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Strong start for Campo and Acalanes boys' basketball, as Mats build momentum

By Jon Kingdon



Logan Robeson , #24 Photo J. Kingdon

Each of the Lamorinda boys' basketball teams have been facing various challenges coming into the season. Whether it's been replacing key players lost to graduation or waiting for players to return from injuries and illnesses, there has been no time for self-pity, receiving little sympathy from their opponents. Campolindo and Acalanes have started strong and Miramonte after a slow start is now pointed in the right direction.

Campolindo

Despite losing three starters from last year, Campolindo has simply picked up where they left off, having made it to the state semifinals. The Cougars are now 5-2 with two of the wins coming against highly ranked Branson and Archbishop Riordan at the Gridley tournament.

"We made a lot of progress in the off-season and have played a really hard schedule so far," head coach Steven Dyer said. "Our guys have bought in and played hard and have already made a lot of progress."

With last year's starting guards Aidan Mahaney and Cade Bennett now playing for Saint Mary's, seniors Logan Robeson (20.7), back after missing the last two seasons due to injuries, Shane O'Reilly (13.0) and Clay Naffziger (9.1) are all scoring well. Junior Tyler Bergren (5.1 and 3.9 assists) has been running the offense as the team's point guard.

"Logan, Shane and Clay can put the ball in the basket and that helps alleviate a lot of problems on offense," Dyer said. "When all three are on the court, it makes our offense hard to stop. It was a rough two years for Logan with his injuries and he has worked really hard. No one in our program is surprised by what he is doing now. He's just in a good place mentally and injury free and those are the biggest things. Tyler is tough and confident and has done a good job in taking care of the basketball and getting our shooters the ball for good shots."

Sophomore guard Gavin Rendle is another shooter that is new to the team. "We're looking for Gavin to keep developing and we think he is going to be a really good player and he can get some good minutes this year."

With the graduation of four-year starter Matt Rendell, 6'4" junior Dominick Sanguinetti has been asked to fill that role. "Dominick has been getting better with his defense, rebounding and screen setting," Dyer said. "We're asking him to do the dirty work and he is doing well. We are playing a lot of four and five out on offense and when we go smaller, we use Dylan 'Diggy' Mansour who has been rebounding well and playing with toughness."

Without a true big man, rebounding requires a team effort for the Cougars. "We don't have an inside player that will get 10 rebounds a game, so we have to address it as a group and have multiple guys get four to five rebounds a game," Dyer said. "We will double the post if we have to, and our base defense takes away a lot of that stuff. We had success in our three games at the Gridley tournament, all of whom were taller than us."

Besides shooting well, the key for the offense is avoiding turnovers. "We haven't been turning the ball over a lot," Dyer said. "It's a big statistic we look for and over the last four years, we've averaged less than 10 turnovers a game. On defense, our goal has to always hold our opponents to just one shot."

The attitude and confidence the players have brought is a real strength, according to Dyer: "Knowing that

there were going to be opportunities to play more, all of our players worked hard in the off season to maintain the standards we have set. Our expectations are high and we're still looking to continue to improve our depth and to stay healthy, which is always critical."

Acalanes

Last year, it took Acalanes 10 games before they had their fifth win, on their way to an 8-15 final record. This year it only took five games and optimism reigns supreme for the Dons with a 6-2 record.

Head coach Bill Powers made it clear that things were going to be different this year. "We've had a good start to the season," Powers said. "We simply had not won enough so that was something we had been working towards since last March. We have put so much energy into the process that the players now get it and winning is just a byproduct."

Powers attributes much of the team's early success to their work in the weight room. "Mike Ivankovich has been running our strength program since March and he has made a real difference in our program," Powers said. "With what Mike created for us, we knew that we would be improved this year. Initially, the players were uncomfortable, but they fought through that discomfort, and this has impacted their play on the court and their confidence."

With eight seniors leading the way, there is no shortage of leadership. "We are a mature team beyond the fact that we have so many seniors," Powers said. "It's just a group of old souls. They have the maturity to understand that self-awareness and sacrifice are important to being successful, understanding the human characteristics that makes them better teammates."

