

# LAMORINDA SPORTS

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## Early success and potential shown by Lamorinda baseball teams

By Jon Kingdon

**Acalanes**  
After finishing last season ranked 241st in the state, head coach Connor Hornsby has led Acalanes to a major turnaround this season, starting the year with nine straight wins, a ranking of 14th in the state and third by the Bay Area News group.

"We've had a number of come-from-behind wins and there is no give-in with our team," Hornsby said. "All of our guys understand their roles and we really focus on the little things that allows us to win. We're a lot more selfless and not focusing too much on some of the individual numbers."

As a team, the Dons are batting .313 led by co-captain Sully Bailey (.393), Keegan Goddard (.310), Isaac Copen (.333), Benji O'Rourke (.433), and James Stadt (.385). "Bailey is a big reason for our success," Hornsby said. "Goddard's a top leadoff man, Benji is a first-time catcher [but] has been one of our clutch guys, and Copen is a big body guy with a bright future. We were really young last year, and a number of our starters didn't have huge roles then."

Hornsby, who played for St. Mary's, has taken on the Gaels basketball attitude of gritty not pretty. "We've successfully used the two-strike suicide squeeze and beaten out throws to extend innings with the old school style of grittiness, multiple mentalities with some new age thinking and are our guys are buying into it," Hornsby said.

The pitching staff is led by co-captain Henry Souza and Peter Thorn, along with Branson Smith, Jake Colaco, and Hank Bauer, among others. "Henry has been our number one guy for years," Hornsby said. "He's more of a pitcher than a thrower. Peter is my go-to guy when things get hairy. He can give me five innings or come in and give me two outs. Bauer is a submarine

pitcher that has been very effective in relief."

The infield is solid with co-captain Gavin Bender at third, Stadt at short, and Mason Zirkel at second. "Mason is also a co-captain who understands positioning and is just a vacuum out there," Hornsby said.

The outfield is set with Goddard, Everett Glass, and David Gonzalez. "All of them work hard and nothing gets down out there," Hornsby said. Goddard and Glass are probably the two best outfielders in the area."

Hornsby is also utilizing Paul Kuhner, a sprinter with the track team. "Speed puts pressure on the other team," Hornsby said. "Paul runs like a deer and he's our go to guy when we have some big guys on base that can't run that well." Hornsby accepts the team's high rankings but knows that it comes with a proviso: "With our record, we have a target on our back but we're ready for that. The rankings are nice but I don't want our players to be satisfied with this. I want them to keep putting the pedal to the medal, practicing and playing hard."

**Campolindo**  
Despite losing nine players to graduation, Campolindo, with a roster of three seniors, eleven juniors, and six sophomores, has started this season off well with a 5-2 record.

"We're definitely a brand-new team that is young but is gaining experience," Head Coach Julian Fiammengo said. "A lot of our guys are playing varsity baseball for the first time and I'm proud of how they're competing."

Though it is early in the season, Campolindo has raised their team batting average of .246 last season to .303 led by Cameron Imberg (.450), Jack Luster (.435), William Myers (.412), Andy Moon (.385), and Miles Clayton (.346). "We really don't worry much about batting

averages," Fiammengo said. "We talk about the process and having quality at bats, hitting the ball hard and putting pressure on the defense. If we can continue to do that, the results will take care of themselves."

With a staff of eight to ten pitchers, Fiammengo has a lot of options on who to pitch. The staff is led by senior Joey Cecchin, who came over from the water polo team, William Myers, and Colin Rutzen. There are three left handers on the staff, Dom Caruso, Justin Nagayama, and Alex Rothey, and infielders Moon and Johnny Wang can also be called upon.

"We're still figuring out each pitchers' roles in terms of being a starter, middle reliever, or closer. Joey is very competitive and fits well as a starter or a closer," Fiammengo said, "Myers just needs to get ahead earlier in the count. We're looking at a three-man rotation and we'll use who has the hot hand. Four to six of our pitchers are going to get a lot of innings. We're getting our share of strike outs and that's definitely a good thing."

Replacing Hideki Prather (now at Clemson) at catcher, Imberg has not missed a beat. "Cameron put in a ton of work in the offseason to get better behind the dish and he has been doing a good job for us, receiving the ball really well," Fiammengo said. The defense has been solid, led by shortstop Miles Clayton, second baseman Johnny Wang, and outfielders Blake Robison and Luke McLeod. "Still, we have a lot of work to do," Fiammengo said.

With Moon, Imberg, and Clayton taking on the role of team leaders, sophomores Luke McLeod and Cole Fisher have also been filling that role. "Even though they're sophomores, Luke and Cole have been learning how to lead and that's what I've been preaching to them, that if everybody

becomes a leader, that's when the team can be really good."

