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Game and practice schedule changed because of the hot weather last week and we could not get pictures for our Water Polo preview stories. We will try to print photo next time.

Lamorinda Boys Water Polo Preview

By Jon Kingdon

The Acalanes Boys Water Polo Team, following Miramonte's lead from last season, is celebrating its 50th anniversary this season. Coach Russ Stryker who played on two championship teams when he attended Acalanes understands and appreciates the history of the program and the responsibility and pressure for the team to have a successful year.

"We're in a tough league and our goal is to win the North Coast," Stryker said.

Having lost four starters to graduation, this is going to be a young team, although the team has a particularly deep junior class.

Stryker's main concern is the team's lack of experience, having to rely on eight new players coming up from last year's JV team. This is going to put some pressure on the team's seniors to provide the leadership for the underclassmen.

"The most important thing is for me to see the team coming together and I hope to see this in our scrimmages," Stryker said.

Acalanes will be utilizing a movement offense. The players leading the offense will be junior attacker Jake Stone who was first team all league last season. Other attackers who will be relied upon include seniors Bennett Winther and Jacob Parker, and junior Max Stryker.

Senior Jed Wood is going to be making a transition from field player to goalie and will be the key to holding the defense together.

Acalanes will be opening their season at home on Sept. 5 against Tamalpais.

On Oct. 6, the Dons will travel to Irvine for the Southern California Invitational.

Campolindo Coach Miles Price has lost four starters to graduation. Ironically he is excited about what he sees as a veteran team. "We have six seniors that should all contribute in one way or the other and seven juniors that will contribute as well. Depth is going to be our greatest strength. This team is more balanced than any I've coached."

With such a balanced roster, Price sees the team as "open for any of the players to step up as the season progresses."

Two of the players that Price is relying on for leadership are goalie Ben Miller and driver/attacker Michael Wheeler.

Campolindo will be utilizing a run and gun system. Price wants his team to press other teams defensively and to put them on their heels.

Even though Campo is a veteran team, Price feels it's important for the team to build cohesion. "We need the players to trust in each other."

Entering his sixth year at Campolindo,

Price attributes the successes of his team to "bringing in a top staff and once that happened, a positive momentum grew with the players buying into our system."

Price is looking forward to major tournaments, opening the season on Sept. 7 in Santa Barbara and The San Diego Tournament beginning on Sept. 21, to measure his team against the top competition in the state.

Miramonte, a team with a strong tradition, having won the NCS 15 times since 1995, once again enters the season with great optimism, having lost only three starters to graduation.

Coach James Lathrop will be counting on his three captains to provide both talent and leadership for the Matadors. The three seniors are attackers Mikey Davis, Will Creed and goalie Duncan Creed.

Lathrop is still trying to establish who the rest of his starting team is going to be. "We're still trying to find out our team identity and am looking forward to the journey," Lathrop said.

On offense, Lathrop has a lot of options with a number of last year's substitutes looking to step forward as starters and he has a number of new players as well. "We're a young team. My job is to figure out each player's role. We have to improve as a unit and the key to this is that we be a team that is aware, focused and disciplined."

Defense looks to be the real strength of the team. As with each unit, Lathrop wants to establish the right attitude: "We want to get better, we want to always give a top effort and always want to win and the players take this attitude seriously."

With 25 players on the team roster, Lathrop has let the players know that there are a lot of open opportunities for the players to step up and establish themselves as contributors.

Lathrop appreciates the strong tradition of Miramonte Water Polo as they enter their 51st season. He feels that someone like Bill Brown who has been involved in some capacity with the team for every one of those seasons, epitomizes the culture that attracts so many players to his program.

Miramonte is playing two major tournaments: Opening their season at The Elite Eight at Harvard-Westlake High School in Southern California starting on Sept. 8 and The SoCal tournament in Irvine beginning on Oct. 8.

Lathrop believes that playing against the top teams in the state will "allow us to keep our focus and is great preparation for our league play in the NCS."

Lamorinda Girls Water Polo Preview

By Jon Kingdon

It's been said that no good deed goes unpunished.

The Acalanes Dons, coming off a very successful season as NCS Division II champions, don't feel they are being punished but rather are being rewarded by moving up for the first time to the more difficult Division I level.

Normally there is some pressure on a team when they win a championship to repeat that success. However, with the step up in competition, Coach Misha Buchel says that the team is able to "avoid the pressure of being the hunted. It's a different type of challenge but the girls are excited at the opportunity and this was our goal prior to last season."

The Dons come into the season with a great deal of confidence, having graduated only one starter.

However that starter was the team's goalie. The battle for that position will be between junior Laurie Garfein and freshman Ava Donleavy. This is a key position not just for preventing goals but the goalie is essential to making the long passes and taking advantage of the opportunities as they come available.

Buchel feels that the team needs to "find more consistent offensive play to go along with our defense."

Senior Bella Wentzel is one of the leaders Buchel is counting on to maintain the team's top defensive play.

On offense, the Dons will be relying on attackers, senior Ryan Hagglund, junior Lexi Rowell and sophomore Brook Westphal.

The team opens their season against Tamalpais on Sept. 5.

Buchel is also pointing to the Acalanes Girls Invitational the weekend of Sept. 11 when they will be hosting a number of teams including Campolindo, Miramonte, San Ramon and Monte Vista. It will be a full weekend with each team playing four games. The games will be played at both Acalanes and Campolindo high schools.

Coach Kim Everist, beginning her 13th year at Campolindo, faces the challenge of replacing four starters lost to graduation. Playing in such a difficult league with so much parity does not make it any easier.

Everist is relying on character and fundamentals to bring the team together: "We are stressing breaking habits, being in top condition and developing great team chemistry. We want a great culture where everyone will be held accountable. We simply want the players to play to the best of their ability."

When asked to describe her offensive

philosophy, Everist puts it very simply: "Attack—Attack—Attack. We want to engage with the defense and we will always be working for positive possessions."

Leading the offense will be senior attacker Katy Klein and center Erin Neustrom.

The same aggressiveness should be evident on defense as well as Everist is stressing a press and drive defense, an attitude of grit and guts.

Everist attributes the success of her teams to having the players buy into the philosophy of "Team First—Self last."

Miramonte, coming off a second place finish in their first year in Division I last season, enters this year with a very optimistic attitude, having lost no starters to graduation. In fact, five of these players have been starters since their sophomore season. The five are attackers, Kelly Murphy and Carson Broad, lefty center, Grace Tehaney, center Katrina Drake and center-defender Skylar Savor.

This will be Lance Morrison's first season as the Matador's head coach, having been promoted from last year's JV team and he appreciates what a rare opportunity it is to take over such a veteran, talented team. "Our offensive power is huge," Morrison said. "I've never seen a team with this much power. We can score from any position in the pool."

Handling such talent should be difficult but Morrison said that "the girls have all been very adaptable to whatever systems we have installed. I am trying to work to the strengths of each of the girls."

Holding the team's defense together will be junior goalie Savannah Sherwood. According to Morrison, "Savannah has shown amazing growth since her freshman year. She brings great length, height and athleticism to the position. She helps to direct traffic on the defensive end."

Even with such an impressive group of starters, Morrison said, "We are going to need our underclassman to be ready to come in and spell the starters."

There are a number of players that should be able to fill these roles. Two-meter sophomore Sally Fellner and utility freshman Fiona Young are just two of many underclassmen that will be competing for playing time.

Morrison says the ultimate key for the team is to get on the same page in the pool and maintain the right attitude out of the pool as well. Most importantly, Morrison wants the girls to "appreciate how rare an opportunity this is to play on such a potentially successful team."

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