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Lamorinda girls lacrosse teams rebuilding and competing for playoff seeds

By Jon Kingdon



Campolindo (red) #48 Carley Hudson, #30 Catie McCauley, #19 Paige Davis, shooting and # 20 Georgia Hudson; Acalanes (white) #30 Jojo Bishop and #18 Maya Wang Photo DeF-stop Photography

and know what that experience is like. It's like they've had to mature from freshmen to seniors overnight and can still understand what the incoming freshmen and sophomores are going through."

The Cougars are scoring at a rate of 14.4 goals per game without having to rely on any one player. Junior Paige Davis (20 goals, 20 assists), who has already committed to UC Davis, senior captain Annie Cimperman (21 goals, 17 assists), also a future Aggie, juniors Catie McCauley (28 goals), Bridgette Lane (15 goals) and sophomore Molly Stephens (13 goals) have all been forces on offense.

"Paige has great vision and may have the best stick work in our league and Annie is really developing her game," Combs said. "Catie is the kind of player who runs faster onto defense when our team is being attacked than when she does when she has the ball and that's her character. The three have great chemistry and we're really looking to elevate Molly and Bridget."

The Campolindo defense has been just as dominant as the offense, only surrendering 5.9 goals per game and it is a sophomore, goalie Haley Richards who was named to the all-American team as a freshman, that has continued her dominant play from last season. "Haley can improve herself without the spiraling pitfalls of overanalyzing her errors. She can oscillate between what she needs to improve her skills and to compartmentalize to know what she does best. She has very quick hands, steady feet and is a great athlete. At times she will pick up a ground ball and sprint 50 yards up the field and clear on the run. She's as fast or faster than some field players that are in front of her."

Complementing Richards is a solid group of defenders in front of her led by senior captain Laurel Hunter who will be playing for Chapman next year, Maddie Krozek, juniors Katie Duff and Ava Martinez, sophomores Sadie Geenty and Caroline Obsitnik and freshman Vivian Tolajian.

"Laurel is holding down the front and anchoring our defense," Combs said. "Maddie, Katie and Ava are all doing great along with Sadie, Caroline and Vivian."

The one loss to San Ramon Valley proved to be a valuable learning tool, Combs said. "We learned that while certain skills and approaches might work in some games, they aren't always going to work in every situation. There's a saying that if your only tool is a hammer, then everything starts to look like a nail. In that game, we were all hammers and that worked in the first half, but SRV made some good adjustments. Still, losses like that one has been empowering because it has allowed us to see the opportunities that can become available."

Even with their success, Combe still sees room for growth with the team: "It's putting all the pieces together at once. I'm comfortable with the progress we're making because I do think that we're getting closer and closer to having more things fall in line at the same time."

Miramonte

If there is one thing that the Lamorinda coaches can all agree on, it's how satisfying it is to have their first normal season in three years following the pandemic. Acalanes coach Bill Frazier spoke for everyone when he declared that "the best part about this year is that it's a normal full season, something we haven't seen since 2019."

Campolindo

It has all come together for fourth-year head coach Devin Combe with the Cougars 10-1 overall record and undefeated (7-0) in league play. "This team has a lot of heart and wants to see that success translate into a big end of season finish," Combe said.

Without a League and North Coast Sectional championship the last two years, it has provided a real motivation for the Cougars to succeed this year, particularly for the upperclassmen. "There's really a fire under our juniors and seniors," Combe said. "Our seniors are the only ones who have experienced a full season

After a six-year record of 84-24, Miramonte coach Jackie Pelletier has seen her team take a step back with the hopes of taking two steps forward. "After so many years of success, you realize that every year can't be a top year," Pelletier said. "We only returned half (six) of our starters from last year, so it's been a rebuilding year."

Saying there are seven seniors on the roster is a little deceptive with only co-captains Elena Gant and Ellie Hawkins bringing experience, having been on the team for four years. "Elena and Ellie have been awesome leaders and great people," Pelletier said. "They're essentially connecting one dynasty of Miramonte lacrosse on to the next. The other five seniors are soccer players that came out for the first time, and they have all been awesome, contributing as much as they can."

