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Lamorinda volleyball teams make playoffs; Miramonte advances to NorCal regionals

By Jon Kingdon



Campolindo's outside hitter, senior Audrey Baumer and libero Megan Mitchell Photo Gint Federas

With all three girls volleyball teams making the playoffs, after suffering through the pandemic this past spring, it would have to be acknowledged as a successful season in Lamorinda: Campolindo was 10-0 in league play and finished the season with an overall record of 16-10 and making it to the second round of the Division I NCS Championship; Acalanes finished with a 12-11 record after losing in the first round of the Division III NCS Championship; and Miramonte with a 15-4 record lost in the third round of the Division III NCS Championship.

Miramonte

Despite last year's abbreviated season and an 8-16 record the year before, head coach Leslie Ray's optimism prior to the start of the regular season proved prescient. "The players bought into the system, and we became more of a team," Ray said. "They came to understand that each player had a role on the team. Our practices were competitive, and they had the mindset that every game mattered."

Though the loss in five sets in the NCS semifinals to Archie Williams High School was painful and disappointing, the pain was ameliorated in that since it was a semifinal game in the tournament, it qualified Miramonte to play in the Northern California Regional Championship. "We were prepared to play Archie Williams and we stuck with our system, not allowing any distractions to get in our way. The girls played with great heart, and it was a back and forth match all evening. All of the girls were super excited to get into the playoffs," Ray said. "I've had to work to keep them focused by telling them that going into the playoffs is a new season and that every time we play in these games, we have to play like we're behind."

The tone for the offense was set by seniors Casey Roy, Natalie Kurtz and Lauren Cunningham and juniors Amber Chu and Ruby Martin this season. "Amber has been our No. 1 hitter since her freshman year, and it has been an honor seeing her grow and being a part of the process. Lauren really stepped up in the middle for us. We needed someone that was actively moving and getting to the ball, and she earned that spot during practice. Ruby became a starter in midseason when we needed a big blocker on the right side."

Julia Berg and Catherine Devlin led the offense as the team's setters. "Julia was my go-to setter when we ran a 5-1 offense and Catherine was my second setter when we ran the 6-2 offense," Ray said. "Kaylen Ishizu did an excellent job as a setter coming off the bench and playing some defense on the right side."

Miramonte's liberos were sophomore Nicole Tuszynski and junior Annika Blas-Cedeno. "Nicole did a tremendous job for us," Ray said. "Annika was phenomenal for us coming off the bench, playing for Casey Roy in the back row and it helped our offense tremendously."

The Matadors were scheduled to play their first-round Division III playoff game Nov. 9, after press time.

Campolindo

After moving up to Division I, coach John Vuong has always made it a point to compete against the top competition prior to league play. The Cougars began this season with a 2-4 record and went 14-6 the rest of the season. "We started to build confidence as the year went on," Vuong said. "It was hard at first because as a team, we had not really played together so we had to build that connection. It took over half the season to figure out the players and who was doing what. At that point, our confidence grew and we began winning more and realizing that we had the ability and potential to be a good team."

After defeating Vintage High School in the first round, Campolindo came up short to the third ranked San Ramon Valley (17-25, 25-27, 25-27). "We lost to a great team and battled to the end," Vuong said. "We did not give up. That's the name of the game. Sometimes it goes our way and sometimes it goes the other team's way."

The Cougars will only be graduating six seniors, returning 10 underclassmen. "We'll miss them all as I have been with them for a long time, and they always competed hard." Vuong singled out outside hitter Audrey Baumer among the seniors: "Audrey stayed focused and poised. She was the anchor of our team."

Baumer took a short- and long-term perspective to the loss. "This was the second year that we were in Division I so we had a lot to live up to," Baumer said. "We prepared really well but it just wasn't our night. I'm going to miss the competition and being on a team with such an amazing group of girls that loved to play together."

Vuong made it clear to the team what they should take away from the SRV game: "This was a game for the younger players to learn from. The next time you play in a game like this, your mental state will be different - I guarantee it. The last two years with the coronavirus, it hurt everybody across the volleyball community in trying to figure things out. We're restarting and our seniors have planted the seeds for the underclassmen. From here on, I'm sure it's going to become easier for us."

Acalanes

When Acalanes started the season losing four of their first five games, head coach Haley Walsh was not worried, and her confidence was borne out when Acalanes was 11-7 the rest of the season. "It was just working out the kinks, coming off of a COVID season and adapting to some sort of normal which was stressful for the girls at first," Walsh said. "By the end of the season, they were more balanced on things which then translated onto the court."

The depth for Acalanes on offense and defense proved to be very valuable as various starters went down with injuries. The offense was led by senior Aly Kirke and juniors Kate Olin, Ryann Jones, and Hannah Hageboeck. Emma Johnson returned from an early season injury and became a starter on the outside, becoming a key factor in the team's offense. "Kate, Ryann and Hannah should only get better next year," Walsh said. "Freshman MaeLin Mason did a great job filling in when Emma was out, and senior Bela Yanakieva was a force in a lot of games in the middle."

Senior setters Rachel Zhang, Mara Korzeniowska and sophomore Monica Dikova all competed for playing time. Korzeniowska was hurt early in the season but came back and contributed as well.

When Lyanne Wang was lost early in the season as the team's libero, Jade Profilio became the starting libero. Georgia Winkler also lined up as a libero along with playing as a middle and as an attacker. Profilio stood out in the playoff game with 37 digs, an outlandishly high number.

"Next year our strength will come out of the back row," Walsh said. "I'm looking forward to see the competition next year between Lyanne and Jade. I'm also excited to see all of our returners in the middle and on the front line."

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