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Football: Unbeaten Streaks Loom Large as DFAL Play Begins

By Karl Buscheck and Spencer Silva



Jake Berry

Sutter Lindberg

Madison Young

Photos Gint Federas

Miramonte (6-0 overall, 2-0 DFAL)

The Miramonte football team isn't just racking up wins. The Mats are flat-out pummeling the opposition, scoring at least 40 points in each of the squad's first six contests.

For the early DFAL co-leaders, the success begins with junior quarterback Tim Tague, who has already aired out 23 touchdowns.

"Tag's doing a great job of making throws, reading defenses - just taking whatever any defense gives us," head coach Jack Schram said of the signal-caller, who has led the team to a 6-0 mark overall and a 2-0 record in league play.

Schram credits the growth and development of the offensive line for giving Tague the time to make all those plays and find all those open targets.

"The line - that was our big question," Schram said. "We have the best skilled athletes in the area.

So, we thought if our line gels, we're going to be very, very good this year. And our line has done a fantastic job."

The team's wide receivers and running backs have also done a fantastic job. Senior Sutter Lindberg headlines the receiving corps, as he's hauled in 816 yards and seven touchdowns. Senior Clayton Stehr highlights the running game, rumbling for 478 yards and 11 scores.

The real danger of the offense is that Mats don't just rely on those stars, but rather have an array of weapons to chose from.

"We've got so many [options]," Schram said. "We've got a full set on the bench that we could bring in. So, we're very deep at skilled athletes."

That assortment of talent has been causing nightmares for opposing coaches all season.

"You can't simulate us," Schram said. "We're very athletic. It's very hard for a defensive coordinator [to game plan against us]."

As the DFAL schedule ramps up, the Mats have just one objective in mind.

"Oh, the goal is to win every game - just keep winning," Schram said.

To make that happen, Schram knows that the team can't afford to look too far out ahead on the horizon.

"It's not about saying who are we going to play Week 16 in the North-South Championship Bowl Game," Schram said. "It's about saying who are we going to play next week?"

There are plenty of tests looming in the upcoming weeks, as the Mats are slated to take on Dougherty Valley (5-1 overall, 1-1 in DFAL) on Oct. 9 before playing rivalry games against Acalanes (2-3 overall, 1-0 in DFAL) and Campolindo (5-1 overall, 2-0 in DFAL) to close out the month.

That road clash with Campolindo will be especially daunting, as the Cougars won the CIF Division III State title a season ago. But for now, the focus is on next week and nothing else.

"For us, it's all about preparing for Dougherty Valley," Schram said.

Campolindo (5-1 overall, 2-0 DFAL)

After winning the Division III state title in 2014, the Campolindo Cougars knew a giant target would be draped across their backs this fall. Even still, head coach Kevin Macy is surprised by the amount of animosity his team has faced in the early season. And it's not going away anytime soon.

"I always tell them - this year's team pays the mortgage on last year's success," Macy said.

"Teams are waiting in line for a chance to dance on our grave."

Despite losing an enormous amount of talent, the Cougars challenged themselves with a daunting preseason schedule, chock full of Division I opponents like Hayward, St. Ignatius, Deer Valley and Napa. Each team was undefeated before its matchup with the Cougars.

They beat Hayward, St. Ignatius and Deer Valley, but lost to Napa 21-7; it was the team's first loss since Nov. 29, 2013.

After the game, a reporter approached Macy, reeling off the various streaks that had come to an end with the loss. His response, "No, no. It's okay."

For Macy, a loss this season seemed inevitable. In fact, he went further, "it served a purpose."

The team now enters DFAL play with 26 consecutive league wins in tow. Over the last two weeks, they beat Dublin 14-10 and Dougherty Valley 41-0.

Handing Dougherty Valley its first loss, in convincing fashion, was a "desperately needed chance to take a breath."

Junior quarterback Jacob Westphal, who was already passed for 1,192 yards and 10 touchdowns, has developed chemistry with his veteran receiving corps in seniors Max Flower and Madison Young, who have combined for 715 all-purpose yards and six touchdowns.

Early in the season, Westphal, a first-year starter, bore a lot of weight with a running game that was sorting itself out. However, in recent weeks, running the ball has been one of the team's strengths.

They employ a thunder and lightning-type approach featuring senior Jack Cassidy between the tackles and push the ball outside with an elusive Matt Ringquist (Jr.). Yale-bound senior and team captain Sterling Strother anchors both sides of the line.

On defense, one of the team's surprise performers has been senior Myles Harris, who moved from the defensive back to linebacker. He's small for the position, but has shored up the Cougars' weakness against the run. The defense hasn't allowed a second-half touchdown all season.

While every game is an important one, Macy presumes many in the Lamorinda area have Oct. 30 circled on their calendars, when Campo hosts cross-town rival and DFAL co-leader Miramonte.

"For the first time in school history, we've probably got Miramonte rooting for us," Macy noted, mentioning the team's protracted DFAL-win streak. "I'm sure they want to be the ones that beat us."

Acalanes (2-3 overall, 1-0 DFAL)

Just five games in, the 2015 season has already been a long one for the Acalanes Dons. By the second week, the team lost three two-way starters to injury: seniors Tom Henderson (RB/LB), Grant Young (G/ILB), and Tyler Henderson (DB/WR/KR).

The Dons traveled to Antioch for their first game, where they faced an up-and-coming Division I program in the Panthers and star running back Najee Harris, who is headed to Alabama next year on a football scholarship. They lost 62-7.

The next week, the Dons were on the other side of a blowout, shutting out Skyline 49-0. Next, they suffered tough back-to-back losses to Heritage (Brentwood, Calif.) and Analy (Sebastopol, Calif.) before opening up league play with a 34-13 win over Alhambra last Friday night.

Coach Mike Ivankovich thinks his injury-riddled team is making progress, however. "[Alhambra] was the first time we've come out and played football the way it's supposed to be played: with intensity and the ability to overcome mistakes."

The boxscore doesn't speak to the closeness of the game against the Dogs. In fact, early in the third quarter, the Dons led by just one point.

Without Henderson, who tore his ACL playing lacrosse, but runs a sub-4.50 40-yard dash, the team can't stretch the field as much as it would like. Without a true deep threat in the passing game, the team regularly sees loaded boxes and pressure packages aimed at stopping the run.

The other issue they're remediating is turnovers. Specifically, the team has lost an inordinate amount of non-contact fumbles.

The offense is led by senior quarterback Jake Berry, while sophomore Ryan Nall, who has an impressive eight sacks through just five games, leads the defense. "I've never coached a sophomore lineman who dominates like this," Ivankovich said.

At this point, the team isn't concerned with their win-loss record, but rather their effort on the field. "Ultimately, we can control effort and attitudes, not outcomes," Ivankovich explained. "We

would rather lose doing things the right way than win doing them the wrong way."

The Dons face a tough Dublin team on the road Oct. 9 for their second game of league play.



Tim Tague

Max Flower

Nicholas Price Photos Gint Federas

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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