

Published October 12th, 2022

Lamorinda girls' water polo continues its long-running domination

By Jon Kingdon



Campolindo Goalie Sydney Kring, Defenders #6 Ava Jacuzzi, #12 Ainsley Hogan, Miramonte shooter #10 Megan McAninch Photo Ann Murphy

rankings are Miramonte-1, Acalanes-2, Campolindo-3. The California rankings are Miramonte-1, Acalanes-3, and Campolindo-4 and nationally it is Miramonte-1, Acalanes-4, and Campolindo-5.

Miramonte

Coming into this season, Miramonte had won 39 straight games and are 14-0 so far this season. With nine seniors, several of whom will be playing for Division I colleges next year, the Matadors have outscored their opponents 226-69. "We're doing well," second year head coach John Roemer said "We have a solid group of girls that are doing well, and our second line has come a long way."

After last year's championship season, Roemer has added a new level to the team's offense. "We're more dialed into the offense," Roemer said. "Last year, it took them a while to buy into the offense and realize how it works. This year, they understand the offense even more which takes a lot of intuitive and fast thinking because it's high tempo with a lot of movement."

Leading the offense are Meghan McAninch, Dania Innis, Allie Lurie, Tali Stryker, and Rosalee Hassett. "Rosalee has really come a long way after playing with the U.S. Cadet national team and has been our most improved player," Roemer said. "She and Meghan lead the team due to their speed and versatility, but all the players run it. We counter and if the ball is at a certain spot, they all know what to do."

Petra Cherry, who split time with Lindsay Houston (Harvard) last season, has been equally effective in the net this year. "Allie Lurie is the defensive leader but as a group, we constantly press everyone," Roemer said. "We have a full box of tools. We press everyone without fouling the ball and we're up in the lanes so that there is no one to pass to," Roemer said. "If we do foul the ball, we'll go right at them again. If we get into a situation where we are behind at center, we have three different defenses that we can drop to."

What makes Miramonte so difficult to play is that they are so hard to game plan for. "We don't play one way on offense and defense, and we will use different tactics depending on who we are playing, what we're trying to do and how the refs are calling the game," Roemer said. "We don't care about the score or who we are playing. I just want the team to focus on doing what we do and if we do that, we'll be fine. Still we're looking to improve in all areas. We can always do better."

Campolindo

With an 11-6 record, Campolindo can take some solace in that three of the losses came against the top four ranked schools in the nation (Miramonte (2), Soquel and Acalanes) and also defeated Acalanes earlier in the season by a 6-5 score.

All four classes are equally represented on the Cougar roster this season with four seniors, four juniors, three sophomores and four freshmen. "I have four captains this year (Seniors Shayne Clancy, Kaia Levenfeld, Ava Jacuzzi, and Lauren Lacour) for the first time because each one of them brought something to the table and it has been great as they are finding their way in leading the team," Coach Kim Everist said. "From a chemistry standpoint, the team is great, but we are still learning how to play together in the water

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche once said, "What doesn't kill us, makes us stronger."

He could have been talking about the Lamorinda girls' water polo teams who, year in and year out, have been essentially competing against each other in the highly ranked Diablo Athletic League and this year has been no different.

Since 2013, there has been a consistent domination by the Lamorinda girls' water polo teams. Acalanes (161-60), Campolindo (159-62) and Miramonte (187-40) have a composite 507-162 record for a 76% winning percentage. Throw in four undefeated complete seasons and various NCS and NorCal championships and it's a triumvirate that will compare favorably with any set of teams.

This season has proven to be no different as noted by MaxPreps in their rankings. The North Coast Section rankings are Miramonte-1, Acalanes-2, Campolindo-3. The California rankings are Miramonte-1, Acalanes-3, and Campolindo-4 and nationally it is Miramonte-1, Acalanes-4, and Campolindo-5.

as half the team is still pretty young."

Such a balanced class also portends well for the future. "We're able to avoid graduating a big group so we are able to avoid having to fill big holes which allows us to have consistency from year to year," Everist said. "Our seniors are able to ease the stress of the freshmen and they can just go and play."