Four-year lettermen, 6'9" center Jake Davis and 5'6" point guard Theo Stoll have been the long and short of the team. Davis is averaging 18 points and 11.2 rebounds per game and Stoll is second averaging 14.2 points and leading the team with 6.8 assists per game.

"Jake has been dominant on the boards," Powers said. "We're getting him the ball in good areas to operate, moving him around and making him harder to guard. He is playing with a lot more toughness and confidence. Theo has been like a coach on the court and a leader off it. He understands that he doesn't have to be perfect; he just has to be Theo."

There is good depth in the back court with seniors Zubin Acuna and Jack Bayless and junior Jordan Brown all of whom have been playing well. "Jordan has quickly made his influence felt," Powers said. "He's been a major spark as an athlete and a winner. We're just a better-looking team on the court with our ball movement and our players have become harder to guard. We've taken very few bad shots so far this season and this is a testament to the players and how they care about each other. With sophomore Joe Reidenbach's return from an injury, and the anticipated return of Matt Bacon from his injury, the front court will be that much stronger."

Coming into the Chris Huber Tournament with a 4-0 record, Acalanes was hit with a flu bug and four starters and others out with the flu. Powers told the team that 'adversity creates opportunity' and the players took that to heart in their opening game against Ygnacio Valley, finding a way to score four points in the last 0.2 seconds of the game.

At that point with the score tied 60-60, YV sank a foul shot and their bench ran onto the court in celebration, drawing a technical foul. After they sank their second shot, Acuna calmly sank his two foul shots to tie the score. Powers then set up a play where Trevor Powers inbounded the ball from half court, throwing it right at the basket with Bayless tipping the ball in to win the game, a victory that the team can build on.

"What we're working towards is a celebratory locker room," Powers said. "Coming into this season, we had not had any wins that would create an exciting locker room, but after experiencing that by winning the Piedmont Championship earlier in the season and the Ygnacio Valley game, we've been winning the locker room."

Miramonte

Miramonte was hit particularly hard with the loss to graduation of their top four leaders in scoring, rebounding and assists.

Compound that with injuries and illnesses, the Matadors began the season with three losses. The team's only senior, guard Ethan Conley, is currently wearing a harness, rehabbing a dislocated shoulder he suffered playing football, junior Chase Miller is coming off a concussion and Damian Wyszinski recently had appendix surgery.

"I don't use the term rebuilding, but we do have a new and inexperienced team and we're missing a number of key players," head coach Chris Lavdiotis said. "We're doing a lot of teaching with so many new players and I've had to scale back what we can do offensively and defensively, and we decided as a staff and a team that we had to go back a couple of steps before we can move forward. We're still steering in the same direction and teaching basic fundamental stuff on both sides of the ball."

Junior Marcus Robinson has been the team's leading scorer and is the leader on the court, but Lavdiotis is looking for production around him with the return of the injured and sick players. "With Ethan and Chase coming back soon and Thomas Zwahlen, a football player who is just getting into basketball shape, we'll be a much better and deeper team," Lavdiotis said. "We're looking to be hitting our stride in the Marin County tournament at the end of December. We just haven't had enough time together because in most of our practices, we've only been able to dress eight or nine players due to the flu."

With the team down to eight players, Lavdiotis brought two freshmen up from the JV, forward Blake Bastani and guard Preston Rguem, for the Casa Grande game where Bastani led the team with 19 points, nine rebounds, three assists and four steals, and was named the player of the game by the coaching staff and Rguem ran the offense well and was a top defender.

There is depth in the backcourt with Charlie Haas, Matt Bakonyvari and Owen Brady. "Owen has shown a good ability to move without the ball and he really understands how to use screens," Lavdiotis said. "I've told the players that nobody has anything set and they have to earn time and things will be fluid until things settle down and figure out who are going to be our five starters."

Things have already improved with the team winning two of their three games at their home tournament. "We've gone back to some of our older stuff and it's going to work," Lavdiotis said. "We're changing things on the fly to give our players the best chance to succeed. The kids are earnest and want to do well. We're together which is good and it's up to them now to understand what we're giving them."

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