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Published September 1st, 2021

## Teams seek to recover from short respite as football season restarts

By Jon Kingdon

After waiting 476 days for last season to start, there was only a short respite of 133 days before the start of this year's football season. After an abbreviated season, with mask requirements and seemingly endless tests, there is a greater sense of normalcy on the field though adjustments are still being made.

"Preparation for this season has been hard just coming off the April season," Miramonte head coach Jack Schram said. "We have guys that are still recovering from injuries from last season."

It was the protocols that Acalanes head coach Floyd Burnsed found most distracting: "The main thing that was difficult this spring was that we still had to stay in groups no larger than 15 so we did not get to do a lot of team stuff or get to go indoors to have meetings and watch film. In the weight room, we were also limited to 15 people and one coach which can be difficult when you have 60-plus players."

Campolindo's head coach Kevin Macy is still feeling the hangover from last spring. "Right now, we're dragging a COVID anchor which has never left us, and this year is when the COVID bills come through. Every time we turn around, a new thing is hitting us. With supply lines down, it's hard to get parts for helmets. Hopefully, we'll be able to get some more fun back in football."

Miramonte

After going through a slew of quarterbacks last season, Coach Schram welcomed back with open arms junior Luke Donlan who spent last year at the IMG Academy in Florida. "Luke's been a great leader. He made a lot of good plays in our scrimmage, throwing for seven TD's and could have had more but for some misreads and drops. John Williams will be his backup and will do well if called upon."

The running backs are led by junior Bennett Destino and is backed up by seniors Ben Chinn and Aiden Stone. Thomas Wilson has proven to be the top blocker for the group.

The passing game has shown very well this spring. "We had a really good passing camp up at Tahoe and won the 7 on 7 passing tournament," Schram said. "Tyler Dutto (who led the team in receiving last season) has looked awesome so far," Schram said. "Division I schools should be all over him." Cooper Bohlig is one of a number of good receivers that will provide the depth behind Dutto.

With the strength of the offense at the skill positions, the offensive line is still a work in process due to graduations. Senior Sam Ross (6'4" 220) has moved over to left tackle from the wide receiver position to add more stability to the line. "He made a great sacrifice, but he has shown he can be a dominating offensive lineman," Schram said.

The defensive line played well in the team's scrimmage led by senior Sawyer Peterson and juniors Jackson Davenport and James Patrick

Besides playing on offense, Ross will be the dominant force on defense, playing both inside and outside linebacker. "On both sides of the ball, Sam will be our biggest and most physical player," Schram said. "He can do it all and he has over 10 Division I offers so far."

The safeties Dutto and Bohlig and Chase Bliss will be lining up at one of the cornerback spots. "Dutto has look dominating and Bohlig is playing very well while Bliss has looked good at the corner," Schram said. Jimmy Foster, coming off a shoulder injury, should contribute as well.

Miramonte was limited to 23 players at their scrimmage due to injuries and held up well though they did wear out in the third session. That speaks to the key for Miramonte to be successful this season: "We have to stay healthy," said Schram. "We have an opportunity to roll through our non-league games but in a league with Acalanes, Campolindo and Benicia, it's going to be really tough."

Miramonte's opening game against Piedmont was canceled due to poor air quality.

Acalanes

If you look at the Acalanes non-league schedule, it would seem teams were trying to earn frequent-driving credits. Playing on the road in Manteca and with teams coming to Lafayette from Reno, Rohnert Park, San Francisco, and Oakland makes for a difficult schedule for the Dons. "It was hard to find games with local teams," Burnsed said. "We were turned down by a lot of closer schools because they said we had too many returning players."

Despite losing their starting quarterback and leading rusher to graduation, Burnsed has been pleased with how senior Luke Souza has stepped in as his starter along with Connor McPhail as his backup. "Luke is going to be a good quarterback even though he did not get to play much last season. He is a good athlete with good arm strength, vision, and leadership skills. He gets the ball to the right people on time. Connor has looked good as well."

