

Published December 21st, 2022

Girls' basketball gears up for exciting season built on last year's successes

By Jon Kingdon



Karyss Lacanlale

It's been a productive off-season for the Lamorinda girls' basketball teams with each team creating its own chemistry and team unity. Acalanes is looking to build on their success from last season, Miramonte is counting on improving on their .500 season and Campolindo, with a full off-season for the first time with their head coach, is anticipating a more unified team on the court.

Acalanes

Having lost no players to graduation, Acalanes is essentially putting the same team on the floor this season though one with a solid year of experience under their belts. As with last year's team, the Dons are a team that will constantly play pressure defense and push the fast break whenever they can. With a 5-1 record, an offense that is scoring 70.8 points a game and only giving up 42.2 points a game, the Dons are hitting on all cylinders.

"This is the same team with two new freshmen, Cameron Thornton and Alexis Le," head coach Margaret Gartner said. "Our players are bigger and stronger and making fewer mistakes. We're pressing and fast breaking better this year because we were short-handed last year due to the COVID virus. With the players doing weight work and doing everything full court in practice, this is how we get in condition to play this way. We will be using all of our players to keep the pressure on the other team."

There is no lack of familiarity with the players. "Our chemistry has improved," Gartner said. "They are a very tight knit group that loves playing together and enjoys each other off the court. They're all trying to grow their games and do better."

Gartner is not one to hold back her players. "The players have the green light to shoot and they're always looking for a teammate to take the better shot," Gartner said. "We're not forcing it as much as last year and we're being a lot more patient."

There are many options for the Acalanes offense led by sophomores Dulci Vail who had a season high 30 points against San Marin and is the team's leading rebounder, Sophie Chinn, co-captain Karyss (K.K.) Lacanlale, Natalie Frechman, juniors Natalie Lyons, co-captain Jenna Steele and senior co-captain Emily Du. Freshmen Thorn and Le have both shown offensive skills and will be seeing playing time as well.

"K.K. will be running the offense," Gartner said. "She is a beast at 5'4" and is a great passer. Everybody works off of her. We are a fairly balanced offense."

Outside of Vail, there is not a lot of height in the front court. Compensating for that lack, Acalanes has a very aggressive defense as evidenced by Lacanlale and Chinn getting nine and eight steals respectively in different games.

"We can get a little lost on defense and rebounding is always going to be our nemesis," Gartner said. "On defense, we want to make our opponents take outside shots and prevent them from getting layups and second and third shots."

The success of the team relies on its cohesion as a team, according to Gartner: "We have to play as a team on both ends of the court. On defense, our main concerns are playing team defense and rebounding because we know that we can shoot. On offense, it's moving the ball and making the extra pass."

Currently ranked ninth by the Bay Area News Group, the Dons will be tested this week at the Nike Tournament of Champions in Phoenix and the week after at the West Coast Jamboree.

Campolindo

In his second year as the head coach for Campolindo, Bill Flitter was far more comfortable heading into this season. "When I started last year in September, we did not have a summer of preparation," Flitter said. "This year, we worked over the summer in getting the processes in place, establishing a culture and having a program on offense and defense so we're much deeper and further ahead than where we were last year."

What hasn't changed for the Cougars is Flitter's philosophy of being aggressive on offense and defense. "We want to put a lot of pressure on the rim which creates a lot of opportunities on offense, driving and cutting hard to the basket," Flitter said. "On defense, we play a half-court man pressure on defense."

There is good depth at the guard position for the Cougars with seniors Camille Yabu, Mina Wang, and sophomore Ali McCauley. "Camille has a lot of speed in going to the basket and at 5'8" was our leading rebounder last year," Flitter said. "Mina missed almost the entire season last year and will be our other starter. She runs the floor well and is a great commander. Ali will be valuable in that she is able to play both guard positions."

The front court brings both experience and youth with senior Charlotte Arnswald, sophomore Aislinn Comerford and freshman Avery Yasukochi (whose brother played for Campolindo last year). "Charlotte is a great defensive player that has gotten stronger and runs very well and is a sprinter on the track team," Flitter said. "Aislinn worked really hard over the summer and earned a place on the roster and gives us good size and she has learned to play around the rim better and Avery is very athletic and shows great potential."

It's the team having the right attitude and using its strength that Flitter is looking toward as the season develops. "We're a really quick team that can move," Flitter said. "It's getting the players to get them to believe in our strength and in themselves which our keys to our being successful."

Miramonte

Coming into the season with a solid core of players, Miramonte coach Vince Wirthman was anticipating an improvement over last year's 14-14 record and so far, he has been proven correct, starting off with a 5-2 record.

With a roster of only eight players, the last thing that the Matadors could afford to do was to lose any player to an injury and unfortunately that's just what happened when junior guard Willa Mapaye went down with a season ending knee injury. Wirthman spoke of how valuable Mapaye was to the team. "Willa was running our offense as our point guard," Wirthman said. "She is a good all-round player who is smart, a good shooter, ball handler and played good defense and will really be missed this season."

In her one game, Mapaye scored 11 points and had three assists, seven rebounds and four steals. Sophomore Julia Quinn-Ferguson (5.2 ppg) and freshman Maegan Eichenberger (4.4 ppg) will be counted on to replace Mapaye.

Wirthman was already high on Quinn-Ferguson and Eichenberger. "Julia is a good athlete and plays with a lot of speed," Wirthman said. "Maegan has been showing a lot of potential. She is a hard worker and a good defender who is very aggressive."

Senior guards and sisters, Courtney and Katherine Scheingart, have shown great improvement on offense from last season with Courtney improving her scoring average from 7.7 to 14.1 and Katherine going from 3.3 to 10.6.

"Courtney is our best shooter, but all of our players can shoot and I'm encouraging them all to shoot their three pointers," Wirthman said. "We're going to try and run and keep an up tempo. From our starters to the bench players, they're all players we have confidence in."

Junior Karena Eberts (14.7 ppg and 10.0 rebounds) was all-league last season and is the only player with size in the front court. "We're not going to rely as much on the inside game as we did last year when we had more size," Wirth said. "Karena is a strong inside player, but she can also shoot from the outside. We are also anticipating the return of Eva Patrick, who suffered a knee injury last season once she finishes her rehab."

Miramonte scheduled three tournaments prior to the league season - Miramonte (2-1), with the Windsor and West Coast Jubilee tournaments coming up.

Wirthman is counting on the team's chemistry to be a key factor in the team's performance. "We had a good off-season and played in the summer leagues," Wirthman said. "We play a pressure defense more than normal due to our size, speed and shooting ability and we'll be able to take advantage of teams that don't handle the ball well. We're going to get better as the year goes on with our trapping and pressing style though we're not there yet."



Sophie Chinn Photos Nicolas O'Rourke

Reach the reporter at: sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA