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Hope springs eternal for Lamorinda basketball

By Jon Kingdon



Chris Kaufhold

With all five starters having graduated, Acalanes head coach Bill Powers is looking to move on from last season. "We're trying to build an identity of just being relentless in how we rebound and run and we're trying to play at a pace that's a little faster than we played the last couple of years," Powers said. "We're a team that cares for one another."

With the addition of legendary Bay Area coach Don Libbi (922 wins), this year's Dons will be running more. "This is an emphasis in practice," Powers said. "Don has had a big influence in that area. It was just a stroke of luck that he found his way to Acalanes and we're so grateful. We're also trying to get the best shot we can, an 'Acalanes shot' and we're teaching them what a good shot is. We're still taking some bad shots but that's what happens in November."

Powers is also looking to be equally aggressive on defense. "We can really match up in our ability to put five guys on the floor where our smallest guy would be 6'3," Powers said. "We're excited about being a team that presses, zones and then gets out and runs."

Acalanes has a lot of depth and Powers is taking advantage of it. "To coin a Golden State Warriors phrase, there is strength in numbers," Powers said. "I want us to be a team that keeps coming at you with a number of players that will be getting significant playing time."

There is a lot of size in the front court led by Joe Reidenbach, brothers Maddox and Ryder Malm, Jake Elerts, Cooper Edelman, and Trevor Carrillo, though Matt Bacon is currently out with a knee injury. "We are bigger in the sense that we can put a lot of players on the floor that are between 6'2" and 6'5," Powers said. "Ryder is a sophomore who is a big kid who we think highly of, and he has made great strides over the summer and fall."

Along with Quinn in the backcourt, Ian Salmon, Liam Krackeler, and Jordan Brown bring experience and the ability to score. Sophomores Gavin Dodge, Ryder Malm, Cameron Hood, and Preston Hilsabeck will all be seeing time and Powers is particularly optimistic about Dodge: "Gavin is a good player and you'll be writing about him for the next three years."

Powers is also stressing the mental aspect of the game to his players: "They have to believe in themselves and their ability to win games. We'll have a game plan for every game but it's also getting the players to realize they're good players and not doubt themselves. That's what we need for us to be successful."

Miramonte

After only winning five games last year, head coach Chris Lavdiotis addressed the issue head on. "We just weren't good enough to win for a variety of reasons," Lavdiotis said. "We determined what we need to do to get better and then put it in the rearview mirror."

Every exit interview from his players had a common theme - they didn't work hard enough in the offseason. "So, we committed to that this offseason and our efforts in the spring, summer and fall have set the groundwork for the team," Lavdiotis said. "Our goal this summer was to play harder than our opponents. I think we did. We went to four tournaments and went 19 and 5. It was important for us to play well and win together and have that experience of building a team."

Lavdiotis has relied on his team captains, seniors Chase Miller, Koleton Fenton, and Chris Kaufhold: "They've demanded accountability while being respectful of everybody. Their hard play and their presence on the court is obvious to everybody that they're there to help everyone get better."

Miramonte did not lose any players to graduation though they were missing Thomas Zwahlen, Jack Quinnild,

and Preston Rguem who were still playing football with the team deep into the playoffs.

With so many returning players, it has facilitated the installation of the team's offense. "That's true," Lavdiotis said. "We're basically a 4-out offense, motion base with guidelines and we're getting better and better at spacing the floor and opening up the driving lanes and shooting the threes. They understand playing, spacing, and making plays out of structure and we could have a different high scorer each game."

Lavdiotis has relied on Stefan Maksimovic and Matt Delartini designing the defense. "Stefan and Matt put in a new press and it's really helped our attitude adjustment to be aggressive," Lavdiotis said.

Miller and Marcus Robinson will be starting in the backcourt and freshman Adam Houssami, Kaufhold and Fenton will be the front court starters. "Marcus played for the 18 and under Great Britain this summer. He is shooting well, and his defense and leadership has gotten better," Lavdiotis said. "Adam has grown physically and is a great defender. He understands the game and what we're trying to do. He's got a lot to bring and is not at all intimidated."

There is a lot more size and strength on the team this year. "Our whole team is noticeably bigger because they really committed to the weight room in the offseason," Lavdiotis said. "The big difference for this team is that they have another year of maturity and a determination that we really need to have a successful season. We have to be the hungriest, most aggressive team we can be, and we'll get there."

Campolindo

This may prove to be one of head coach Steven Dyer's more challenging seasons. This will be the first team since 2016 that is not returning a single player that was a double-digit scorer. "It's the most inexperienced team I've had since I've been coaching at Campo," Dyer said. "It's hard to know how we're going to do this year, but these guys are definitely working hard, and we have a chance to be pretty good, but we just have to make progress every week."

It was anticipated that there would be two returning starters from last season, co-captains guard Dylan Mansour and point guard Tyler Bergren, but Bergren is currently out with a knee injury. Sophomore Peyton Beld has stepped in as the team's point guard and there are a number of players that will be looked upon to step us as scorers.

"I think there's a lot of different candidates," Dyer said. "Andy Moon should be a starter for us. He plays really hard and is one of our better defense players. He can hit the open shots and we're counting on him to be an impactful player for us. In an ideal world, Peyton would not have to start right now but the world's not ideal. He's gotten a chunk of minutes and has shown a lot of potential. Gavin Rendle can be a double-digit scorer and Ren Marchetti has also been playing well and we can have as many as eight guys score from 5 to 10 points a game."

In the frontcourt, Tim Smith will be starting at center with Luke Devine, Max Robeson and Will Marusich vying for playing time. "Tim is good defensively and we're looking for him to make more of an impact offensively," Dyer said. "Luke had some good minutes in our scrimmages so we're looking for him to continue to improve on that. Will, a volleyball player, has good size and has been making progress."

Defense remains at the forefront of Dyer's priorities: "It's team defense. Even though it's an inexperienced group, these guys have won a lot on the lower level and have used the same system we use on varsity, so it's just a matter of translating how to do it at the varsity level playing against better guys, and it just takes a lot of work to be good defensively."

The team is going to have to find its success through character and determination. "We might not necessarily have the talent that we had the last five years, but we have a really good group in terms of chemistry and connectivity," Dyer said. "They've all got to be able to chip in, scoring-wise, because we're not going to have a dominant scorer so it's finding out who's going to get the 6 to 10 points a game consistently throughout the year to be an everyday guy. We have to be really well connected as a team and that's where we're going to try to continue to do better."



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[back](#)

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