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## Lamorinda girls basketball shines in West Coast Jamboree

By Jon Kingdon



Lauren Frechman Photos Gint Federas

The Christmas break has become far more than just a time for college football bowl games. For the East Bay, it's become a tradition to watch high school girls' basketball at the West Coast Jamboree Tournament.

In 2000, David Jackson put together the first West Coast Jamboree Tournament with 56 schools. In the two decades since its inception, it has become the largest girls high school basketball tournament in the country. In this, it's 20th anniversary, there were 136 different high schools competing in 17 different brackets, with eight teams in each bracket, that were played at various high schools around the East Bay. The competing teams came from all over the state of California along with schools from Nevada, Oregon, Hawaii and Canada. In the past 20 years, there have been over 25,000 players and around 2,500 different teams that have played in the Jamboree.

All four of the Lamorinda high schools competed in their respective brackets: Acalanes in the Emerald bracket at Benicia High School, Campolindo in the Ivory bracket in Livermore at Granada High School, Miramonte in the Diamond bracket and The Bentley School in the Onyx bracket, both playing at Las Lomas High School in Walnut Creek. Miramonte (second place), Acalanes (third place) and Campolindo (third place) won two of their three games and Bentley won their opening game

finishing in fourth place.

The West Coast Jamboree is a 501(c)3 nonprofit that hired the company Hoops4Girls to run the tournament. There are three tournament directors: Harold Abend, Clay Kallam and Miramonte head coach Kelly Sopak. Each had their own responsibilities, according to Abend: "I do the state rankings for Cal-Hi Sports and I go through the rankings and work with Clay and Kelly setting up the top three brackets, along with handling the marketing, hotels and sponsorships. Clay does the national MaxPrep rankings and does the bracketing for the other 14 divisions and handles all the finances. Besides helping with the brackets and working with me to attract the top teams, Kelly, along with his daughter Lauren Sopak, an associate tournament director, are in charge of all the operations."

This is the seventh year that Sopak has served as a tournament director: "We raised about \$50,000 from sponsors for the tournament and we donate the money back. All of the host sites receive money for hosting the games."

The West Coast Jamboree is the only high school tournament that offers scholarship opportunities to participants. This will be the third year in which at least three \$2,500 scholarships are awarded based on the players academic grades, athletic achievement, sportsmanship, leadership and with needs based criteria as well.

Making this tournament particularly special was the participation of the Paradise team that was devastated along with the entire town by the 2018 Camp Fire. An anonymous corporate sponsor covered the entire cost of the expenses for the Paradise team.

The effort in putting together the brackets is the key to the success of the jamboree and keeps the teams returning each year, says Sopak: "Clay and Harold do a fantastic job in evaluating the teams so the brackets are really balanced all the way through. A lot of time goes into getting those brackets scheduled and the other part of it is not having league opponents playing each other and always trying to play out of town teams. They do such a great job that when the scores come in, there is very rarely a blowout. In almost every bracket, you will probably get a game you can win, a game that's going to be a 50-50 and a game in which you will be an underdog."

Miramonte defeated Damonte (Reno, Nevada), Buchanan (Clovis) and lost to Salesian Prep (Richmond) 75-65 in the championship game.

Against Salesian, the Matadors trailed 22-4 after one quarter. It was a unique experience for Miramonte to trail by so much in the first period, said Sopak: "We're more used to the opposite score. We also trailed Buchanon early but we weathered it. You can't get down to a team like Salesian. It was absolutely a learning experience."

Miramonte did battle back to close the margin to 4 points with four minutes to go in the game before Salesian closed out the game. Mia Mastrov and Jordan Allred were selected to the all-tournament team for the Diamond Bracket.

Head coach Kelly Thomas, in her fifth year at Bentley, competed in the tournament when she attended Campolindo and appreciated the exposure for her team: "As a small school, we get to play a lot of big schools that we normally would not get to play against. We're a young team with only two seniors and half of our team has never been on a varsity team before. If we execute what we've been working on, then whatever the score says, it's still a victory for us because we're really focusing on competing for a full 32 minutes and playing our best basketball."

Bentley, with the smallest enrollment of all the schools in the tournament, defeated Deer Valley in their first game behind senior Grace Kim's 22 points, lost to Gregori and then to Las Lomas 47-45 to finish in fourth place. Junior Alex Wechsler was named to the Onyx All-Tournament team.

Campolindo head coach Matt Kirby particularly enjoys this event because "it's one of our more local tournaments with a lot of teams from out of state." Campolindo defeated Central Valley, lost to Granada and then defeated Foothill 57-39 to finish in third in the Ivory Bracket and bring their record for the year to 9-4. "Our half-court man defense has been a key to our success. It's been a pleasant surprise in how comfortable the girls have been playing that defense."

Senior Kate Brown and freshman Allie Cummins were named to the All-Tournament team for the Ivory Bracket.

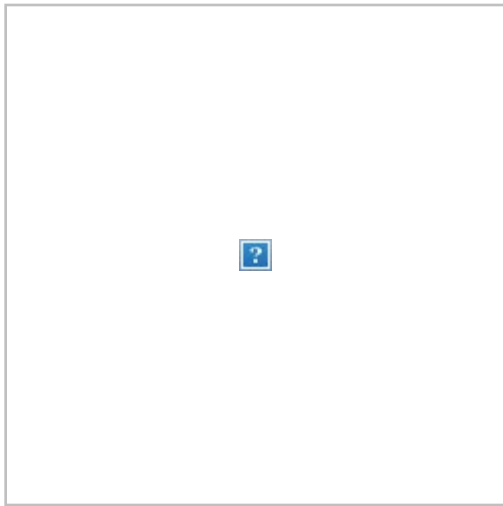
Acalanes head coach Michelle Sasaki welcomes all tournaments, but the Jamboree in particular: "It's always an opportunity to play teams out of our area and it's a luxury that it's in our backyard. Our players look forward to play in a tournament like this of such high caliber. Anytime you play in a tournament, you're playing for something. For a championship, third place or consolation. That sense of urgency is good for team growth."

The Dons defeated Los Altos in their first game and lost to Montgomery and then defeated James Logan 54-42 to finish third in the Emerald Bracket. Grace Gebhardt and Lauren Kobashigawa were chosen to the Emerald All-tournament team.

It proved to be a successful tournament from several perspectives, said Abend: "The fact we were able to over double the amount of sponsorship money with the help of some dedicated girls basketball fans, and to be able to bring the Paradise girls to the Jamboree at no expense to the school or families, made the 20th anniversary Jamboree even more special than it already was. Work on the 2020 West Coast Jamboree has already begun."



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