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Miramonte boys win DAL Tournament; Campo advances in NCS

By Jon Kingdon



Miramonte boys DAL Lacrosse Championship team Photo provided

Coming into the Diablo Athletic League lacrosse tournament, the 17-2 Miramonte High School had the No. 1 seed and lived up to expectations defeating Northgate (13-2) and Acalanes (15-7) in the championship game.

Miramonte

It's never easy to defeat a team three times in a season so the Matadors coach Byron McGovern took that into account in the game plan against Acalanes. "We had to make a few adjustments to make sure we were ready for this game," McGovern said. "Acalanes changes their defense from game to game and they always throw something new at us so we had to get creative about how we would get around it."

The offense was led by juniors Chase Bliss, Jake Disston, Matt Hawkins and senior Anchul Schmidt. "Anchul played really well, dodging through doubles to get goals, running the offense and facilitating to his teammates," McGovern said. "He also had to be our face off guy due to an injury and he did an awesome job there as well."

Sophomore Rhys Hire, giving up an average of 6.3 goals per game was dominant in the net. "Rhys plays with his heart and talks to the team and did an amazing job," McGovern said.

Hire spoke about how prepared the team was going into the championship game: "We knew their offense pretty well, so we were able to accommodate for that and we gave up fewer goals against them than the last time we played them."

The Matadors only gave up two goals in the second half and Hire gave much of the credit to Ethan Berndt, Jack Spencer, and Chase Bliss: "We had a great halftime speech from Ethan who is our defensive captain and that really fired us up and led to better results. Jack was a big help and Chase is our most versatile player, scoring goals and shutting people down on defense."

Bliss pointed to the intangibles in the way Miramonte played: "The difference in the game was our energy level. We all worked hard and had a great team game plan. We just played together and played team ball."

Miramonte showed good ball control getting to the majority of the loose balls. "That's something we've been working on, controlling the game, the ball and the tempo we play at," McGovern said. "It's a sign of how good their sticks are and the way we were able to control the ball."

McGovern praised the defense and singled out Bliss for his play and leadership: "Our top four defenders all did a great job but particularly Ethan who played 100%, putting the team on his back and said, 'I refused to lose this game.'"

The Matadors then came up short against Campolindo in the NCS tournament.

Campolindo

This has been an up and down season for Campolindo. The Cougars had an 8-7 record coming into the NCS tournament having not won or lost more than two games in a row all season.

In the semifinal game of the DAL tournament against Acalanes, Campolindo lost in overtime by a score of 17-16. The disappointment in the loss was exacerbated by an unsportsmanlike penalty after the Cougars tied the game with four seconds left in regulation when a player flung his stick into the air. The penalty carried over to overtime and Acalanes scored the winning goal 15 seconds later.

"It was a dogfight, and we have to take the emotion out of it," head coach Colin Knightly said. "We have to avoid penalties, be professional and keep our emotions under control." Knightly rationalized the late penalty on the fact that "they're teenagers."

After the loss to Acalanes, Knightly was counting on making the NCS. The seventh seeded Cougars won their opening game at home over Rancho Cotate, 20-6, and then had a pseudo-home game, only having to travel down the road to play second seeded Miramonte.

In a season that Knightly described as a grind, they picked the right time to play their most competitive game of the year, defeating Miramonte by a score of 15-8. The game was tied after the first quarter 3-3 but Campolindo had a dominant second quarter scoring nine goals and going into halftime leading 12-6.

"This was the best game we played all year," Knightly said. "Our seniors knew that if we lost, this would be the last game of their career. It was a rivalry game and playing at Miramonte was as close to a home game as it could be, so everything was in our favor, and we just really wanted this game."

The 15 goals scored by Campolindo was the most scored against Miramonte all season who came into the game giving up an average of 6.3 goals per game. The Cougars were led by Harrison Leenhouts, who had five goals and two assists, Patrick Sebree with four goals and Holden Coakley with three goals.

"We were able to find the open seams in their defense," Leenhouts said. "We kept our heads up and kept looking for the open guy. This was a game we were looking forward to all week because we knew what they were going to do, and we had our game plan and it worked out for us."

Penetration on offense was the key for Knightly. "The most valuable real estate on the field is right in front of the goal so we wanted to take advantage of that," Knightly said. "We wanted to be 'crease creatures.' Our guys did a good job right by the goal and it really helped us to see the crease. Harrison is just a special player. He's a pleasure to coach, a pleasure to be around and a pleasure to watch."

Miramonte had been averaging 14.4 goals per game but were held to their second fewest goals in a game all season. "We decided to go with a zone defense because we figured that it would be tough to be the whole team rather than breaking it down one by one," Knightly said. "Our goalie Dante Avicolti was outstanding tonight and Tyler Kivelson controlled most of the face offs and that really helped us big time and Jack Alaclay did a great job in shutting down their best shooters."

Campolindo's next game was on May 10, after press time, against the No. 3 seeded Tamalpais High School in Mill Valley and if they win that game, they would play the winner of the Justin-Siena - Bishop O'Dowd game on May 12.

Acalanes

Despite making it to the finals of the DAL and the second round of the NCS with a 12-8 record, Acalanes head coach Lorne Smith was left hoping for more. "One of our goals is always to get into the NCS," Smith said. "We're trying to win championships for sure, so you never like to end your season with a loss."

Acalanes earned a spot in the DAL championship game against Miramonte with a 17-16 overtime win over Campolindo, coming up short against Miramonte by a score of 15-7. Against Miramonte, the Dons fell behind 4-0, coming back to trail 7-5 at halftime. "The ball wasn't bouncing our way early in the game and it's been that way in a number of our games," Smith said. "We just had to take a breath and get ready to play. Our guys played hard and battled."

Miramonte closed out the game by outscoring Acalanes 8-2 in the second half. "We feel that with our team that if we do the things we know that we can do, we'll have success," Smith said. "In the first half, we didn't do those things. It was a game of runs and they had more runs than we did."

After a first round 13-2 win over University High (S.F.), Acalanes lost to the third seeded Tamalpais despite the play of Dylan Olson, who was a standout on offense with some top goals.

With a strong junior class and a number of players moving up from the JV team, Smith is already looking forward toward next season. "We're excited to see things keep rolling next year," Smith said.

There are a number of players returning on offense and defense. "Dylan and Cooper Olson at attack are leaders down there and Ben Foux emerged at the midfield as a strong face off player and had a great season," Smith said. "Our first three midfielders are all coming back. John Cain in his first year on the varsity had a great season as a long stick middy and Zach Appel and David Depaepe are the other returning midfield starters."

Depaepe did as much off the field as he did in the games. "David is not a big scorer but emotionally he is one of the guys that got the team fired up in practice and before the games," Smith said. "He is a bit of an emotional engine in a good way."

The defense is set with Blake Chehlaoui in the goal and George Churchill heading the defense. "We feel we will have a great goalie in Blake who is really strong and saw playing time as a backup this season," Smith said.

This will be an experienced team that is very familiar with each other next year. "We have a core group of offensive and defensive players returning, many of whom have played together for a long time," Smith said. "It's always nice to have strong senior leadership led by our co-captains George Churchill and Owen Estee

and our other seniors to define the character of what the team is going to be. Every team is different from year to year which is what makes it a lot of fun. There is only an upside in our future."

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