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Lamorinda boys basketball teams abound (and rebound) with optimism



Scott Ruegg



Carter Mahaney



Matt Meredith

Photos Gint Federas

By Jon Kingdon

With the onset of the basketball season, the boys teams in Lamorinda are all heading into the 2019-20 season with their heads held high. Campolindo's is certainly the highest, coming off their state championship. Miramonte defeated Campolindo prior to their playoff run and Acalanes closed the season with two key victories.

Campolindo

Campolindo has won three of their first four games but head coach Steven Dyer is well aware that "uneasy lies the head that wears the crown" (Shakespeare-Henry IV) but there is nowhere else he would rather be: "We do have a target on our back this year. Everybody knows who we are and everybody in our league is going to want to beat us. We've talked about it a lot and how we have to be better mentally than the teams in the past."

Dyer proudly describes himself as a defensive coach and with the graduations of David Ahazie and Jake Chan, it is a major concern for him so far: "We're still trying to figure the roles for our players and replacing Ahazie, who was our best defensive player and Chan who was also a good defensive player, is something that we need to do. Carter Mahaney is our best defensive player so far and we're still searching for other players that can defend well."

There was a delay in the roster reaching full strength as Rex Curtis, Cole Curtis and Max Weaver were still involved in

the playoffs with the football team.

The team will be led by Carter and Aidan Mahaney, both of whom made first team all-league last season. Carter has already committed to attend and play for the University of Northern Arizona next season. "Carter totally deserves this and has worked very hard to get to this point," said Dyer. "Now he can totally focus on his senior year."

Mahaney has continued to elevate his game as evidenced by his scoring 23 points in the Cougars' opening game. Besides his stellar play on the court, Dyer is also looking for Aidan to step up as a leader.

Matt Radell, who was honorable mention as a freshman last year, and junior Emmanuel Callas should continue to provide the size up front. Chase Bennett, who was a 46% three point shooter last year, is again going to be counted on for his outside shooting. Sophomore guard Cade Bennett (Chase's brother) and forward Tyler Smith, both promoted from last year's JV team, "have stepped up and will have roles on the team," said Dyer. The one freshman on the team, Logan Robeson is a top shooter and should contribute as well to the Cougars' offense.

Dyer welcomes the difficult games in preparation for the post season tournaments: "We raise the bar with the tournaments against good teams that will really challenge us. We're not better than last year's team yet. We have a lot of talent and we have to see how it meshes.

We're a work in progress."

Miramonte

In his first year as Miramonte's head coach, Chris Lavdiotis, who brings a wealth of experience with him, having last coached at Lowell High School and for a number of years at Piedmont High School, has been won over by his players: "It's a coach's dream. They're great kids that work very hard and are very coachable. These guys are very close. The strength of our team is its togetherness."

Lavdiotis describes his offense as heavily motion based, freedom with structure that demands a lot of trust in the players reading each other and the defense: "We're pretty traditional with four out motion and some five out components to it. It's not read and react. I'm teaching the team to space and move without the ball, cut and screen and play together which gives the players a lot of freedom. The players are really smart and they have picked things up quickly and are running it pretty well."

Leading the offense are senior co-captains Matt Meredith and junior Niyi Olabode. Meredith, who was first team all league and averaged 15.6 points last season, had 25 points, 11 rebounds and five assists in Miramonte's opener. Lavdiotis has been equally impressed with Olabode's talent and versatility: "Niyi can play anywhere on the court from point guard to the high post where he can really attack the rim." The 6'5" Olabode had 12 points, seven rebounds and six assists in the

Matadors' opener. Olabode will primarily be playing the wing with junior Ryan Schwarz and sophomore Tyler Dutto being the team's point guards. The other team's co-captain, senior Quenton Breznikar is another scorer on offense that is being counted on. "We have a lot of guys that can put the ball in the basket," says Lavdiotis.

Lavdiotis wants "an athletic defensive team which we can hang our hats on. You have to stop the opponent. We're a pack line defense where we are playing gaps rather than areas of the court. The goal is to take away the paint first and force contested 2-point shots. It's a real good team defense and once our players learn how to trust each other and apply pressure to the ball and are in the proper position, it can be really effective.

"We're not like the biggest bruisers," said Lavdiotis. "We're pretty aggressive and the physicality is there and they're pretty tough kids. It's all a work in progress."

Acalanes

After winning their final two games last season, Acalanes now has a six game winning streak, starting off this season with four straight wins. After losing only one of their top six scorers to graduation (Ian Archer), head coach Sol Henik is excited about his returning players.

"It's great that we have most of our players returning, led by our junior captain Scott Ruegg. He's a great leader that brings the team together. He's the first guy at practice and his

enthusiasm and spirit on the team is contagious. He cares about the team, the school and his own game and has put in the time and effort to get the most out of this year."

Two freshmen, 5'6" point guard Theo Stoll and 6'6" Jake Davis are already seeing playing time for the Dons. "Theo is not big but he is so shifty and herky-jerky, it is hard to stay in front of him," says Henik. "He is crafty and sees the floor really well and has been a great addition to the team. Jake has a very good basketball IQ and a really good touch around the rim with a good outside shot. Not only is he a good rebounder, he is a really good outlet passer. He gets the rebound and gives it up to the proper guard. All fall they have competed and earned their spots on the team."

Henik has been very welcoming to the football players that have come over since their season ended: "Joey Carillo, Jackson Aris-Dumas and John Kalil all came in with a winning mentality after a successful football season and they bring an added brand of toughness."

Rebounding is a concern that should be addressed by the football players, says Henik: "We really have to test ourselves and be mentally and physically strong on every defensive sequence to make sure that the other team does not get the offensive rebound."

Co-captain, Aidan Bodner, is the only senior that will be starting this year. "Aidan plays with so much heart, hustle and energy," said Henik. "He will get point just on pure hustle."

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