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Lamorinda Basketball Teams Build Lasting Success

By Spencer Silva



Haley Van Dyke Photo Gint Federas

While the Lady Mats make their historic run to the state championship game this week, other Lamorinda teams have unpacked their lockers and turned their sights to the next season - or the next sport, in many cases. This offseason, however, players from all three programs can hold their heads up high. Each school sent a team to a CIF tournament, signaling the enduring strength of basketball in the area.

The Campo girls had one of their best seasons in recent years. They finished 25-6 and spent most of the winter ranked among NorCal's better teams. They lost to Bishop O'Dowd in the NCS semi final, but the Cougars earned a berth in the CIF Division III tournament because both the Dragons and Lady Mats earned bids in the CIF Open Division tournament - where qualifications are based on rankings rather than school size.

The Cougars netted two home games in CIF play, a rarity in the postseason. They won their first tilt against Tamalpais, though they fell to No. 10 seed Inderkum (Sacramento) last Tuesday, 57-49, in the regional quarterfinal. It was their third appearance in the tournament in the last four years.

"[It] was a really special season," Campolindo girls head coach Art Thoms explained. "They loved coming to practice and being together. Many players said it was the most fun they ever had during a season."

Thoms credits some of the program's success to the perennially difficult DFAL. This year, Thoms explained, tight games against Acalanes and Dublin, and the relentless full-court press of Miramonte, helped prepare his team for the next step.

"I believe those games significantly prepared us for the playoffs," he said.

After a runner-up finish in the Division III NCS tournament, Miramonte boys head coach Drew McDonald was hoping for a CIF home game of his own. Instead, the CIF selection committee decided to give their second-round opponent, Sacred Heart Prep, who held a humble 12-17 record, a slightly higher seed, despite an inferior regular-season record - the Mats were 19-11, in contrast. The Mats lost their March 11 match up with the Gators 70-64.

"Maybe the committee knew more than we did, but looking at the resumes, I think we earned a shot at the four seed," McDonald said. "It was a little disappointing not having a home game, I love promoting basketball in Lamorinda."

Despite the disappointing finish, McDonald recognized the specialness of the season. "This was the best season of my four-year tenure," he noted.

In fact, it was a season for the record books. Senior Eddy Ionescu, sometimes overshadowed by his All-American twin sister, Sabrina, had a season for the ages this winter. Ionescu averaged 26 points and 10 rebounds this season. Thanks to solid record-keeping, McDonald said the Mats can demonstrably say Ionescu not only scored the most points in school history this season, but also had the best overall season since the program's inception. He was also the first outright league MVP from a non-DFAL-winning team. He'll play at the University of Oregon next fall.

The Acalanes Lady Dons quietly had one of their best seasons in school history this winter, too. In fact, they earned berths in the CIF tournament in consecutive seasons. This winter, they earned a tournament berth despite moving up from Division III to Division II.

"Making it to the NCS finals was a great accomplishment for the program," said head coach Chad Wellon, who decided to step down after a successful three-year tenure last week. He anticipates, however, that the program's success will persist. "The players mean so much to me and I couldn't have asked for a better group. The Lady Dons are going to continue to compete at a high level moving forward."

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[back](#)

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