

Girls Basketball Preps for Preseason

By Conrad Bassett



Miramonte

The upcoming girls' basketball season in Lamorinda promises to be every bit as exciting as last year as each of the three teams returns a solid nucleus of players and the addition of new talent.

A year ago the **Miramonte** Matadors won every game they played in pre-season and the Diablo-Foothill Athletic League on their way to a berth in the Northern California championship game in Sacramento and a 31-2 overall record.

Head coach Kelly Sopak recognizes the pressure to repeat. "We have a lot to prove again this year. We will do so in the same fashion as last year," he explained. "We are going to run, shoot and press. We are deeper than last year and as a team we are much quicker."

With a target on their backs, the Mats return some key players from last season. Senior point guard Carly Gill will lead the speedy Mats and will be accompanied by fellow all-leaguers, juniors Breanna Alford and Megan Reid.

Sopak is challenging the team in several high-caliber tournaments. In addition to taking on last year's Division II state champion Archbishop Mitty, they will play in Phoenix at the Nike Tournament. They host their own Lady Mats Tipoff Classic and will play in the top-rated Diamond Division of the West Coast Jamboree.

The team looks to fill the voids left by high-scoring Janine Loutzenhiser, who is playing at Rider University, and Devon McDonald, who is running track at Bucknell.

The program has also lost assistant Drew McDonald, who has stepped over to head the boys' program at Miramonte.

Still, Sopak is confident in the talent of his team. "In my 10 years of coaching high school basketball in the area I have never seen as much talent at tryouts as we have this year," he said.

Over in Lafayette, head coach Chris Russell returns for his second season at **Acalanes**. He will be looking to improve on last year's team that went on to the NCS tournament and won 15 games.

He will be looking for players to step up to replace several key graduates, including Sophie Taylor, who is now playing at Loyola-Marymount University.

"Senior Grace Francis impressed me last year in our loss to Bishop O' Dowd in the NCS semi-final, and has really worked over the summer and fall, and I am expecting her to have a bigger role," Russell said.

Russell also returns three senior leaders in Marie Paladino, Jamie Jacobs, and Molly Martin.

"This year's team is better as a team, so I'm hoping when we need a big shot, rebound, or play, I can count on any one of the five girls who may be on the court at any given time," added Russell.



Acalanes

Photos Ohlen Alexander



Campolindo

The team will stay in northern California for all of their tournaments—including trips to Ukiah, Brentwood and local West Coast Jamboree.

Campolindo's head coach, Elgin Leslie, also returns for his second season as varsity coach. The Cougars return senior Laura Hickey and junior Ashley Ewing, who both started every game last year and Leslie is happy to have them back.

"They bring experience and leadership to our team, and both present match-up problems for other teams because of their ability to play multiple positions," he explained.

Senior Kelsey Wixsom and junior Sierra Regan are also returning. "[They] will be looking to step in and contribute more than last year," said Leslie.

The Lady Cougars will be challenged in their pre-season. They will play powerhouses, including Piedmont, McClymond's and Castro Valley. They will participate in tournaments at Northgate and the West Coast Jamboree.

The balance of the competition will remain strong in the DFAL. Dougherty Valley went 21-11 last year with the only blemishes in league coming from two- and three-point losses against Miramonte.

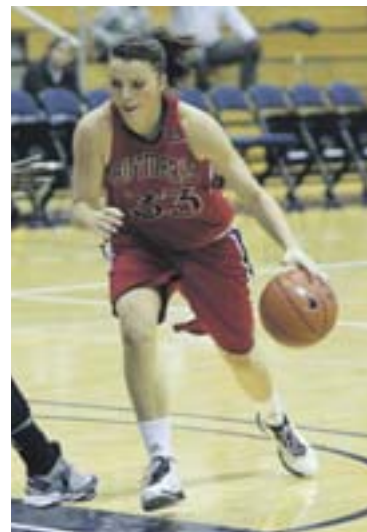
"Dougherty will be tough again. Doug Vanderhorst is a great coach and will have the Wildcats ready. Dublin returns everyone so they might be the favorite," said Sopak.

Regular season play begins in January, but in the meantime, Lamorinda teams will spend preseason preparing for DFAL play.

Saint Mary's Basketball Opens Season on Road

Returns home Saturday

By Michael Sakoda



Ashlee Smith Photos Tod Fierner

Saint Mary's women's basketball finished last season with a 22-11 record, and went 11-5 in conference play. They qualified for the WNIT and knocked off UNLV in the first round, before falling in the second. The Gaels look to improve on last year's success and, returning three-of-five starters, they are in a good position to do so.

In addition to sophomore forward Carli Rosenthal and junior forward Danielle Mauldin, returning to the starting line-up is junior guard Jackie Nared, who averaged 13 ppg, 7.5 rpg and was an All-WCC selection last season.

The Gaels also welcome back redshirts junior forward Ashlee Smith and junior guard Kate Gaze.

On her return, Gaze said that she is ready to play. "I feel really prepared. I feel like I haven't missed a beat," she added, "We worked really hard as a team."

Head coach Paul Thomas said that there is less emphasis on starting than on capitalizing on playing time. "You need to do your job when you're on the floor, whether it's one minute or 39 minutes...that's how our team views it."

As for the plan this year, Thomas said that they plan to stick with last year's strategy. "We're not going to stray too far from what our base philosophy and system is. We're just going to try to improve it," he explained.

The Gaels opened season play Nov. 9 at Washington, their first of three non-conference games against Pac-12 opponents.

Mauldin pointed out that one of the team's strengths is rebounding. Against Washington, Nared pulled a game-high 17 rebounds, and got help from senior guard, Morgan Hatten, who finished the game with 15 rebounds. Mauldin grabbed 11 boards



Kate Gaze

of her own. The Gaels outrebounded the Huskies 60-34, but their effort wasn't enough, as they lost 70-68.

The tough loss to the Huskies was followed by a 78-69 victory at Oregon on Nov. 11. Thomas said the team learned from its mistakes. "We took our experience from Friday night at U.W. and over a course of less than 48 hours learned, and did a good job at Oregon," he said. "I was very pleased with that."

Mauldin, who finished the game at Oregon with 20 points and 16 rebounds, was named the WCC Player of the Week for her efforts. "I just see what we need...and then do what's needed to help win those games," she said.

On Nov. 15, the Gaels faced number #12 Cal, and suffered an 89-41 loss.

Thomas noted that the team play allows for potential blow-out losses. "We don't play a style that beats teams by 20 or 30 points. We're just not going to," he explained, "if we don't take care of the ball...we can be blown out a lot easier than we can blow teams out. It's all up to us."

The Gaels were not able to take care of the ball in the loss, and Cal forced the Gaels into a season-high 24 turnovers.

Looking towards the future, Thomas doesn't set his sights far, emphasizing the importance of practice. "My expectations right now are to go out and have a really good practice today. We'll put ourselves in a good position to be where ever this team deserves to be at the end of the season," he said.

However, he did note the team has the potential to be a successful season. "I think this team is very capable of accomplishing a lot this year, and it's going to be up to them," he said.

The Gaels next game is their home opener Nov. 23 against Butler.

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