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Lamorinda boys' soccer leading in competitive Diablo League

By Jon Kingdon



50 - Alejandro Canales. 17 - Mason Fish Photos
Liza Marie Narido

Unlike the basketball teams that are at their busiest over the Christmas holiday and New Year's, playing in the various tournaments during that period, the soccer teams make it a point to avoid playing games at that time. "Our philosophy is to not put any additional pressure on our players," Acalanes head coach Paul Curtis said. "When you schedule games during the school breaks, it's a time many of the families want to do things such as visiting relatives and traveling. Restricting the kids during this period is totally unfair to them, so we don't do that."

Acalanes

With a 7-2-1 record, the winter break did the Dons no harm. With 20 juniors and seniors on the roster, there are too many leaders to mention. The co-captains on the team are midfielders Rhett Skvarna, Matt Walner, and defender Jacob Hill.

"Rhett has not played yet due to off-season knee surgery," Curtis said. "Regardless, he's been a strong leader and will be a four-year letterman. Matt, also a four-year varsity player is the hardest worker on the team. He has found his voice and has matured into what we thought he would be when he came in as a freshman. Jacob is the voice of the team and has a lot of character. He has a wonderful personality, is extremely resilient and is a natural born leader."

Junior Dylan Olson and sophomore Jake Boselli are splitting time in the goal and together are giving up less than one goal a game with a combined six shutouts. "Both of them are winners and extremely athletic," Curtis said. "They know what winning looks and feels like and are very good communicators."

The list of defenders goes seven deep led by Daniel Adri and Mason Fish. "They are our primary center backs with great depth behind them," Curtis said.

There are two freshmen that have contributed immediately, defender Eitan Romick and striker Jonathan Roth (younger brother of midfielder Eli Roth). "Both of them are playing well," Curtis said. "Eitan is a good defender that has seen a lot of playing time and is coming along nicely. Jonathan is dangerous playing on the outside midfield. Both he and Eli are great attackers."

There is still room for improvement, according to Curtis: "The team is developing as to who they are. We're split between the seniors and the rest of the team which in my mind is an ideal situation because we have the older kids teaching the underclassmen about the program and why we do things the way that we do and that just helps to maintain the integrity of the program."

Miramonte

Defense has been the name of the game for the 4-0-1 Matadors. Though they have only scored seven goals, they have only given up one goal, 0.2 goals/game. The domination on defense begins with goalie Grant Scanlan.

"Grant has been amazing in goal for us as he was last year," head coach Masood Ahmadi said. "He's a great shot stopper with great size and confidence. He also has good feet which allows us to use him as another field player in the games."

The back line is very talented led by seniors captain Henry Hill, center back Miles Ownes and the brother duo of Graham Ballantyne (Jr) and Brant Ballantyne (soph). "Henry has been a great leader on and off the field. His confidence on the ball along with Miles allows us to maintain possession through the matches and play our style of soccer. Graham and Brant both can play fullback and are great defenders but can also get up the field and be an attacking threat, to either score or give assists as wingers. Brant has also taken on a leadership role as one of the younger players on the team with both his play and being vocal at trainings and games. Sophomores new to the team, Aiden Rascher and James MacKenzie, have both done a good job at fullback/outside defenders as well."

The goals and assists among the players have been spread throughout the team. The midfielders are a solid

group with Jonas Dao (Sr), Nick Govea (Jr) and Riley Coover. "Jonas is calm, cool and collected but will surprise with his flair and speed," Ahmadi said. "Nick transitioned from center back/fullback to midfielder and winger. His technical ability has allowed us to use him more on offense this year. Riley is our holding midfielder. He is intelligent with the ball and knows how to win tackles in the midfield. He is as important to our defense as he is in keeping the ball for our offense."

There have been some pleasant surprises for Ahmadi with senior center forward Ethan Haines, after playing three years for the JV team and Noah Rabinovitz and Eli Leal-Schuma. "Ethan has been solid filling in at center forward and I'm looking forward to seeing Noah and Eli get solid minutes and experience at this level and thrive."

Optimism abounds for Ahmadi at the potential for the team: "The possibilities are endless for this group. If they continue to trust in one another and believe in how we want to play, we'll have a great year. We just need to stay patient with the process and not get ahead of ourselves, by focusing on one game at a time, which will be a key factor. Staying healthy will help as well."

Campolindo

It's a homecoming for Campolindo's first year head coach Stefan Clemens. Having graduated from Campolindo in 2004, Clemens was a four-year letterman for the soccer team, going on to play at UC Santa Cruz. He brings a great deal of experience having coached at the Lamorinda Soccer Club, Cal State East Bay, Los Positas J.C., and the University of California.

Clemens bases his philosophy on TOVO (total football in Dutch) which seeks to define the characteristics of ideal football and a set of prescriptive techniques for player development.

For Clemens, "It's all about soccer IQ and understanding your spacing with your teammates and opponents off the ball so that when you get the ball, your decision making is at a very high level."

Despite coming in late as the team's coach this year, Clemens has come to appreciate the quality of his team. "I have a really good group of players. They are passionate and they don't give up, being able to problem solve in mid-game. They have been positive and responsive and have enjoyed the training and intensity that I have brought to the training and games. I had an individual meeting with every player, and I've received a lot of positive feedback."

The offense is led by senior captain, center mid Will Ruskin, junior captain, center mid Luke Olsen and senior midfielder Nauder Maghsoodnia. "They all bring a lot to the team in skill and talent. Will is a major standout as our leading scorer and assist man," Clemens said. "He is very technical and an extremely smart player. Luke is very technical and smart and is a good distributor and Nauder is also very smart, making good decisions. He is dangerous with the ball and does great in maintaining contact."

The goalie position is split between freshman Luc Narido and junior Ryan Sintchak. Narido generally starts the game and Sintchak takes over in the second half. "Luc is very technical, good with his feet, passing and is a good shot blocker," Clemens said. "He's tall and strong and age doesn't matter to me as long as someone show competency. Ryan is very good at closing games for us with his leadership and vocal skills."

The defensive backs are led by a senior Aiden Paul and a freshman Sean Mungunshagai. "I coached Aiden in club," Clemens said. "He is big, strong, good in the air and as a one-on-one defender. Sean has not missed a minute. He is our anchor in IQ and patience, calming the team down. He has good height and is so good with his feet and decision-making. He is a distributor that gives us more space in his passing."

The other defensive backs are right back Douglas Ellery and Mason Fara. "Doug is strong with a good long ball to initiate attacks. He is a gritty player that will block shots with his chest and his face. He is a full game player that never gives up. Mason is a lightning bolt that is the fastest player in the league. We would be lost without him because he is a good cover defender and is able to clean up mistakes."

The one area that Clemens is looking for the team to improve is in finishing. "Our first two-thirds of the field are very good in possessions and positional play," Clemens said. "We need to improve on crossing and finishing, sending in a dangerous cross, putting pressure on the goalkeeper and giving us the opportunity to deflect it into the goal. We're looking to score two or more goals in a game and getting higher up the field, occupying more dangerous spaces."



17-Luke Olsen, 10 - Rhett Skvarna. 16 - Jack Alcalay Photos Liza Marie Narido

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