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Lamorinda boys' water polo - showing talent and potential

By Jon Kingdon



Campolindo Goalie Joey Cecchin. #4 Dante Vattuone, #21 Hayden O'Hare, #16 Cade O'Hare; Miramonte #22 Griff Tunney Photo Shirley?DeFrancisci@defstop

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Miramonte lost the league's outstanding goalie Harrison LaBrosse and league MVP Charlie Eng, both of whom are now playing for Santa Clara, along with three out all-league players to graduation and Nash has not looked back. "We got an influx of young guys who have really developed last year as freshmen and a good group that's returned for this year, like first team all team players Henry Eng, Grant Kurtz, and Oliver Sherwood and second teamer Griff Tunney, a left-handed attacker. We have a very balanced team in that we're getting goals from everyone. Oliver Sherwood and Grant Kurtz have been scoring a lot at the attacking positions and Tristan Tucker has been scoring as well at center."

Sophomores Brock Bliss, Jackson Cherry and Tristan Tucker all saw significant playing time last year and have stepped up their games so far this year. "Brock on offense and Jackson on defense played off the bench last year and are playing a lot and doing a great job. Tristan is now our starting center and he's taken a really big jump after playing on a national team trip this summer and it's really propelled him forward. Though it's hard for a sophomore to play center, he's done a really nice job for us at that spot."

Miramonte's starting goalie is sophomore Zach Liu who was on the traveling squad last year. "Zach has good size and he's really aware, making explosive moves to the ball," Nash said "He's excellent at coming out of the cage and helping the center defender, at times being the seventh defender. He's continuing to improve every day and is really embracing that role. He is becoming way more comfortable, learning a lot on the fly and we're really happy with where he's at."

The defense has done a solid job in protecting Liu. "We really rely on team defense and playing collectively as a unit," Nash said. "We've been able to do that because our center defense has been strong with Patrick Stice and Ben Lucas. Patrick is a big, long, and lengthy center defender that has done a good job in controlling the center for us. Ben has really taken a step that has elevated his game over the course of the last six months as a defender but is also an attacker that we can plug into a bunch of different spots."

It's Miramonte's defense that Nash sees as the key to the ultimate success of the team: "We're always trying to be the best defensive team we possibly can be which translates to the postseason because even if we have a poor shooting day, if our defense is top of the line, we're going to be in every game. One of the things we preach all the time is that we want to be the best field blocking team in the country and that's something that we've been trying to really improve on and so far, they've done a nice job and that's what we're going to continue to focus on."

Campolindo

Last season, Campolindo made it to the second round of the CIF North Coast Championship and they have carried over that late season success to this year, having won six of their first nine games, which included four of five win in the South Coast Tournament and the difference in their three losses were only by a composite of five goals.

"We are a fast and smart team," head coach Darren Schroeder said. "We're a really good team that is young (three sophomores and four freshmen) which is great in that it's a very coachable team with guys that are eager and super talented."

Even after losing 15 seniors to graduation the last two years, the team still has six seniors and nine juniors. "We're getting contributions from the juniors and seniors that are at the top of our roster, providing the leadership for the team but we have a lot of fill-ins from our young players so there's a lot of teaching and coaching that's going into this team."

The Lamorinda boys' water polo teams have shown both success and potential. Miramonte and Campolindo have had a number of victories and Acalanes is taking the long-term perspective, anticipating similar success by the end of the season.

Miramonte

Coming into the season, Miramonte head coaches John Nash and Lincoln Haley wanted to learn early where their team stood and made it a point to compete in the South Coast Tournament in San Juan Capistrano against the best 32 teams in the state. "It allowed us to challenge ourselves and create the best competition in a good early test," Nash said.

The Matadors returned with a two and two record, with both losses by only one goal and have an overall record of 6-3 at this point.

"We have a mature group with 12 seniors that is really competitive and resilient and most of them are playing big minutes," Nash said. "They've all done a nice job of leading by example. We want to stay off the roller coaster emotionally and just keep an even keel. We did

that after trailing De La Salle by three goals and came back to win 13-11. This is a really fun team to

coach."

The numbers back up what Schroeder has been saying. The goals scored per game has jumped from 9.3 to 12.0 and the goals against has dropped from 10.6 to 9.6 this season. The team's three co-captains are seniors Dante Vattuone, Callen Bronson, and Will Vranesh.

Schroeder and co-head coach Yurii Hanley have made it a point to use the junior varsity team to keep refreshing the varsity roster. "We have a lot of great young talent in the pipeline which is a good way to put it," Schroeder said. "We rely on our upperclassmen and then we have the underclassmen to keep replenishing the roster. Hayden O'Hare, Dylan King, and Garrett Chivers were sophomores last year and are all playing much better this season."

Sophomores Sam Storrs and Jack Elder are all getting time along with freshmen Grayson Bloes, Cade O'Hare, Ellis Culleton, and Will Maguy. "They're making us stronger in practice and in all areas," Schroeder said.

Leading the offense has been O'Hare, Will Vranish, and Garrett Chivers. Culleton, in his first year, has been really standing out offensively.

O'Hare and Dylan King have been very solid on defense in front of goalie Joey Cecchin.

"Joey Cecchin is a fantastic goalie who had a great club season in offseason and he's doing very, very well for us," Schroeder said. "He's very good at blocking balls and is also a very good outlet passer."

There has been an improvement in the team as a whole on both offense and defense. "With many of our better players upperclassmen, there's still this young energy to the team and that makes it fun for them and rewarding for us," Schroeder said. "Their confidence is going nowhere but up."

Acalanes

Despite the team's slow start, head coach Nick Jordan is positive as to where the team is going. "We've been developing and growing as a team every game," Jordan said. "Our players have bought in and are trying really hard every day in practice and in the games. They're trying to better themselves and the team every day. We've been prepared for every game and the team has been putting forth their best effort on what we've been practicing and we're just trying to go forward with that, and the score will take of itself after that."

There is a varied range of experience among the players. "There's a good mix of players that are brand new to water polo along with some that have been playing for a few years and others that have been playing for a long time," Jordan said.

Leading the offense has been sophomore Thomas Parrott, freshman Isaac Topp, and seniors Sam Whipple and Tyler Gerhardt. "Thomas is extremely dynamic as a driver, attacker and in post ups," Jordan said. "Isaac has been dynamic in the counterattack and is really active when we get down to the front court. Sam and Tyler both play the center position and have been doing very well. We have a number of players that have been very integral in our offense, in that we have a lot of different looks and we're just trying to find the best one every time we come down the pool."

Jordan's offensive philosophy is simple: "It's to find the best option and taking advantage of what the defense is giving us. We want to get the best matchups, keeping up the movement and finding the opportunities to attack quickly."

The key player on defense for the Dons has been Justin Rosenblatt. "Justin plays center defense and has done a great job locking down players and being a rock on our defensive end," Jordan said.

Senior Ryder Bradford-Urban has been very solid in the net. "Ryder has been doing very well and we're happy to have him in the goal," Jordan said. "Ryder does a good job in making the blocks and even covering for the other players when they have been beaten by the attacker. He does a good job coming up and making the blocks which has been extremely helpful."

Jordan is anticipating a much-improved team by the end of the season. "From where we started from, I've been very pleased with the development of all of the players," Jordan said. "It just goes back to them coming every day and working hard with a good positive attitude which goes a long way in the development of the team. As long as we're improving every day, wherever we are at the end of the season, that will be great because we'll have gone just so far from the beginning of the season."

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