**Miramonte**  
After eight years as a varsity assistant coach, Skip Tague was named Miramonte's head coach and, as often happens early in the season, the weather played a big part in the team's preparation for the season.

"At times we did not have a field to practice on, though we did have some good back up plans and it's starting to come together," Tague said. "Our biggest strength is that we have a lot of guys that can play multiple positions. We have fourteen players that can pitch which gives us a lot of versatility on the mound. Our ability to defend and manufacture runs is going to be the key to our success."

Jordan Rodino is the team's most versatile player, being able to play four different positions, and nine players have two positions. "When we practice, we try to get them reps at all those spots because we want to keep that versatility and flexibility and see what's happening in the game," Tague said. "We're relatively inexperienced but the work ethic and maturity level of our players is high. The guys that didn't play much last year are competitors and will get a lot of opportunities this season. They're mature players and I think that they'll excel given the opportunity."

Tague is aggressive in his offensive philosophy. "Our team's strengths are speed and intelligence," Tague said. "We are aggressive on the bases and we're going to try to mix it up a little bit and that's going to be a key to our team's success. We practice that stuff a lot and we'll continue to work on it."

The leading pitchers are J.D. Pearce and Brody Bornstein, though Pearce is injured but should be back soon, with Jordan Rodino and Casey Yung set to fill in. "With a number of games coming



Campolindo pitcher Joey Cecchin Photo Jon Kingdon

up, we'll be going with a three-man rotation, and we have the depth to have a fourth starter, if necessary," Tague said. "With so many available pitchers, I'm a little more cautious with innings and pitch counts, particularly early in the season. I'd rather take them out a little too soon and a little too late."

Joe Shallot and Kobe Wong have been leading the offense and should be helped when Pearce returns as a three or four hitter. "As a team, we're a little behind, but we're getting better each game" Tague said. "Joe was [a] great hitter last year and we expect all good things from him this year. Wong has a lot of pop and a great swing. We're not even close to our offensive potential."

Luke Holden is set as the team's third baseman

and there are seven players that can play up the middle. Tague is particularly taken with the one sophomore on the team, Ian Hughes: "Ian's defense is outstanding and he's a real gamer in all aspects. His baseball IQ is very high, and he plays more like a veteran."

There is also a lot of depth in the outfield with Finn McManus in right, Kobe Wong in left, and Gavin Kelleher in center. "We have good speed at all three outfield positions and that's a big asset for us," Tague said.

As the team is coming together, Tague sees strength in the leadership on the team: "We've got great returning senior leaders. I'm also very impressed with the leadership and maturity shown by the underclassmen and they're all good team guys."

## St. Mary's comes up short in NCAA opener vs. Grand Canyon

By Jon Kingdon



Aidan Mahaney (20) and Mitchell Saxen Photo Tod Fierner

With a below average shooting night (39%) and an out of characteristic number of turnovers (13), fifth seeded St. Mary's lost 75-66 to the twelfth seeded Grand Canyon University.

Though obviously disappointed with the loss, at the post-game press conference, St. Mary's Head Coach Randy Bennett still spoke proudly about the team. "I don't think we played very well tonight, but it doesn't diminish what we did for the overall year. Our guys did a phenomenal job to do what they did to turn it around after starting 3-5

and then winning 23 of our next 25 games. I'm very proud of this team and our kids hanging together and accomplishing what they did."

With a record of 26-8, having won the regular season conference title and the Conference Title championship, this year's team has had a plethora of awards and recognition come their way and elevated this team to one of the top teams in Coach Bennett's 23 seasons at St. Mary's.

There were four players chosen to the all-West Coast Conference teams –

junior Augustas Marculionis – first team and the WCC Player of the Year, Most Outstanding Player in the WCC tournament and second team all-district by the National Association of Basketball Coaches (NABC), sophomore Aidan Mahaney – first team, second team all-district by the NABC and a finalist for the Lou Henson National Player of the Year Award, presented to the top player in mid-major college basketball, Mitchell Saxen – first team and WCC Defensive Player of the Year, Alex Ducas – second team for the second consecutive year, and sophomore Josh Jefferson – honorable mention.

With his 16th consecutive 20-win season (besides the COVID shortened 2020-21 season), Head Coach Randy Bennett has been named the WCC Coach of the Year for the third consecutive year and sixth time overall. Bennett was also named the District Nine Coach of the Year by the NBC, is one of the 20 finalists for the 2024 Hugh Durham National Coach of the Year Award, and one of the 20 finalists for the 2024 Jim

Phelan National Coach of the Year Award.

Junior Luke Barrett and sophomore Chris Howell were both named to the WCC All-Academic Team, the first time both have been recognized with this award and the third consecutive year that St. Mary's had had multiple student-athletics so named.

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