be a force in the net. "West is a generational talent that has been a blast to have coached for the last four years. (Senior) Ben Blatt also did a good job when he was called upon to play. He and West have been very supportive of each other, and we always had some great practices."

Price never had cause to question the commitment of the team: "Our intensity and effort was always great, and I've been really proud of our captains (Temkin, Luca Rago and Brody Crouch). Our future is bright, and we'll continue to be a good team."

Acalanes

Acalanes started off the season slowly losing six of their first nine games. It was at this point that head coach Lincoln Haley realized that the development of the team's mindset was going to lead the team to the top or sink it far lower: "The biggest things for us to stay positive and find that chemistry within the team, making sure that everyone stayed on the same page."

That they did, going 9 and 5 the rest of the season, even more impressive with the 61st ranked Dons playing 11 games against higher ranked opponents and eight of those teams ranked in the top 20 nationally and making it to the NCS championship game.

Though losing 10-7 to Redwood in the final, the Dons made it a game right to the end. However, it was the prior semifinal game against Tamalpais, an overtime 14-12 victory, which epitomized the attitude, effort, and desire of the team.

The offense was led by Christian Gotterup but when teams were able to shut him down, juniors Austin Bishop and Andrew Sappal were able to step in and carry the offense as they did in the Tamalpais game. "Andrew did a great job getting up and down the pool, scoring some counter goals and Austin came through in the clutch," Haley said. "He had a lot of opportunities in that game and took advantage of his scoring opportunities."

It was seniors Kyle Rosenblatt and Eli Berkowitz who were the cornerstones of the Dons' defense fronting for junior goalie Harrison Labrosse. "We had to find out what we were as a defensive team," Haley said. "Kyle and Eli were just rock solid in there and Harrison also did a consistently great job all season."

The attitude of the team is what really pleased Haley: "We had our ups and downs as you do in any season, with both good and bad streaks. However, when we got into a funk, it might have taken a second to get out of it but once we got over it, the team came out pretty high."

Successful seasons for Lamorinda girls water polo led by Miramonte's championship team

By Jon Kingdon

Starting and finishing the season ranked No. 1 nationally, the Miramonte Lady Matadors concluded a dominating, undefeated season with their 28th win, a victory of visiting Davis High School 11-4 in the Division I Northern California championship. Acalanes (18-12) made it to the Division II finals losing 10-7 to Arroyo Grande in Santa Cruz. Campolindo (15-12), reached the NCS championship game falling to Miramonte, qualifying for the NorCal championships, but came up short against Sacred Heart Prep.

After the celebratory jump in the pool after the win, Miramonte coach John Roemer spoke to the quality and talent of the team rather than singling out any individuals. "The depth of the team was the key to our success. The girls knew that if somebody didn't have a good game, someone else would step up."

Evidencing the statement, in the semifinal game against Sacred Heart Prep, Allie Lurie scored five goals and in the Davis game, Meghan McAninch led the team with five goals.

"It would depend on how a defense would play us," Roemer said. "If they took something away from us, we would have somewhere else to go to. The girls would read what was open and they would know what to do."

McAninch made it a point to share the credit for her performance against Davis and for what Roemer brought to the team: "The five goals I scored were because of my teammates. We worked as a team, not individually. Coach Roemer was someone that we could learn from and look up to because of how much experience he has had in the water polo field."

Miramonte only gave up one goal in the second half of the game. Goalie Lindsey Lucas also made it a point to share the credit with her teammates. "It's all about the team," she said. "It's everyone working together, playing for the player next to you and not for yourself. Allie Lurie and Ally Smith our center defenders were huge but honestly it was everyone that made it work, our starters, our substitutes and even that players that didn't make it into the game were also important."

After the victory, Roemer spoke with the team to make sure they were aware of how unique an undefeated season is: "It's important for all of you to realize how special and rare an undefeated championship season is. It was all about you as a team. All I did was lay the foundation and you took it from there. I'm so proud of all of you."

Acalanes

Despite losing to Miramonte in the semifinals of the NCS championship, coach Misha Buchel was confident about the teams chances in the NorCal Championship. "I was really pleased with how the girls responded in the Miramonte game. They kept on fighting and got ready to take on the next level."

Ready they were, defeating San Ramon Valley (12-2) and Amador Valley (11-4) prior to the championship game against Arroyo Grande. Last Saturday at 10:30 in the morning, a caravan of Acalanes water polo players set off on a 248-mile, four-hour drive to play Arroyo Grande High School in the NorCal Championship.

The Dons were down by four goals after the first half but adjusted and put pressure on Arroyo Grande, reducing the lead to two goals in the fourth quarter. "We had several chances to cut the deficit to one," Buchel said. "We just couldn't find the back of the net, missing some great chances with bar outs and goalie tip outs."

After losing to Arroyo Grande earlier in the season, Buchel adjusted his game plan: "Our point of emphasis was to win the one-on-one matchups. I was really satisfied with our performance

and effort even though the results were not what we wanted. We made it tough for Arroyo Grande and gave them everything that wanted but they just had a few more options on the offensive side than we did and that proved to be the difference in the game."

Once again it was Heidi Heffelfinger who led the offense and Audrey Cox who was her usual dominant self in the goal: "Audrey made some huge one-on-saves that helped us get back in the game," Buchel said.

Sophomore Olivia Williams also merited special recognition. Earlier in the day, Williams won the Girls Division IV NCS Cross Country Championship in Hayward. After stepping off the medal podium, she jumped into a car and made it in time to start and play almost the entire game. For Buchel, there was one regret: "We were only disappointed that Olivia was not able to be the first high school athlete to win two gold medals in a day."

Still, Buchel came away very satisfied with the performance of the team starting from day one. "We made steady progress all year long. Once invited into the Division II bracket, we were absolutely committed to do everything that we could to earn another gold banner and gold medal. We performed well in all three games. Considering where we started the season, I was super proud that we were able to come home with the silver medals, knowing that those opportunities are not frequent."

Campolindo

With 22 of their 27 games played against teams ranked in the top 25 nationally, Campolindo arguably played the toughest schedule of any team in the county.

"In NorCal, the top eight teams were pretty close. We had some rough moments against a lot of tough teams," coach Kim Everist said. "However, the team did a good job in keeping their eyes focused on the end of the season and not getting wrapped up in what was happening in the middle of the season and just trying to maintain their confidence and working through that tough part of the schedule."

After winning five of their first six games, Campolindo had winning and losing streaks of four games. "Still, we were stoked to be in the mix with the top teams," Everist said. "The girls did a good job of developing a familiarity with each other and were able to maintain their confidence and working through the tough games is what ultimately brought them together."

Junior Goalie Shayne Clancy's play since moving over as a field player has been a constant source of pride for Everist: "She just keeps getting better and better. To see her improvement has been spectacular through the course of the season. She's been the backbone of our defense."

The Cougars held their opponents to single figures in 11 of their games. "In the back end of the season, our team defense really came together," Everist said. "Everybody in that primary group has really played a role on defense. Our center defenders were posting up and our attackers were playing center defenders, and everyone has had to pick up some different roles and filled them with great pride."

Maggie Hawkins, Kaia Levenfeld, Ana Pieper, and Paige Chivers were the leaders on offense. "With our strong center and outside shooters, we were able to make it tough on our opponents because they could not shut down the pockets," Everist said.

The growth of confidence the players developed were a key to their ultimate success. "Initially we did not know what we were capable of but, in the end, the girls were able to see within themselves as to what they can be capable of."