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## Lamorinda high school boys soccer doing well despite injuries, illness

By Jon Kingdon



Oliver Feigin (Acalanes) Photo Gint Federas  
together with one system."

Coming off a championship season, Acalanes coach Paul Curtis was certainly aware that it was going to be difficult to match last season's 20-2-4 record and accomplishments. In the heart of league play, with a record of 13-6-1 and 5-1 in league play, Curtis remains positive about his team and their prospects: "This is a team that has great resilience. They have learned to value the aspects of the game. They know how to take advantage of their advantages."

This was evidenced by the Dons' ability to rebound from an early season three game losing streak by responding with a seven game winning streak of their own. With many of the players competing on club teams during the offseason, Curtis has had to work on the chemistry of the team. "There is a lot of talent here," Curtis says. "The majority of the players play on three different club teams. My job has been to get these players to come

Because of the varied styles each of the players has brought to the team, Curtis has come to rely on the leadership of his senior captains, Dominic Van Cleave Schottland and Oliver Feigin. "Our captains have been able to combine being firm and having fun and they are well respected by the team." Schottland has been a four-year player and has unique explosion in his play. Feigin, combining with Chris Rogers have proven to be very effective anchors in our defense."

Goalie Luke Denham has combined with his defensive front to give up a miniscule 0.76 goals/game and eight shutouts. Curtis appreciates Denham's talent in the goal: "Luke is very talented. He is dominant in the back and has great reaction time."

Nick Schirmer has stood out as well for the Dons. "Nick has a real presence on the field," Curtis says. "He is big and physical and is good in the air."

Acalanes lost two valuable players to injuries, Cameron Shapoorian and Zach Flagg. With injuries and the flu taking their toll, sophomore Nick Geannacopulos, has stepped in without missing a beat and become the team's leading scorer. According to Curtis, "Nick has shown good maturity and been a consistent force on offense."

Curtis' goal for the rest of the season is simple: "We want to stay healthy and be consistent."

First year coach and Campolindo graduate, head coach Aaron Girard, came into the season with a decidedly young team. With a 6-10-4 record, Girard has approached the season realistically. "We have only two active seniors on the team and in most matches we are playing teams with numerous seniors. Normally the leaders on the team come from a core senior class however there is a unique dynamic for this team. It's been a learning experience for the players."

The team has also been the victim of the school's success on the football field, having to wait for players to finish the football season, forcing those players to miss numerous games with the team going so far in the playoffs. Senior Seppi Ortman, the football team's placekicker, was sorely missed and has shown constant improvement throughout the season.

The goalie position was also a position that proved difficult to fill early in the season. Sophomore Lucas Allen, also a football player, left a big hole to fill and Girard was forced to use a makeshift lineup in goal. "We had to use field players as our goalies, Christian Marki who got injured, and then Nico Lewis until Lucas returned to the team and has provided much needed stability at that sport," Girard says. "Lucas, has a natural athleticism. He has a great attitude and everyone on the team looks up to him."

As league play began, Campolindo suffered three serious injuries to expected starters: Steven Metcalf (concussion); Connor Gregg (separated shoulder) and Grayson Gilbanks (hamstring). Girard has had to learn to roll with the punches. "It's a challenge as a coach to focus on more than wins and losses. We are always looking for improvement. This is part of life and we all have to learn how to deal with the adversities of a difficult season and how you apply it to life as a whole."

Jose Carra-Hernandez, a returning all-league player, has been a genuine force on offense, says Girard. "He is the heart and soul of our midfield."

Sophomore Riley Breul has been a pleasant surprise for Girard. "Riley became a starter when the opportunity presented itself and he really stepped up and has been a key to our defense."

Freshmen Sean Donovan, Kellen Clancy and Steven Metcalf (prior to his concussion) have all played a great deal which is not an easy thing for such young players. Says Girard: "We have asked them to play against bigger and faster upperclassmen and they have really hung in there."

By no means is Girard looking past this season, but he has to be excited about the team's future prospects with so many underclassmen on this team. "On any team, character and attitude of the team is crucial," he says. "Who are going to be the core that will turn things around for us? Leadership is not how you act when things are going great but when you are facing adversity and after a tough loss. It has been a learning experience for me and my staff as well."

With a team comprised with an equal mixture of seniors and underclassmen, Miramonte coach Masood Ahmadi has come to appreciate and utilize the assets of his team leading them to a 12-2-2 record so far. "We are a veteran team that does well when we can play our style, a style of possession which increases our scoring opportunities."

Early in the season, the Matadors were able to establish to themselves that they would be a team to be reckoned with as the season progressed. After having lost to Bishop O'Dowd last season in the NCS playoffs, Miramonte was able to put that loss behind them by winning the Winter Soccer Classic in Livermore in December with a 3-0-1 record, taking particular satisfaction in defeating the aforementioned Bishop O'Dowd 1-0.

Unfortunately the team has not been able to avoid injuries or the flu epidemic but the Matadors have been able to weather the storm, according to Ahmadi. "We are a resilient team. We have been fortunate to have a lot of depth on the team so that injuries and illnesses have not held us back from playing to our potential."

With six shutouts this season, Miramonte has benefited from a triumvirate of seniors on the back row. Senior captain and defenseman, Sam Pinto, a four-year letterman, who will be playing at Chico State next year, has solidified the team's defense. Senior defenseman Ben Andrews also provides great leadership and a front for the defense, utilizing his speed and his ability in the air and in one-on-one situations. Ahmadi appreciates the skills Cole Kelez brings as his goalie. "Cole has great feet. He is an excellent field player. He reads the game well and has a lot of spring in his step. He has made a lot of big saves for us."

Relying more on speed than size, Miramonte's offense has matched their defense with equal effectiveness, outscoring their opponents by a combined 36-11.

Forwards Gavin Pitt, Owen Reed and Kent Barbir have been leading the way on offense. Ahmadi applauds the effort Reed put in during the offseason: "Owen is a lot stronger and faster. He had a great offseason and put in the effort."

With Barbir out with a recent injury, the depth for Miramonte has once again paid off with junior Charles McIntyre stepping in with little drop off in offensive production. With three goals so far this season, freshman Simon Neuwirth-Stein is showing great potential for the future.

Ahmadi has let his team know that they cannot expect anyone to roll over for them: "It's a big test for us in the middle of league play. We have to take it one step at a time. It's important that the team stays hungry. We are capable of being successful but we have to stay focused each game."



Jose Carra-Hernandez (Campolindo)

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