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Short-term success, long-term goals for Lamorinda girl's lacrosse

By Jon Kingdon



Emerson Bohlig Photo Shirley DeFrancisci, DeF-Stop Photography

Despite an abbreviated season and no post-season tournaments, the Lamorinda Girl's Lacrosse teams have shown well on the field and in the eyes of MaxPreps Sports. Each of the teams is ranked in the top 25 in the state of California - Miramonte (3), Campolindo (10) and Acalanes (25).

A number of players have opted to play soccer, and some have moved out of state but it's a matter of moving past what is beyond their control, according to Campolindo head coach Devon Combe: "The big mentality for our players is that they are out here because they enjoy what they're doing."

Miramonte (5-0) has only four seniors along with five juniors and nine sophomores. "Our seniors are phenomenal," said head coach Jackie Pelletier. "They have won an NCS title in the past, so they are no strangers to success and this is their time to shine."

The offense is led by senior Emerson Bohlig who will be playing for Northwestern University next year. Bohlig has scored 49 goals on 69.4% of her shots. "Emerson is tenacious and gritty," Pelletier said. "Her accuracy is laser point and she can score from anywhere on the field. She is also the fastest player I've ever worked with."

Senior Sally Peterson is second on the team with 12 goals on only 15 shots. Junior Kiara Kofoed (15 goals, 8 assists) is the team's draw taker. The Matadors as a team have scored on 64% of their shots.

"We have an awesome group of sophomores," according to Pelletier. "Kate DiFranco (10 goals, 3 assists) is taking on a bigger role and midfielders Lindsay French and Taryn Pearce have both become huge threats this year."

Senior goalie Mina Jenab has been solid in goal. "She is a very positive person and is the ultimate leader," Pelletier said. "She has stopped 48.1% of the shots on goal where anything above 33% is good. She knows what she must do, and what she has to work on. She has the confidence and tenure now."

Junior Bridgette Mills, following in the footsteps of her two older sisters, is the defense's quarterback. Junior Ellie Hawkins has also been solid on defense as well. Senior Lindsey Bliss who played J.V. last season has really stepped up this season. "Lindsey is a phenomenal athlete and has been a great defender for us," Pelletier said.

"We've been excited to get the season started and we were ready to go right from the beginning," Pelletier said. "We knew that lacrosse would come back. This program has been strong for years and I knew that girls wanted to do it."

When you have a close team, it makes it easier to come together. For Campolindo, with three sets of sisters (Lindsay and Paige Davis, Georgia and Carley Hudson, and Grace and Catie McCauley), it's that much easier. "Our team is like a very tight-knit community," Combe said. "They turned to lacrosse with our pod practices after being stuck in Zoom classes. That, along with the familial bonds, was a way to have fun and they have really improved tremendously so far this season."

Combe has come to rely on Lindsay Davis and Grace McCauley to help lead the team through these trying times: "They have done quite well in navigating the difficulties of the season. They have been great keeping the girls aware that they have a voice and how to use it and how to keep focused on the love of what they're doing."

The offense has been led by Grace McCauley (9 goals, 3 assists) and sophomore Paige Davis (8 goals, 3 assists). "It's Grace and Paige's creativity that makes them so good on offense," Combs said. "They're willing to try shots they've never taken before which has fostered a growth mindset for each player."

Setting them up has been junior Annie Cimperman (7 goals, 8 assists). "Annie is a smart player that has always worked at developing a wide set of tools," Combe said. "She has committed to UC Davis and has developed all the skills like having various types of shots, skills at the draw and the ability to make assists."

This is someone who really loves the game."

On defense, freshman goalie Haley Richards has started from day one and has stopped 39% of the shots on goal. Assistant coach Angelyn Brown coached Richards in seventh grade, so they knew what type of talent she had. "Haley has really quick hands and a good IQ and anticipation for understanding the movement of the ball," Combe said. "She is just eager to take feedback and improve."

The defense has a lot of depth, led by a trio of midfielders who became defenders: Kennedy Merrion, Ava Martinez, and Sadie Geentie. "They really appreciate the value of defense and what defense is," Combe said. Seniors Captain Lindsay Davis and Laura Studebaker, as well as junior Laurel Hunter have been solid as well.

"The girls have done a lot of extra work on their own like working with trainers, attending clinics, and shooting on cages, fostering a love for the sport. That's the real cache of the game."

Acalanes head coach Bill Fraser and his assistant Mark Rurka attacked the virus issue head on. "Since the state allowed us to work with the girls in June, we've been out here once a week trying to keep hope alive."

Numbers are not an issue for Acalanes with a full varsity along with 36 girls on the J.V. team. "After being locked down for a year, they were excited to come out here," Fraser said. "We're doing some rebuilding, but we have had a successful program and are going to continue that tradition."

The offense is led by Grace Gebhardt (45 goals, 17 assists), who will be playing for UC Davis next year. "Grace is the most fluid player I've ever seen in regards to her stick skills," Rurka said. "She is naturally gifted and has put in the time for years. She's a step ahead and she knows where to be and where to put the ball."

Gebhardt is a co-captain along with Coco Fellner. "They've done a great job in communicating with the girls and getting them excited to play," Rurka said.

Two freshmen have stood out so far, Grace Imrie on offense and Avery Ives on defense. "We knew Grace and Avery from the local rec team, and I knew that they would contribute but I didn't realize how much," Rurka said.

Another pleasant surprise has been junior Maya Stelzer, said Rurka: "Maya just started playing two years ago. She just puts her head down and goes. She loves the game and will only get better."

Other players on defense that have stood out are juniors Elise Flagg, Maggie Saracevic, Ellie Ives and sophomore Haley Rurka.

In goal, two seniors, Kiki O'Toole, and Della Pascucci have split time and "both are doing well," Rurka said.

Fraser and Rurka are taking a long-term perspective for the team. "With a shortened season and no playoffs, we're more concerned about getting experience for everyone on the field," Rurka said. "The girls get to be out here and that's the most important thing."

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