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## Girls' tennis teams gearing up for post-season tournaments

By Jon Kingdon



Miramonte's No. 1 singles player, Soleil Skjorshammer Photos Grace Kim

It's been an overall successful season for Acalanes, Campolindo and Miramonte and once again each of them found their toughest opponents in Lamorinda.

### Miramonte

After eight years as an assistant coach to Mike McCullum, Riki Sorenson was promoted to head coach after McCullum's retirement. Sorenson's first season was during the pandemic and as things were finally settling down, she had to address the recent heat wave.

The first step was to move their practices to the evening and after that it was a matter of getting the players used to the high temperatures. "We made sure to acclimate the girls," Sorenson said. "We took it really easy at the start when it was especially warm and when it got really hot, it wasn't that big a deal for the girls not feeling the exhaustion they went through the first couple of days. They were just playing and having fun."

There were still many precautions taken by Sorenson. "We made sure that the girls were hydrated," she said. "We talked about strategies with cold towels and ice and when a few of the girls had more issues with the heat, we sat them down until it cooled off and then they were back to playing."

As a former college athlete at Stanford, Sorenson brings a player's mentality to the team and an understanding as to what it takes to be successful. "I see greatness in this team though they don't see it in themselves," Sorenson said. "However, they are gamers. The stronger the opponent, the better they compete and without fear. They have to learn the mental aspect of the game as they have learned their physical skills. Time will tell just how much this team can achieve. When they are ready for a match, physically, emotionally, and mentally prepared, they are really competitive and the key is to keep that level all the time."

Miramonte has a great deal of depth with 20 girls on the team and great class balance with five seniors, five juniors, four sophomores and six freshmen. The singles players have been a strength of the team. "Our top six are very strong and seven through 20 are very close in ability which makes for very high-quality practices," Sorenson said. "I've never had so many freshmen on one team with two, Caitlin Chan and Maddie Silveira, our number two and four singles players."

The number one singles player is junior Soleil Skjorshammer. Seniors Elena Sullivan plays number three and juniors Nicole Hui and Nicole Guo round out the group. "Elena has been a pleasant surprise for us," Sorenson said. "She is a phenomenal athlete and is someone who is able to adapt in the middle of a match to figure out what to do to beat her opponent and she has gotten stronger each match. With the two Nicoles, there is never a letdown and it's amazing to have girls that will put it on the line every match."

Sorenson attributes much of the success of the singles players to assistant coach Julie Silveira: "Julie, who is a top player in her own right, is working closely with our singles players and they are so lucky to have her expertise."

The doubles teams are still works in progress where chemistry is the key. "We have one partnership that is really strong in junior Ali Rhee and sophomore Audrey Kosla, and we've been working on new combinations," Sorenson said. "Emily Suh and Jessica Hui, a sophomore and a freshman, are starting to figure it out."

Heading into the postseason, Sorenson has been able to count on the upperclassmen to lead the team. "They are extremely inclusive, kind and great role models showing how to balance athletics, academics and just being good people," Sorenson said.

To be successful in the tournaments is a matter of not letting up, according to Sorenson. "We have to take advantage of every opportunity to improve every day," she said. "They have the talent, and they just need to channel it and get serious in their competitive spirit."

### Campolindo

With an 8-2 league record, both losses coming against Miramonte, it has been a successful season so far for the Cougars and head coach Sunun Faulkner. Unlike Acalanes and Miramonte, during the head wave, the Cougars moved their practices to 6:30 in the morning. "Our girls really show good sportsmanship and are very team orientated. Every one of them came out for those practices," Faulkner said. "I don't think we would have played as well had they not come out for those practices, which allowed us to win the James Logan Tournament early in the season."

The singles are led in order by senior Alex Goett, sophomore Sophia Raldugina-Zhu, seniors Sienna Carroll and Paige Davis, junior Dilara Basegmez and freshman Summer Chang.

"We have a solid team from top to bottom and I can say that, overall, this is one of the strongest singles lineups I've ever had with a lot of depth," Faulkner said. "Alex always takes on our opponent's top player and often goes to third set tie breakers. Sophia is a very hard worker and has gotten better and better. Sienna has played very well and Paige who is a great athlete and a top lacrosse player. Dilara is a real fighter and has improved every year and Summer, as a freshman, will only get better and better."

The doubles teams have always been a strength for the Cougars.

"My number one doubles team are seniors Liesel Hilkemeyer and Emily Floyd. Alyssa Muller and Louise Goldblatt are the number three doubles team. Louise is a senior and it's her first year on the varsity and it has been a pleasant surprise," Faulkner said. "She will run anything and everything down and makes some impossible shots and I'm just so excited about her."

Goett and Hilkemeyer are the captain on a team with eight seniors. "They have been good leaders and the senior group as a whole have been good leaders as well," Faulkner said.

With so much depth on the team, Faulkner has a lot of options when the North Coast Sectionals come up. "We are deep enough in singles that I may move some of them to doubles and then move some lower line singles players up," Faulkner said. "It should be very interesting to see how things turn out."

Acalanes

Head coach Janice Metzger and her staff have been very consistent in league play with a 5-5 record and four of the losses coming against Campolindo and Miramonte.

The attitude that the staff wants to imbue in their players is for them to know that it is fun to win, but the most important goal for the team is that they enjoy themselves while fighting hard and doing the best they can. With nine seniors on the roster of 19, many of the players came out for the team during the pandemic, a difficult time for all, but the players also found a way to bond.

Leading the team all season has been senior Ari Ruczynski who has been a dominating player. Following close behind have been Martha Burns, freshman Aamena Shipchandler, Ashley Donner, Siena Moise and Cate Condy. Piper Duff has played both singles and doubles all season.

The doubles teams have complimented and given a lot of support to the singles players led by the pairing of Emily Berkowitz and Kailyn Broad, consistent winners all season. Marcella Wisniewska and Lucy O'Brien and Olivia Dawkins and Liv Heglie have all had a good deal of success throughout the year.

In keeping things light, every match for the Dons was a "dress up day" for the team where a theme was chosen for all the girls to dress up to. There was a country-western day, a rainbow day where each girl was assigned a color to wear and even a day when they dressed up as one of the coaches.

Ruczynski is the team captain and many of the seniors have also taken the mantle of leadership as a number of them are on the leadership group at the school. The seniors have done a good job in bring up the newer players. The players have been more than accommodating in moving from singles to doubles and vice versa. This is a team that likes to be together and play together as well.

With the DAL tournament coming up, the players will have the option to decide whether they want to play singles or doubles. Metzger plans to work with each of the players but will be allowing them the independence to decide where each feels they will fit in best.



Undefeated No. 2 singles player for Miramonte, Caitlin Chan

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