

Published November 19th, 2014

Mats Avenge Loss, Defeat Cougars in NCS Finals

By Spencer Silva



As time expired late Saturday afternoon, the Miramonte boys' water polo team, along with their fully-clothed coaches, jumped into the pool to commemorate their 10-8 victory over the No. 1 Campolindo Cougars.

It was a rematch of last year's final, where the Cougars scratched out an 11-10 victory over their cross-town rivals. This time around, the Mats led for most of the game, but it was their defense that ended up making the difference.

"Our defense and seniors really came up big," Miramonte coach James Lathrop said after the match. "Evan (Pauletich) was awesome. ... Jack Conner came off the bench and really provided a spark. It was the best team defense we played all year."

The Mats reached the final by comfortable defeats of California High and De La Salle in the

early rounds, before beating Sir Francis Drake (San Anselmo) 10-7 in the semifinals.

In the championship, Campolindo was expected to employ their full press and counter-attack strategy. The Mats held the high-octane Campo attack to zero goals in the first quarter, although they broke through for five in the second.

Cal-bound senior Jordan Hoover scored four of the Mats' first five goals, carrying the team as he often has in 2014. It was apparent to the standing-room-only crowd from the beginning - including many of the Acalanes faithful - that this would be a tough match.

Senior Garrett Felix, one of Campo's best defenders, was tasked with guarding the powerful Hoover, but by halftime Felix was a foul away from leaving the game. He eventually fouled out, leading to a number of defensive mismatches.

The score was 6-5 at the half, but in the third quarter, Miramonte began to pull away as the Campo defense struggled. The Mats outscored the Cougars 3-1 in the quarter, swinging the score to 9-6 in their favor.

The game ended with a final score of 10-8.

The road to the NCS final match was paved in controversy for the Cougars. They won their first two NCS matches by a combined margin of 25 goals against Heritage and Monte Vista. On Nov. 12, they faced an upset-hungry Acalanes Dons team who looked poised for the win (see sidebar) and it wasn't until Nov. 14 that Campolindo's win was confirmed.

Before the championship match, Campolindo head coach Miles Price declined to specifically comment on the situation, but he said that he talked to Acalanes head coach Clarke Tamariki about the incident and there was "no bad blood" between the teams.

Acalanes (12-11) earned the No. 5 seed in the tournament and beat Washington and San Ramon Valley to reach the semifinals.

Lathrop reflected on how the semifinal controversy affected his team. "I think we benefited from the weird situation between Campo and Acalanes," he explained, "not because of the drama, but because we were able to concentrate on ourselves and our game-plan during practice because we didn't know who we were going to play."

Despite the tough loss in the championships, Price reflected on how far the Campolindo program has come. "Just a few years ago we weren't making it past quarter-finals. Now we've

made it to the championship game two years in a row. We have a great pipeline and our program will continue to be strong."

The NCS crown is a nice bookend on what amounted to be an extremely successful season for the Mats.

The thrilling NCS Championship game had a shadow cast over it, unfortunately, by the events of the semifinal match between Acalanes and Campolindo.

On Nov. 12, with seconds left in the second overtime, Acalanes led Campo 11-10. They possessed the ball and were in a spread formation intent on running the clock out. However, with less than 10 seconds left, there was an errant pass thrown by an Acalanes player that led to a scrum for possession. Campolindo came away with the ball but time expired.

Acalanes began to celebrate in the pool, but after a conversation between Campo coach Miles Price and the referee crew, it was determined that Price had called a timeout before time was up. The referees decided to add five seconds to the clock and gave Campolindo the ball. Campo scored a game-tying goal in those final five seconds and went on to win the match 12-11 in the sudden-death third-overtime.

Misha Buchel, the Acalanes girls' water polo coach, who attended the game commented, "When time expired and they put five seconds on the clock, no one could believe it. I imagine (Campolindo) felt like they found a \$20 bill in their pockets. It was a remarkable night."

After the match, the referees were approached with video evidence and other accounts by parents, students and fans. Video footage showed possession was taken by Campo with less than two or three seconds remaining. Seemingly aware that they had added extra time to the clock, the referees deliberated and declared Acalanes the winner, 11-10.

On Thursday, the North Coast Section determined the game results under review. It was decided that Acalanes could not protest the result after continuing to play the final overtime. In an official statement released by the NCS, it declared that the protest had to be declared at the time of the incident - which would have been at the end of the second overtime. Also, according to the National Federation of High School (NFHS) rules, "judgment of the officials" is not something that can be protested.

In a phone interview, associate commissioner Karen Smith said, "The (referees) felt they'd made a mistake by reporting Acalanes as the winner. It's an unfortunate situation and I hope the focus gets back on what a great game it was rather than the controversy."

Neither coach from Acalanes nor Campolindo would comment on the situation.



Evan Pauletich Photos Gint Federas



Coach James Lathrop pulled by Tommy Baier Photo Gint Federas

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA