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Baseball squads use preseason slate to gear up for league play

By Karl Buscheck

The Miramonte baseball team has never cared much about what outsiders think of the program. Last spring, the Mats landed the No. 12 seed in the NCS Division 2 playoffs only to advance all the way to semifinals where they lost to Acalanes, the eventual champs.

"If you ask me who is going to win NCS, I'll say that I'll tell you the day after," head coach Vince Dell'Aquila joked, as he recalled last spring's run.

"That's kind of always been my mantra with the kids," Dell'Aquila explained. "They're like, 'Oh, we're ranked this we're ranked that.' And I'll say, 'You know what? I'll tell you what the rankings are at the end of the season.'"

This time around, the Mats have been buzzing past the competition in the early going, posting an unblemished 8-0 record in non-league play.

Miramonte boosts a deep pitching staff headlined by senior captains Tim Tague, Casey McGonigle and EJ Hodges. Hodges also spends time in the outfield for the Mats, who begin DAL Foothill Conference action by paying a visit to Las Lomas on April 18.

"We know we're going to get better as the season goes on," Dell'Aquila said. "That's the way it's always been because we do the right things - give the boys a day off here and there - so when they get into late May they're still loving it. They're still playing hard."

Before league play commences, the Mats will once again match up with Acalanes, a member of the Valley Conference, in Lafayette on March 28.

"It's always fun to play against Miramonte," head coach Justin Santich-Hughes said. "I'm glad we were able to make that happen even though we are now in a league where we don't play each other. Vince's clubs are always well coached and prepared, which is good for our guys to play against because it forces us to have a high level of focus."

The Dons, who went 26-2 overall last season (12-0 in DAL) on the way to NCS and league titles - as well as the No. 15 ranking in the state, per MaxPreps - have been bumped into D1.

"We are the only team (out of all sports) district wide that is competing at that level," Santich-Hughes explained. "With that said our expectations don't change, we set out to win an NCS championship but the road will be extremely difficult."

In the quest for yet another section title, the Dons will lean heavily on a cavalcade of veterans.

"Josh Candau (UC Santa Barbara commit) was an all-state pitcher last year who returns for us and we hope has a great season for us. Seniors Matt Burns, Will Rembac, Ty Ewing and Daniel Kim should lead us offensively while Seniors Matt Vicencio and Kevin McConnell (Utah Valley Commit) will be great compliments to Candau along with Junior Brian Merken."

Like the Dons, the Campolindo Cougars are one of six members of the DAL's Foothill Conference. Campolindo, who entered the week of March 19 with an 3-2 record, is still searching for its identity as a squad.

"The goal right now is figuring ourselves out," explained head coach Max Luckhurst.

After previously overseeing the Cougars' program for 16 years, Luckhurst is back at the helm for the first season of his second stint.

"We're very young and not very experienced," Luckhurst added. "So we're using the early part of the year - and obviously the rain was an issue so we got a late start - but the goals are to get better every day and be able to put ourselves in a position to be able to compete for championship at the end of the year."

The Cougars begin league on April 18 with a trip to Northgate, and in the interim, the team's emerging hitters and pitchers will get the chance to earn at-bats and innings.

"There's a lot of different guys who are getting opportunities to play and trying to figure out roles and who's able to step up in certain positions," Luckhurst said. "By the time we start league, hopefully we're a little bit further along and putting ourselves in a good position to be able to compete after the 24 games."

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