

# Challenging season for Lamorinda girls soccer

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Emily Smith (Acalanes)

Photo Gint Federas

They are learning how to deal with adversity and that is important.”

The Dons are a very young team with 10 seniors and juniors and 13 sophomores and freshmen, which has proven to be a challenge for Chalak. “It’s been a learning experience for the group. Our goal is to maintain a positive attitude and continue to fight until the end, regardless of the outcome. I want the players to focus on their own personal fight and realize that the opponent is none other than themselves and to focus on their actual efforts.”

Chalak has come to appreciate the quality of the leadership that the captains have come to provide the underclassmen: seniors defender Katrina Lee, goalie Sophia Giordano and junior defender Malika Haji.

Giordano, who will be playing at Emerson College next season, holds the team together, according to Chalak. “Sophia has a great ability to process the game. She is a real leader in the back third of the field has been a real force in the goal for us.”

Midfielder Emily Smith, who will be playing at American University next year, has also earned accolades from Chalak. “Emily has a marvelous ability to manipulate the ball and a great ability to receive the ball with pressure on her back without losing control. At game speed to still

have the finesse to the ball is really difficult and Emily has done it phenomenally well. She has been as good as any player we have played against.”

Forward Kierra Krawec, who will be playing for Michigan next year, has been a real force on offense, working particularly effectively with Smith. According to Chalak, “Emily and Keira have a great chemistry and play very well together. Keira has a great ability to move and make specific runs into space. Her high level of intelligence and the ability to navigate about the field makes her deadly in the final third of the field.

Freshman center defender Samantha Hansen has provided Chalak with a lot of optimism for the future. “Samantha has adapted to the high speed of play and never leaves the field. She has done a good job in controlling our back line and in playing against older players.

As the season begins to wind down, Chalak wants his players to stay mentally strong: “I’m looking for the players to find a higher level of motivation to finish the season strong. The test is to see if we can get a collective team effort and will their way to victory. Not getting discouraged and finding the motivation to win is a transferrable skill that can be used in life in general.”

# Lamorinda high school boys soccer

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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. Ahmad 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.”

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