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Lamorinda Thrills in Girls NCS Soccer Tourney

By Hunter Hewitt



Sophie Fuller Photo Brian Fessenden

A blowout, a first-round comeback upset, a rivalry matchup and two penalty-kick shootouts summed up the thrilling North Coast Section Division II playoffs for the Lamorinda high school girls soccer teams.

The first round began on Feb. 13, with Campolindo, Acalanes and Miramonte each taking the field.

Second-seeded Campolindo (15-2-2) hosted No. 15 Hercules (10-9-1) in the first round, and made a serious statement with a commanding 8-0 win. Junior midfielder Emmy Melkonian led the way for the Cougars with three goals, while junior midfielder Julia Reshke added one goal and three assists.

No. 10 Acalanes (10-10-4) entered its first-round matchup as the underdog when it faced off against seventh-seeded Ygnacio Valley (17-6-2). The seeds proved irrelevant, however, as the visiting Dons rallied from a 1-0 deficit to knock off the Warriors, 2-1. Acalanes prevailed with a clutch second-half performance from senior forward Kaitlin McGee, who assisted the game-tying goal and scored the game-winner soon after.

Fourth-seeded Miramonte (7-7-2) suffered an upset loss in the first round, falling to No. 13 St. Mary's in dramatic fashion. Tied 1-1 at the end of regulation, the teams continued to battle through two scoreless overtimes.

The Panthers eventually came out on top when they defeated the Matadors 4-3 in a penalty-kick shootout.

"We had some chances, but we just could not put the game away," Miramonte head coach Mohamed Mohamed said. "The girls gave it all they could, and it was still a good season because a year ago we didn't even make the playoffs."

The second round of the playoffs produced a classic Lamorinda rematch when Acalanes traveled to Campolindo on Feb. 16.

The Cougars struck first with a goal from junior midfielder Emily Orwig early in the match, and they never looked back from there. Following two more goals and several saves from senior goalkeeper Sophie Leksan, Campolindo eliminated the Dons with a 3-0 victory.

"Campolindo is an aggressive defensive team that applies great pressure," Acalanes head coach Tom Ginocchio said. "They don't have any weaknesses and they have great confidence in their abilities.

Although the loss was an unfortunate end to the season, Ginocchio was still appreciative of his team's effort.

"I felt we were capable of more this year, but I was still proud of many elements of our team's season," he said. "I saw great improvement from many of the girls throughout the season and they never gave up no matter the adversity."

The Cougars' next opponent was sixth-seeded Piedmont (17-5-2) in the semifinals on Feb. 20, and the game added even more theatrics to the already exhilarating playoffs.

After an early 1-1 tie, neither team scored in the rest regulation, forcing the game into overtime. Following two scoreless extra periods, the Highlanders eventually secured the victory by defeating Campolindo in another penalty-kick shootout, 3-1.

Campolindo head coach Ernesto Silva was disappointed after the loss, but proud of his girls and optimistic for the future of his young team.

"Sometimes things don't go your way, but all you can do is be proud," he said. "We had one of the most successful seasons this school has ever had, and we will learn from an emotional experience like this and work even harder in the future."

Piedmont fell to Bishop O'Dowd (26-2-0) in the championship game on Feb 23. It was the Dragons' second consecutive NCS Division II title.



Bridget Coleman Photo Andy Scheck

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