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Volleyball Teams Prepare to Battle in Competitive League

By Karl Buscheck



Campolindo hopes to be on top of the league this year...

Photos Gint Federas

The new season brings new challenges for the Campolindo girls volleyball team – the runner-up in last fall's NCS Division III title match. The team's objective remains the same.

"Our goal is to be on the top of the league at the end of the year," explained head coach John Vuong.

That's where Vuong's squad has been at the end of each of the past four seasons. The difference is this year marks the first time the Cougars are playing in the top division of the newly-formed Diablo Athletic League.

The division also includes Miramonte, Acalanes, Las Lomas, Northgate and College Park. Vuong – 2015 East Bay girls volleyball coach of the year – anticipates that the competition will be fierce.

"I think the top five could be pretty much even across," Vuong said. "This year, based on what I saw so far, it's going to be tough to fight for that first-place spot.

While navigating the new league setting remains the top priority for now, the playoffs

will also pose a new hurdle for Campolindo.

"Hopefully (we) get another shot at winning in the postseason an NCS (title)," Vuong said. "They moved us up to Division II, so that would be all new teams that we'd be facing."

The Cougars, who lost 3-2 to Monte Vista in Danville in their opening match on Aug. 30 and who beat Foothill 3-1 in Pleasanton on Sept. 1, can call on a core of veteran players. The talented senior class includes Lauren Pak, Jamie Brown, Janelle Gong, Sabrina Smith and Emily VanKoll.

"Those are our leaders this year," Vuong said. "They've been on the team for a few years, so we're going to depend on them a lot in leading and guiding us to the end."

Acalanes not only is playing in a new league but also has a new coach.

"They've done a great job so far in learning my system and learning the things that I teach," said head coach Ernie Rodriguez. "(They've done) absolutely a phenomenal job in coming in and wanting to learn

every day."

The Dons began the season by beating Deer Valley 3-1 in Antioch on Aug. 30 and edging Monte Vista 3-2 on Sept. 1 on the road. Acalanes begins the league portion of the schedule with a trip to Miramonte on Sept. 27.

Rodriguez will be leaning on the senior quartet of Parker Jones, Alex Matson, Devin Grobeck and Melissa Elliott.

"The four seniors are absolutely what I call the catalysts of this team," Rodriguez said.

The group will also help guide the younger members of the team and unlock the team's potential.

"We're full of talent," Rodriguez said. "But talent is as good as it is on paper unless we show it on the actual volleyball court."

Like their rivals, the Mats also have big plans for the fall.

"We want to finish strong in league and qualify for NCS," said head coach Lisa

Bachtold. "We want to have a strong seed going into NCS, and make it past the second round which is where we have been knocked out the past three years."

As Miramonte angles to build on its past postseason runs, the Mats will look to Caroline Schafer as the squad's pillar. Schafer has been a four-year varsity player for the Mats.

"Caroline is an incredible athlete and an incredible teammate," Bachtold said. "She's committed to UC Berkeley to play beach volleyball next year."

This year, Schafer will help the Mats, who beat Albany 3-0 at home on Aug. 30 and who defeated Granada 3-0 on Sept. 1 in Livermore, get the most out of a young squad.

"We added seven new players to the roster this year and had some key positions to replace," Bachtold said. "Building chemistry early in the season will be important for our success."



... if they can make it past division rivals like Acalanes.

Miramonte and Campo Girls Water Polo Make Division I Jump

By Karl Buscheck



Members of the Miramonte girls water polo team hope for a title repeat. Photo Gint Federas

Miramonte head coach Noel Murphy drew a comparison to the NBA when asked to describe his squad – the reigning NCS champs.

"We're not the Houston Rockets where James Harden just comes down and shoots every single time," Murphy said. "We're more like the Golden State Warriors. We look to pass to the open man and everybody gets involved. And that's how we win."

Last year, that approach brought the Mats the NCS Division II title. If the team is going to claim another section crown, they'll have to do so against a new set of competitors, after getting bumped up to Division I.

"It's going to be extremely competitive. It's going to be enjoyable. It's going to be a dogfight," said Murphy, whose Mats began the league season with a trip to Northgate on

Sept. 28. "And we look forward to the challenge."

The Mats have five juniors who are returning as starters. All five – Skylar Savar, Kelly Murphy, Carson Broad, Katrina Drake and Grace Tehaney – were All-League, All-East Bay and All-Northern California last year. Tehaney was also the MVP of the league.

"They're all D-1 prospects – no doubt about it. They're going to be playing in college somewhere in two years," Murphy said. "But it's more of a – they're very good teammates. They (work) together very well."

Campolindo was the team that lost to the Mats last November in the NCS title match in Lafayette. Like the Mats, the Cougars have been pushed up to Division I this fall.

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