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Lamorinda Soccer Teams Begin DFAL Play

By Spencer Silva



Drew Wondolowski (17) and Mark Vonhacht (4) Photo Gint Federas

On Friday Dec. 11, Miramonte (1-1-2) hosted Campolindo (2-1-2) in a sleepy rivalry match that ended in a 0-0 tie. In fact, the varsity match was moved from 6:15 to 4:15 to allow the Cougars players and coaches to support the football team in their bid for consecutive state titles.

Both teams emphasize possession-style soccer, and while each had their chances early, neither was able to put the ball in the back of the net. Senior goalkeeper Garret Johnson made two spectacular saves for the Mats, including a stop on a ball that looked destined for the far post well to his left.

"It was a quality match," said Campo head coach Shane Carney. "I think both teams would have preferred a winner/loser, but we do get to play again."

Carney and Mats' head coach Massood Ahmadi have also discussed scheduling a third match between the two toward the end of season, since

the two teams will not meet in the playoffs -- the NCS re-aligned its soccer divisions, sending the Mats down to Division III while the Cougars remain in Division II.

The Mats are encouraged by their play so far, despite their so-so record. The team's lone victory came against a familiar opponent: De Anza, the team that eliminated them from the NCS playoffs last fall. Senior Coleman Fine delivered the game-winning goal in thrilling fashion, when he sent a left-footed shot from 15 yards to the far upper post to clinch the 2-1 victory.

The Mats are anchored by seniors Joe Wang -- who exited Friday's match with a pulled hamstring -- the aforementioned Fine, and attacker Clark Jordan. Ahmadi is pleased with his talent, though the first-year coach admits he's still figuring out how to best use his players.

"We have so much talent," Ahmadi explained. "It's just my job to put them in the right spots and be creative."

The Cougars -- who have won the DFAL in consecutive seasons -- are dealing once again with hefty turnover. They bid farewell to 14 players from last year's championship team after losing 20 the year before. Adversity, it appears, is a way of life for Cougars soccer.

"A lot of coaches and programs make excuses and talk about how they are 'rebuilding,'" Carney said. "I don't like excuses and prefer to look at it as the opportunity to reload each year."

The team features 10 freshman, and the benefit of inexperience, as Carney noted, is quick improvement. Seniors Ryan Rossi, Shea Danforth, Amir Aliakbari, and Kyle O'Connell anchor the team. The team will also get a shot in the arm once junior Matt Rengquist returns from outrunning defenders for the school's football team.

"We have a lot of young and/or very small guys, but we'll be scrappy and put a fight up against any opponent," Carney said.

The Acalanes Dons (3-2) lost to Concord High 0-2 this weekend, but remain confident heading into DFAL play. The team graduated 12 seniors, but veteran head coach Paul Curtis isn't concerned about the loss of talent.

"I think we'll be competitive."

The Dons are known for their unique playing style and formation, which extends from the freshman team all the way to varsity. In fact, the program emphasizes camaraderie and personal

responsibility above all. It's not uncommon, for instance, to see juniors and seniors at a freshman match cheering on the youngest Dons.

Senior captain Ian Franklin, who has been on the team since his freshman year, leads the varsity team. The team is "getting organized" and polishing up its game before heading into DFAL play.

The Dons travel to Campolindo Dec. 16 for their first rivalry match of the fall.

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