Senior Evan Malmquist, an all-purpose player will be starting in the backfield and will also be seeing a substantial amount of time as a wide receiver. Junior Ellis Berger will be the second back when the Dons go with a 2-back set. "All Evan needs is a little hole, and he is gone and Ellis, who came up from the JV, brings good size and has looked very good."

The Dons are returning their three leading receivers from last year: seniors Will Berrian (26-391), Malmquist (25-312) and Dante Montgomery (22-439), and it goes deeper than that. "Our receiving corps can go eight deep with little drop off from one group to the next," Burnsed said.

The offensive line returns three starters, Anthony Ortale, Mike Kuhner and Tyler Murphy. Marcus Julian will be the fourth starter and Ryan Hogner, coming back from an injury and Victor Nicolackis will be competing for the fifth spot. "We have good size on the line and a lot of good, young linemen that just need to play and will continue to improve," Burnsed said. "We should have a balanced offense being able to pass and run."

Despite losing their top three tacklers from last year's team, several players have stood up to become starters. On the defensive line, Ryan Giorgiani and Sam Hafner, who were backups last year should start along with junior Tyler Washington.

At linebacker, Logan Ketcham (11T, 30A) is a returning starter and Kyle Bielawski (the team's third QB) will be another starter. Miller Smith, George Churchill, and Ryan Giorgianni will all see playing time.

The defensive backfield returns three starters, James Gunn (13T-12A), Brady Brinkman (5T-7A) and Devin Miniello (12T-17A). Marshall Lockwood (5T-6A) also saw playing time last season.

It's just a matter of fine-tuning things for Burnsed: "We have to get everyone on the same page, improving our run and pass blocking and if we do that, we have the skills kids to be really good."

The Dons defeated Sienna Saturday 59-6 behind Souza's three touchdown passes and a 39 yard run for another score, Malmquist's two TD receptions and 49 yard TD run and Berrian's two TD receptions.

Campolindo

With the graduation of 24 seniors, lower numbers for the senior and junior class and only one starter returning from the offense and defense, it becomes readily apparent that this is going to be a rebuilding year for the Cougars.

"With only 26 kids on the varsity at this point, it is a challenge," Macy said. "We don't have the numbers we usually have but we're working to get our numbers back up with some kids coming back off of injuries."

The battle at quarterback is between Adam Harper, whose brother Grant is playing at UC Davis and Dashiell Weaver, whose brother Maxwell will be playing at Davidson this year. "Right now, we have a quarterback battle," Macy said. "Going into the opening game, we may alternate series with them because they are very similar but with different skill sets."

With 90% of the yards gained on the ground by graduating seniors, the running back position is also wide open. "We're light at the skill positions," Macy said. "There are no numbers behind them, and it seems like the whole team is starting from scratch." Max Rittman and Colin Koznarik, backups from last season, will get the first opportunity to establish themselves as the starters.

The standout among the wide receivers has been junior Robbie Mascheroni. "He's big, tall and fast and can be a difference maker," Macy said.

The one returning starter on offense is offensive lineman Elijah Klock who played left guard last season and may also be called upon to play left tackle if the need arises. He will also be looked upon to take the leadership role on both sides of the ball as he also will be starting on the defensive line. Tyrone Tuavale will also be filling in all along the line.

The defensive backfield does show some stability. Bradley Nestel is the long returning starter on defense.

Will Moncars who played linebacker last year will be lining up at safety. The starting corners at this point are Ryan Mandell and Xion Adams.

Macy puts it simply: "We have a challenging schedule , and we have to stay healthy."

Campolindo began the rebuilding process defeating Moreau Catholic 56-21 behind three touchdown passes by Harper and one by Weaver, 127 yards rushing by Rittman and 6 receptions for 202 yards and three touchdowns by Mascheroni.

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