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Optimism abounds for the Lamorinda girls tennis teams

By Jon Kingdon



Miramonte's Caitlin Chan Photo Larissa Kosla

If there is one thing that all of the tennis teams can agree on, it's that it's nice not to have to find a time to practice early or late when it's not 114 degrees. Talent and character abound with all of the teams, and each are pointing to making it to the North Coast Sectional Tournament this year.

Miramonte

Coming off a very successful season where they made it to the NCS championship, ultimately losing 4-3, head coach Riki Sorenson is excited about the prospects for this year's team already having defeated Foothill, the fourth-place finisher last year, 8-1 and Bishop O'Dowd 7-2.

"It is too early to know a lot about our team, but I've learned that a good chunk of our girls invested a lot of time in their games from last season until now," Sorenson said. "We have a number of girls that played all year round and it showed at the tryouts where they played that much better than last season. It's a good core group that can play both singles and doubles."

Caitlin Chan who played number three as a freshman last year is now the lead singles player. "Caitlin has really made extraordinary improvement from last year," Sorenson said. "Her strength had been consistency, but she has become more powerful in her serving and ground strokes and has already had two big wins over

the top players at Carondelet and Piedmont."

With the loss of last year's No. 2 player, Soleil Skjorshammer, who transferred to another school, it's created opportunities for many of the 17 players on the roster. Already set as singles players are Maddie Silveira, and co-captains Nicole Hui and Nicole Guo. "Everybody is out there working hard, and our goal is to get more of our girls able to play both singles and doubles and they've been pretty good about doing that," Sorenson said. "Charlotte Weston, Jessica Hui and Emily Suh are all playing well."

Sorenson is looking for improvement with her doubles teams. "Our goal this year is to get stronger in doubles as we have been so strong in singles the last two years," Sorenson said. "Co-captain Ali Rhee and Audrey Kosla are just a really potent partnership. This is the fun time of the year in that we are trying all types of partnerships. Our only freshman, Maddie Essner, has already played in two of our matches and has looked very good."

Sorenson is confident in the team's ultimate performance though she does qualify it a tad. "It all depends how things shake out, but we are very strong and very deep with a good core group that plays singles and doubles," Sorenson said. "Our advantage over last year is our depth in terms of having quality players up and down the line. If all goes well, we should be in the top two in the league, hopefully winning the league, being one of the top five seeds for the NCS and making a deep run in the tournament."

Campolindo

Campolindo has started off strong with victories over College Park, Bishop O'Dowd, and San Ramon Valley, only losing to Davis High School "on a really hot day."

Head coach Sunan Faulkner appreciates the character of the team. "We are really gelling together," Faulkner said, "This is a good group to work with and we have four very good senior captains, Dilara Basegmez, Jamie Kelly, Alyssa Muller, and Caroline Obsitnik."

The strength of the singles players is the depth that reaches down to the sixth player. "Our lead singles player is Sophia Raldugina-Zhu, No. 2 is Basegmez and No. 3 is a sophomore Summer Chang," Faulkner said "Sophia is a player that will elevate her game against the better players and has the ability to wear down her opponents and in one case, led her opponent to retire. All three are very competitive and are

going to be facing a lot of tough opponents."

Playing fourth singles is sophomore Rebecca Tanner, fifth is Caroline Obsitnik, and freshman Madison Watkins is sixth. "Our strength has always been our depth," Faulkner said. "Becca is in her first year on the varsity, Caroline is the leader of this group and Madison, 'my little freshman' has shown that she can really play. She has really good fundamentals and her ground strokes are great and is really coachable. She just needs more experience. I'm expecting them all, as a group, to do really well."

The top doubles team from last year graduated but this still remains a strength for Campolindo. "Our doubles teams should do well against any team," Faulkner said. "Nola Coane, who teamed with her sister last year, is now teamed with Annie Cooper as our No. 1 team. They are a very strong pair that are gelling well. Our No. 2 team is Alyssa Muller and Jamie Kelly who are best friends and really enjoy playing together. Our third doubles pair, Eva Canales and Clara Hwang, have also played very well."

Faulkner has a strategy to keep the team fresh. "I make sure that they warm up with somebody different every day to prevent them from only practicing with people that they are comfortable with, which avoids there being cliques on the team," Faulkner said. "We also have a sister program where the girls will pair off and bring each other snacks at the matches to take care of each other."

To ensure the improvement of the players, Faulkner, and assistant coach (and the boys varsity coach) Jimmy Scott evaluate each player after their matches and determine which areas of their games need to be addressed at practice. "We will each do 15-minute 'mini clinics,' working on the specific areas of their game where they did not do well in their match the very next day."

One last change Faulkner has made has been to practice on Friday. "I always thought it was a good day for the girls to take care of any personal needs," Faulkner said. "However, I believe that taking Friday, Saturday, and Sunday off is too long of a break. It's turns out that everybody has been embracing the Friday practice and that's been kind of nice."

Acalanes

There are two new co-head coaches for Acalanes this year - Joe Schottland and Sharon Langtry - who have worked well, complementing each other. "As a social studies teacher at Acalanes, I can deal with the paperwork and I'm used to dealing with teenage girls," Schottland said. "Sharon is better suited with the more technical side of tennis and understands and is much better understanding the clinics and drills and in the end, it has shifted the burden a little bit from both of us."

"It's a big-time commitment so it's good for each of us to have the other as a backup," Langtry concurred.

Both have come to appreciate the quality of the team as athletes and their character as individuals. "They are really good as a group," Langtry said. "We had a nine-hour tournament playing in 90-degree heat out in Oakland and it was tough, and the girls really pushed themselves and I think they learned a lot. They're all friends and they have all come together as a group."

"This is very much a team and they have bonded and genuinely like being with each other," Schottland said. "They all cheer for each other to the end and that says a lot about our team, and it also makes it special for us as coaches."

The singles are led by co-captain Aamena Shipchandler, the team's line one singles player followed by Piper Duff, freshman Grace Colaco, sophomore Emily Roberts, junior Siena Moise, and senior Nicole Parlett. "We're definitely younger than last year," Schottland said.

"Aamena plays competitively all year round," Langtry said. "She has a high skill level, and she is a fighter and more tactical on the court. All of the girls have played well and even though she is only a freshman, Grace is very strong and plays with a tremendous amount of endurance and grit."

This is the time of year that all the schools are trying to find the right combination of doubles players and Acalanes is no exception. "We're still working on finding that perfect coupling," Schottland said.

The leading doubles players are Olivia Dawkins and co-captain junior Lucy O'Brien. "Olivia is a great net player and Lucy is also a line one doubles player," Langtry said.

There is a unity that carries over to off the court activities. "The girls will pick a theme to dress up to on matches days and also go together to cheer for other girls' sports," Langtry said.

If the team is going to be ultimately success, they need to improve in two areas - "Strength and consistency of serve and rallies," Schottland said.

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