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Lamorinda volleyball teams are works in progress

By Jon Kingdon



15 Tyler Vineyard, spiking, 26 Patrick Volk, 50? Gabe Goeller, 11 Andrew Pak Photo Jon Kingdon

If there is one thing that the volleyball teams in Lamorinda have in common, it's how they are all pointed to the future. Campolindo head coach David Chan is cautiously optimistic about his team's performance: "We are ranked highly in the state but there is so much more that we need to do to solidify that."

Acalanes head coach Mark Passalacqua is taking a long-term perspective: "We're creating a new culture and it's going to take a while before it all comes together."

It's youth and inexperience that Miramonte head coach Michael Sami is confronting: "We have a very young team and most of the players have just began playing the game and because of COVID-19, we missed a lot of practice time."

Campolindo

"Skill-wise, we're getting there as a group," Chan said. "The culture of the group has been really good and that starts with the team's leadership. We have a big team physically - one of the tallest teams we've ever had, and we have a large number of players. That culture has really defined our group, due to the virus."

An early season tournament in San Diego against a number of top teams proved to be an eye-opening experience for Chan and the team. "We knew what our strengths could be, and our weaknesses were exposed. It showed us what we really needed to work on." The players have shown themselves to be quick learners with a current record of 16-4.

The roster has brought on a basketball player (Tyler Vineyard) and a football player (Tyrone Tuavale) who are both first year players. "Even though they have not played a lot of volleyball, their value and contributions have helped us," Chan said. "They have a work ethic and drive that is something valuable that we have been able to use."

Josh Ewert has been leading the team on the court. "Josh is the heavy lifter on the team as the players learn our game and figure out our system," Chan said. "At some point, we are going to have our other players contribute. It's just a matter of time when we will be holding everyone accountable, and they will be able to carry their own weight which will allow us to open up our game."

The Cougars have a lot of size that they can call upon. "We have the size but if your size is not fast or disciplined at the net, that can hurt you," Chan said. "If your ball control is shaky against a team that has good defense and serving, they will pick you apart, so it gave us an understanding as to what we need to do. Our captains Brian Thomas and Patrick Volk have done an excellent job in leading the team."

Andrew Pak has been solid as the team's setter. Graham Volk, who can also be an effective setter, has been called upon to fill the role as the team's libero. "Graham can run our offense, but we need him on defense in our back row," Chan said. "For us to be successful, it's going to come down to our service defense and our defense with our first touch. For most of these kids, they have lost half of their career. We want them to have an experience, an opportunity for them to recoup something they've lost."

Acalanes

The Dons have had an excellent turnout with 50 players. "We been able to have a varsity, JV and freshman team," Passalacqua said. "My philosophy is to combine John Wooden and Phil Jackson together. It's a mental game with a lot of fundamentals."

This is an inexperienced team with half of the starters being first year players. Despite this, the Dons have not been shut out in any of their losses. "The team has been improving and coming together, but it's going to be a little while before we really gel; but every week, we're getting better and better," Passalacqua said.

"We're playing with a lot of heart. The newer guys are doing well, but they're still building up their instincts and I'm very happy in the way that have improved the last several months."

Leading the offense on the front line have been Eric Moen, Liam Bodner and Tommy Biekert. "Moen has been equally good on the front and back row," Passalacqua said. "Bodner is also a great passer and Biekert has been solid and will be playing for Concordia in Irvine next year. Aaron Alvira and Joe Castelli have shown great vertical as well." The setters have been freshman Avyn Morales and senior Cole Regan, who are still getting up to speed.

The defense is still improving, according to Passalacqua: "Our blocking is getting there. We have good diggers and we're working on a back row attack. Liam Hill has been everywhere on our defense along with Liam Stancik."

Passalacqua attributed the large numbers that turned out for the team this year to "lots of open gyms and our players telling their friends about the team. We're trying to bring players from other sports to come out for the team. Right now, we have four freshmen basketball players playing for us. This has been a real opportunity for the players to play as soon as possible and learn that it's a fun sport."

The captains on the team are Bieker, Moen and Bodner. "They, along with seniors like Grant Silveri have done a good job in picking things up and helping to keep the players in line," Passalacqua said. "My assistant coaches Alan Go, who is a great technical coach, and Lexi Hammer have done a great job with the players."

Miramonte

For the Matadors and Coach Sami, it's been a work in progress. Despite the lack of success on the court, Sami remains optimistic and looks forward to improvement in the future. "We have a lot of potential and should be much improved the next couple of years," Sami said. "The season has been going by quickly."

With the coronavirus wreaking such havoc, it has really limited the development of the players, Sami said: "Some of the players are still learning the concepts of volleyball."

There are not a lot of players with real game experience on the team. Senior, Kian Sami, a co-captain and the coach's son is one of the returners to the team, playing both as an outside hitter and setter and has been a solid player along with middle blocker Colin Morris-McDermott who has also been a force on the front line along with Emiliano Boyd.

Sami is looking forward to the development of junior Jon Marc Mosher as he continues to get more playing time. "Jon-Marc is new to the game," Sami said. "He has good height and should be very effective next season."

Seniors Ethan Lee and Yuji Watanabe have consistent players on the Matador's defense.

With four freshmen and four sophomores on the JV team, there is cause for future optimism. It's going to take a large commitment after the season for the team to take the next step. "Most of the players will need to play a lot more in the off-season to improve," Sami said.



Campolindo's? Brian Thomas serving Photo Jon Kingdon



15 Eric Moen Photos Jon Kingdon

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