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# LAMORINDA SPORTS

## Boys lacrosse teams looking ahead to post-season



Photo Dan Kivelson

**Campolindo (white): #6 Boden Rasmussen and #31 Harrison Leehouts (shooter); Miramonte (green): #22 Rhys Hire, #15 Jack Spencer, #9 Ethan Berndt and #13 Liam Williams**

**By Jon Kingdon**

It's been a stellar year so far for **Miramonte** with a 12-1 record (7-0 in league). As is often the case with a successful team, the chemistry on the boys lacrosse team has been crucial to their success. "This is an incredibly tight knit team," coach Byron McGovern said. "They really care about each other on and off the field. I've never had a group of kids that knows and cares about each other and the team this well. The players have a very 'we not me' attitude."

Over the last three years, the Matadors have won 28 of their last 35 games. The team is made up of players who have played a number of years and neophytes. "We have a mix with players from other sports who are new and just bringing their athleticism; trying to learn how to apply it to lacrosse," McGovern said.

"There are also a number of players that have a lot of experience and many of them have been teammates from the start and have a real good connection with each other."

The offense is led by seniors Mark Cheng, Christian Gee and junior Jonah Azevedo. "Mark has definitely been a leader for us," McGovern said. "He speaks up a lot and communicates to the team. He and Jonah, who is also a huge offensive leader, are our leading scorers and Christian has been a huge factor for us in winning possessions. Matt Hawkins and Jake Disston have been making a lot of great plays and Anchul Schmidt, who has missed some time with an injury, has

recently returned and has a great outside shot."

McGovern's offense does not just rely on individual talents: "It's a very skilled, high-energy offense. We try to read the field and the defense and make the right approach when we go after them."

The Matadors are only giving up 6.1 goals per game and is led by sophomore goalie Rhys Hire who has been dominating in the net. "Rhys has been playing unbelievably well and has no fear in the cage," McGovern said. "He has elite athleticism in reaction time and is a true multi-sport athlete that does everything well and is happy just to play his hardest. He's an incredible athlete who can pick it up on a clear and is liable to go coast to coast. He's only been a goalie for two years and it's been awesome to see him develop."

Senior captain Ethan Berndt has been an unstoppable force on defense. "He leads everyone and is a smart and cerebral player that backs it up with toughness, grit and athleticism," McGovern said. "Chase Bliss and Jack Spencer are two other poles who have played together for a long time. They function as a cohesive unit and are physical and aggressive on the ball and quick off the ball. This is the best defense I have ever coached."

With only one loss, where does McGovern see the need to improve? "Everywhere," McGovern said. "I still feel like we're wildly underperforming for the talent we have on this roster on both sides of the ball. I have to do a better job

of putting guys in position where we can get the most out of their talents. We're a good team but we can be great on both sides of the ball."

McGovern is looking toward the players to share in the responsibility for the team's improvement: "We're working really hard every day in practice and taking feedback from the players, listening to what they're seeing. I'm letting them lead each other, deciding how they want to approach different situations in the game and giving them the opportunity to take ownership over the team and how we approach the game."

### **Acalanes**

With an 8-4 overall record and 5-2 in league play, Acalanes coach Lorne Smith is looking for constant improvement from the team: "As the season has gone on, we've worked to improve our skills to match our intensity level and that's been what we've been trying to get to this season."

The individual player comes second in Smith's coaching philosophy. "We play team offense and team defense, and we communicate on both sides of the ball, so no one needs to stop their man one-on-one for us to be successful," Smith said. "On offense, we need to share and move off the ball, playing a team first style for us to be successful."

The starting six players on offense have been working together like a well-oiled machine. Junior attackers Cooper and Dylan Olson, midfielders Owen Estee and senior midfielder Zach Appel,

attacker and senior captain Jake Henderson and sophomore David Depaape comprise that unit.

"They have been doing a great job playing well together," Smith said. "We're continually trying to get them more reps and experience playing together in our team system. I don't want to draw up X's and O's and tell them what to do and where to go every moment. I want them to be able to read and react on the field which just takes time to get that experience together so they can start improvising, reading and reacting together. Jake is filling the role of field general, making sure we're all in the right spots and helping to call out the plays," Smith said

Responsibility in the goal is being shared with senior captain Evan Daly and junior Blake Chehlaoui with Daly starting the games and Chehlaoui playing in the second half. Junior George Churchill has been the leader and a force on the field, Smith said: "George is a presence out there and definitely leads the way for us down low."

It's a non-stop process for Smith to keep working on the teamwork for the players: "We're looking to improve more in the team game playing more offense and team defense. We know we can't win out there trying to do it as individuals. That's always our focus."

The team has adopted that attitude by making up shirts that read "Two Hearts Beat as One" by U2, which the players came up with and use it to celebrate their post game victories.

### **Campolindo**

With only six graduating seniors and a large number of underclassman and a JV team for the first time in four years, Campolindo is looking forward to the future with great optimism though hardly looking past this season with a 5-5 record and 4-1 in league play.

"We have a strong senior leadership and a number of players that picked up the stick for the first time so it's an interesting mix of upper and lower classman," assistant coach Connor Doyle said. "It's cool to see veterans take the younger players under their wings, teaching them the rules and ways of the sport."

It's been a matter of overcoming adversity for the team having to deal with injuries, sickness and calling upon freshman and sophomores to step up and fill a number of positions. "We've asked a lot of our underclassmen start on offense as attackers which is usually held by senior players," Doyle said. "At times, they're going up against guys who are three and four years older than them."

Leading the offense has been 6'4" junior midfielder Harrison Leenhouts along with his brother, Grayer. "Harrison and Grayer have been playing spectacularly," Doyle said. "Our Fogo (faceoff-go off) is senior captain Tyler Kivelson. This is usually a specialty position, but we've had to ask Tyler to be a first line midfielder, playing as much as he can each game, and he has really been stepping up. Junior attacker Holden Coakley has also been a big goal scorer and finisher. Freshmen Gaeton Aviccolli and Boden Rasmussen have also seen a lot of playing time. Resilience has been the common theme for the team this season."

The Cougars' defense has only been giving up 8.2 goals per game behind sophomore goalie Dante Aviccolli, who has been playing club hockey for a long time and has gotten a lot of experience from playing all over the country. "Dante is very comfortable in the cage and has the right build for a goalie," Doyle said. "He has good hand-eye coordination and along with his wealth of knowledge, it has allowed him to start for the varsity as a sophomore. We have a solid group on defense led by seniors Hudson Orman and Collin Krznaric, and junior Jack Alaclay who have all performed terrifically through the season."

Doyle appreciates the growth the team has shown through the season: "It took a while this season, with the gaps in experience and all the new players, for everyone to get onto the same level. The team has learned things in the victories and defeats and with the work they have put in, it's really allowed the team to come together, along with the work ethic of the seniors, the discipline and motivation of the players to improve."

## Lamorinda girls lacrosse teams rebuilding and competing for playoff seeds

**By Jon Kingdon**

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 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."

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