The scoring is led by juniors Anna Pieper, who is the team leading goal scorer, and seniors Levenfeld and Lacour. "Anna and Kaia are the leaders on offense," Everist said. "Kaia had a slow start but in the last few games, she has been playing great and has returned to form so it's been great to have her playing top level water polo. Lauren has really turned the corner as well."

The goal tending responsibilities has been shared by senior Shayne Clancy and freshman Sydney Kring. "Shayne brings grit and leadership to the team," Everist said. "Sydney has also been very dominant in the net and is seeing a lot of playing time."

Sophomores Ainsley Hogan and Sammy Frazier and freshmen Ella Binney and Olivia Metz have all been contributors though the team is missing Nikki Frazier who is out for the season due to an injury. "Ainsley and Sammy have been doing great," Everist said. "Ella and Olivia have been getting more minutes and they're doing a great job. Overall, our freshmen are still trying to figure it out. They're quick and smart and as soon as it clicks for them, we're going to have some big moments. I'm really looking forward to seeing what the team will look like when the chemistry of the team comes together."

Despite the performance of the goalies and Levenfeld and Hogan, Everist is still not satisfied with the play of her defense. "Our defense has not been great and that has hurt us in the big games," Everist said. "Kaia and Ainsley have both done a great job, forcing the other team into a zone which has been setting us up for success. We are getting a ton of steals but we're also turning the ball over too often so working to control the ball and our offense are going to be really key things for us."

Everist is optimistic about the team's fortunes once the defense comes together: "In the end, it's getting our team defense buttoned down to set us up for great counterattack opportunities. Once those things start to gel, you're going to see us have a really great October and November."

Acalanes

Head coach Mischa Buchel was not certain how good the Dons were going to be this season but the 14-3 record with the losses coming against Miramonte, Soquel and Campolindo in competitive games bespeaks to the quality of the team. "We kind of wondered where we would fit this year and, you know, we're up the food chain a bit," Buchel understated.

With an offense that revolved around Heidi Heffelfinger last year, but only losing two players to graduation, Buchel was looking for players to step into the spotlight. Two new players, freshman Ella Del Rosario (49 goals) and junior Brooklyn Pomp (23 goals) are the team's two leading scorers. "The two of them have added a dimension that was missing," Buchel said. "On offense, there has been more dynamism from Ella, and Brooklyn has been a force on offense and defense. Along with the improvement of our returning players, it's given us a real solid team. Brooklyn has been like the quarterback of the offense. She is a fantastic facilitator offensively and she takes the best matchup defensively against whoever we're playing. Overall, we have a lot of experience and understanding of how we want to play."

Del Rosario, though not very large, plays much bigger than her size. "We try to position Ella, because of her strength as an attacker, with as many opportunities to get out on the counterattack as possible as her anticipation and game sense is fantastic," Buchel said. "Another freshman, Addie Dankworth has also stepped up and shown the ability to really shoot with power."

At this point, Acalanes has had 15 different scorers on the team and six who have scored in double figures so far. "We're just so much more balanced than we were last year and have a lot more options to go to on offense," Buchel said. "If teams want to take away Ella, we have two lefties that can score from the outside in Sarah Archer and Sophie Hendrickson. If the lefty side isn't happening for us, we've got a variety of players that can go into the center area and create great danger."

Even though the Dons have been averaging 12.4 points a game, it's the 4.6 goals against average that Buchel takes particular pride in. "I've always said we're a defensive team and we pride ourselves on that," Buchel said.

Leading the way is senior goalie Audrey Cox who has committed to play for Indiana University next year. "Audrey has been fantastic," Buchel said. "She reads the plays so well along with her ability to communicate to her teammates what they need to do while still playing her position. When you have someone in goal like Audrey, you can build out your defense from there, which allows us to turn our defense into offense and counterattack which is why we've had such a strong season." In one of our games, a 6-5 loss to Campolindo in the Acalanes Tournament, Audrey was unavailable and Wendy Heffelfinger, a top defensive player stepped in and did a hell of a job in a combat tournament environment." Buchel still sees room for improvement. "As coaches, we have to find, when teams buckle down defensively, just a little bit more movement and aggression on the offensive side and not get comfortable when we're up," Buchel said.

Reach the reporter at: sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA