

LAMORINDA SPORTS

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Acalanes Flag Football team finishes 2nd in North Coast Section

By Jon Kingdon



Photo provided

The Acalanes Flag Football team celebrates after defeating College Park to win the DAL and move on to the NCS tournament.

Despite starting from scratch, the high school flag football season turned out to be surprisingly successful for the players, the coaches, and the team's supporters. Many of the teams were richly stocked with players and then there were teams like Acalanes that had a roster of 17 players, yet finished the season with a 13-5 record, winning the Diablo Athletic League championship over College Park 6-0, and finishing second in the North Coast Sectional championship game, losing to Clayton Valley 12-6 in overtime.

Initially it was a battle just to get a head coach for the team. When Victor Silva stepped up, he called a number of people like Mike Ivankovich, Joe Escobar, Steve Seidler, Erin Wong, and Tom Shoehair and asked them to just give him the time that they could, and they all served as assistant coaches. "They all had other team responsibilities and I could not

have done it without them," Silva said. "My goal was to make sure that everyone was happy, and I just had a fantastic time."

The work of the staff was not lost on senior co-captain Jenna Steele. "It was a very extensive coaching staff that all had their own areas of expertise which allowed us to split up and do multiple drills at the same time, working within our individual positions," Steele said. "So, having all of them together really presented us with a wider picture of what we could learn and allowed us to go more in depth at each position."

Ivankovich, a longtime coach and first-time flag football coach spoke glowingly of the character of the girls on the team. "Having only 17 players was not quite enough for practice and games," said Ivankovich. "To make it to the NCS championship game, com-

peting against large Division I schools, was an amazing accomplishment for such a small group of kids who had never been coached in football and were there because they wanted to be, and it was one of the best coaching experiences of my life."

Silva shared that sentiment: "If you would have told me after our first practice that we were going to make it to the NCS championship game, I would still be laughing."

The roster included 11 seniors led by Steele who jumped at the opportunity to join the team. "I was really excited to hear that Acalanes was starting a flag football team," Steele said. "My dad is a really big football fan, so I grew up watching football games. Five of the girls on our team this year were on my powderpuff team last year, but we were all really new to the sport and at that point, I definitely had not

thought that we would have gotten as far in the playoffs as we did because it was a little rough at first."

Despite the lack of experience with football, most of the girls brought were athletes that were able to carry those skills over to the football field. "Our players are exceptional people that are very smart, and they absorbed everything," Ivankovich said. "There was a compounding effect of their acquisition of knowledge and understanding about football because they were able to handle more than one idea at a time, facilitated by their knowledge of defense acquired from playing basketball, lacrosse and soccer. Our girls made up for any lack of experience with just this incredible commitment and dedication to each other and the team and bringing such a high athletic IQ and just their overall intelligence."

Thus, the players were able to pick things up quickly. "We had to learn how to break down and pull flags, how to throw and catch the football and all of the super basic skills," Steele said. "By the end of the season, we're running our routes and making crazy catches. Our defense was very solid, and we learned how to read the quarterback's eyes and make interceptions. We also watched game film which our parents would shoot to see where we made mistakes and that was also very helpful."

As in many sports, the defense was ahead of the offense. "Our defense came together from the very beginning," Ivankovich said. "We had a good plan on defense but in the end, the plan is only as good as the players, and it was there from the very beginning. We

only had three touchdowns scored on us three times all season along with three shutouts."

The defense was led by senior linebackers Steele, Ella Thomson, and Alana Brinkman. "The girls always struck me as so mature, and they were tough as hell in the way that they would play through things," Ivankovich said. "It's impossible for football to not be physical and our girls were physically and mentally tough."

The coaches also went the extra mile: "Mike and Joe watched a ton of film on our opponents so in every game, we knew what the other team was going to do on offense and that is another reason why our defense was so good," Silva said.

It took a while for the offense to catch up to the defense, but it all came together soon enough. "We really pushed hard to improve our offense and installing the option really helped us become more dynamic," Ivankovich said. "We used two quarterbacks, seniors Addie Martin and Zoya Acuna who split time most of the season, but all the girls improved a lot on offense throughout the season. Kelly Todhunter, who played running back, was an explosive athlete who was a catalyst for a lot of things on our offense."

The co-captains of the team were Steele and Addie Martin. "It was basically the entire team, but Jenna was our key spokesperson," Ivankovich said. "She would take over the pregame coin toss, correct the officials and even yell at the man on the sidelines handling the down box if he was doing it wrong."

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Campo boys water polo wins D-2 NorCal Championship; Mats suffer close loss in D-1 final

By Jon Kingdon



Campolindo boys team

Photo Shirley DeFrancisci

Though disappointed at just missing playing in the Division I NorCal Tournament, finishing third in the NCS championship, Campolindo did have the satisfaction at being named the No. 1 seed in the Division II tournament. After defeating Rocklin 14-9 and San Luis Obispo 14-4 in their first two games, Campolindo, ranked 40th nationally, came away victorious over the 30th ranked Buchanon (Clovis) High School in the championship game with a 14-12 victory.

The Cougars played a very difficult regular season schedule competing against several teams ranked high nationally. The Cougars took the challenge and ran (or swam) with it. "We really had a trial by fire and the team responded with our development over the course of the year," co-head coach Darren Schroeder said. "The team's character was focused and interested in developing."

Even with an extended losing streak late in the season, the team never lost his composure. "As coaches, we really did not have to do anything there," Schroeder said. "Our players are positive, and our captains, Callen Bronson and Dante Vattuone, are very good leaders and we kept working and soon enough, it was behind us."

Schroeder and Yuri Hanley stressed teamwork over individuality from the beginning and it has worked on offense and defense. "We're very balanced in terms of goal scoring among five players and our defense also has a very team-oriented defensive scheme," Schroeder. "That makes it a little difficult to pick out 'stars' on the team with the way that they have developed and play together."

Stepping in as the team goalie, Joey Cecchin kept up the tradition of strong play in the goal. "Joey was fantastic. You know, every time you graduate a great goalie and Campolindo has a tradition of great goalies, you're really going to miss some, but it helps when you know that there's another talented player right behind them coming out."

Miramonte

After defeating De La Salle 12-10 in the North Coast Section championship, Miramonte entered the Division I NorCal CIF championship as the third seed. The Matadors opened the tournament defeating Saint Francis 17-12 and Bellarmine College Prep 10-9, setting up the championship game against Sacred Heart Prep. Trailing by one after three periods, Miramonte was outscored 4-2 in the fourth

quarter, making the final score 13-10 in favor of Sacred Heart Prep.

Miramonte had a schedule that saw them play 11 teams that were ranked in the top 10 nationally, which was by design, according to co-head coach John Nash: "Every year we set out to play the most difficult schedule we possibly can because if we compete against the best, it'll put us in the best position to be prepared to play the North Coast and CIF playoffs."

It proved to be an effective way to help the team handle the pressure of competition. "We ended up learning what the process of winning is like," co-head coach Lincoln Nash said. "It was going to take four quarters of effort and realize that there are going to be ebbs and flows every game and you have to keep a positive mindset the entire time."

The goal for the coaches was to keep the team balanced. "We talked about staying off the emotional roller coaster," Nash said. "We wanted our players to stay even keeled, not reacting to positive or negative things but to just move on to the next play which has put us in a great position for the post-season."

Cooper Stern who began the season as a field player, became the Matadors' starting goalie in mid-season. "Cooper has done a really nice job for us," Nash said.

Henry Engs, Grant Kurtz, Oliver Sherwood, Tristan Tucker, Griff Tunney, Patrick Stice and Brady Hasset were major players on the team. "They all contributed a bunch as have our substitutes," Nash said. "As a freshman, Hasset did a really nice job progressing through the course of the season, earning more playing minutes. Ben Lucas also became one of our top guys off the bench as a utility player."

Moraga moms place in local Triathlon

Submitted by Brad Beal



Emily Karlberg and Erin Beal Photo provided

Moraga moms Emily Karlberg (Lieberman) and Erin Beal both made the podium at the 2023 Alpha Win Napa Valley Fall Triathlon held at the end of October in Napa.

This was Emily's first triathlon (sprint distance)

and she came in 3rd place in her age category (35-39 years old) with a time of 1:33:23. Erin Beal participated in her third triathlon (sprint distance), and she came in 2nd place in her age category (45-49) with a time of 1:35:12.

Emily and Erin were joined by friends and fellow triathletes from Moraga and San Francisco, and all finished the race and had a great time. They are excited to prepare for their next triathlon in 2024!

First place for Miramonte Water Polo JV team

Submitted by Lena Ayoub Van Leeuwen



Miramonte boys JV Water Polo team

Photo Ann Murphy

The JV water polo season for the Lamorinda teams concluded at the Diablo Athletic League JV Tournament on Oct. 28 at College Park High School. Miramonte High School Boys'

Water Polo JV team, coached by Joey Estrada and Sam Parfitt, took first place in the tournament, winning 12-4 over Campolindo High School in the DAL Championship game.