Exacerbating the lack of experience on the team has been a series of early season injuries. "We had three players get injured in the first two weeks, on offense, defense and in the goal," Pelletier said. "I'm really proud of the other kids that have stepped up."

After losing half their scoring to graduation, Elena Gant and Kate Difranco lead the offense and it has been a work in progress. "With so many new players, we've had to shift our offensive game plan," Pelletier said. "I would not say that we been stifled but we have completely shifted from last year in that instead of having a number of plays that everyone knew and could run, we're really teaching a number of the players the basics of the sport."

Starting goalie Alex Dobbs suffered an injury and the team had to call on a freshman, Isobel Starkey, who agreed to step up when no one else was available. "It wasn't a simple thing to ask a 15-year-old like Izzy to step in against some top D1 teams, but she has been fearless," Pelletier said. "She has gone above and beyond the past few weeks, taking extra reps. I have to give props to her. She now loves the position and I expect big things out of her for the next few years."

The defense has been forced to find a way to replace players lost to injuries and some who moved away. "Ellie Hawkins is our defensive leader, but I also want to acknowledge our two freshmen, Grace Wood and Ashlynn Brown, who I had to throw in there right because we were short of defensive players and they have been a phenomenal team," Pelletier said. "Along with the injuries, we lost Bridget Mills who moved away and would have been the third Mills sister I have coached."

With a 4-8 record but 3-3 in league, it's an adjustment for Pelletier and the team: "Nobody's excited to lose games, but they are all handling it well considering that we're mostly a younger team. We have only one sophomore and it's really a freshman heavy team. I'm thankful that we have a JV team this year, unlike last year. We have a lot of kids and we're going to start digging in our heels and making our way back. So, we need to finish the season strong which should make a difference for us in qualifying for a tournament."

Acalanes

It's been a feast or famine season for the Dons, winless against a difficult non-league schedule and 6-1 within league play. Turnout for the lacrosse program is a sign of better days to come with 24 players on the varsity and a JV team comprised of 46 players.

"This is a very close bunch of girls and they're as happy a group of kids as I've ever seen together," coach Bill Frazier said. "Many of the girls had not played lacrosse until they started high school, many of them willing to try something new. It can be a little humbling, but it has also been very insulating and fun which is the most important thing."

After the graduation of Grace Gebhardt, (now playing at UC Davis), who was responsible for over half the goals scored last year, the Dons have had some issues putting the ball in the net. "From an X's and O's standpoint, you don't just replace a player like Grace," Frazier said.

The offense is led by midfielders juniors Haley Rurka and Maya Wang and sophomore Grace Imrie "Our offense runs through these three players," Frazier said. "Haley is our most experienced player and Maya only began playing in 2020 and Grace are all playing very well. Freshman Megan Churchill, who played several seasons in the Lamorinda Lightning Program, has been adopted by the upperclassmen and has been having a very good season. She brings youthful exuberance and her own unique personality to the team."

The Dons are only giving up 9.4 goals per game with sophomore Addie Martin as the team's goalie. "It all starts with Addie who is really strong and playing only her second year of lacrosse," Frazier said. "She volunteered to play goalie and after a workout with one of our coaches, he said that she may be the best goalie we have. I told her she could be our goalie for the next three years and she has just been terrific. Our two senior captains on defense, Elise Flagg and Ellie Ives have been anchoring a good unit in front of Addie."

With such a large JV squad, Frazier and JV Coach Steve Seiler have been scheduling Saturday scrimmages where most of the Acalanes girls are in their first year. "Lacrosse is frequently a second sport for many of the girls, so this is an opportunity get them more game experience," Frazier said. "The improvement has been rapid for the girls who showed up to play as freshmen or sophomores and are new to the sport and find that they enjoy the game. As a coach, it's fun to teach the fundamentals to a beginner and find that after a few games they're doing it and you can see them stand a little taller as they figure it out."

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