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

By Jon Kingdon



Photo Gint Federas

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."

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