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Successful seasons for Lamorinda girls water polo led by Miramonte's championship team

By Jon Kingdon

Starting and finishing the season ranked No. 1 nationally, the Miramonte Lady Matadors concluded a dominating, undefeated season with their 28th win, a victory of visiting Davis High School 11-4 in the Division I Northern California championship. Acalanes (18-12) made it to the Division II finals losing 10-7 to Arroyo Grande in Santa Cruz. Campolindo (15-12), reached the NCS championship game falling to Miramonte, qualifying for the NorCal championships, but came up short against Sacred Heart Prep.

After the celebratory jump in the pool after the win, Miramonte coach John Roemer spoke to the quality and talent of the team rather than singling out any individuals. "The depth of the team was the key to our success. The girls knew that if somebody didn't have a good game, someone else would step up."

Evidencing the statement, in the semifinal game against Sacred Heart Prep, Allie Lurie scored five goals and in the Davis game, Meghan McAninch led the team with five goals.

"It would depend on how a defense would play us," Roemer said. "If they took something away from us, we would have somewhere else to go to. The girls would read what was open and they would know what to do." McAninch made it a point to share the credit for her performance against Davis and for what Roemer brought to the team: "The five goals I scored were because of my teammates. We worked as a team, not individually. Coach Roemer was someone that we could learn from and look up to because of how much experience he has had in the water polo field."

Miramonte only gave up one goal in the second half of the game. Goalie Lindsey Lucas also made it a point to share the credit with her teammates. "It's all about the team," she said. "It's everyone working together, playing for the player next to you and not for yourself. Allie Lurie and Ally Smith our center defenders were huge but honestly it was everyone that made it work, our starters, our substitutes and even that players that didn't make it into the game were also important."

After the victory, Roemer spoke with the team to make sure they were aware of how unique an undefeated season is: "It's important for all of you to realize how special and rare an undefeated championship season is. It was all about you as a team. All I did was lay the foundation and you took it from there. I'm so proud of all of you."

Acalanes

Despite losing to Miramonte in the semifinals of the NCS championship, coach Misha Buchel was confident about the teams chances in the NorCal Championship. "I was really pleased with how the girls responded in the Miramonte game. They kept on fighting and got ready to take on the next level."

Ready they were, defeating San Ramon Valley (12-2) and Amador Valley (11-4) prior to the championship game against Arroyo Grande. Last Saturday at 10:30 in the morning, a caravan of Acalanes water polo players set off on a 248-mile, four-hour drive to play Arroyo Grande High School in the NorCal Championship.

The Dons were down by four goals after the first half but adjusted and put pressure on Arroyo Grande, reducing the lead to two goals in the fourth quarter. "We had several chances to cut the deficit to one," Buchel said. "We just couldn't find the back of the net, missing some great chances with bar outs and goalie tip outs."

After losing to Arroyo Grande earlier in the season, Buchel adjusted his game plan: "Our point of emphasis was to win the one-on-one matchups. I was really satisfied with our performance and effort even though the results were not what we wanted. We made it tough for Arroyo Grande and gave them everything that wanted but they just had a few more options on the offensive side than we did and that proved to be the difference in the game."

Once again it was Heidi Heffelfinger who led the offense and Audrey Cox who was her usual dominant self in the goal: "Audrey made some huge one-on-saves that helped us get back in the game," Buchel said.

Sophomore Olivia Williams also merited special recognition. Earlier in the day, Williams won the Girls Division IV NCS Cross Country Championship in Hayward. After stepping off the medal podium, she jumped into a car and made it in time to start and play almost the entire game. For Buchel, there was one regret: "We were only disappointed that Olivia was not able to be the first high school athlete to win two gold medals in a day."

Still, Buchel came away very satisfied with the performance of the team starting from day one. "We made steady progress all year long. Once invited into the Division II bracket, we were absolutely committed to do everything that we could to earn another gold banner and gold medal. We performed well in all three games. Considering where we started the season, I was super proud that we were able to come home with the silver medals, knowing that those opportunities are not frequent."

Campolindo

With 22 of their 27 games played against teams ranked in the top 25 nationally, Campolindo arguably played the toughest schedule of any team in the county.

"In NorCal, the top eight teams were pretty close. We had some rough moments against a lot of tough teams," coach Kim Everist said. "However, the team did a good job in keeping their eyes focused on the end of the season and not getting wrapped up in what was happening in the middle of the season and just trying to maintain their confidence and working through that tough part of the schedule."

After winning five of their first six games, Campolindo had winning and losing streaks of four games. "Still, we were stoked to be in the mix with the top teams," Everist said. "The girls did a good job of developing a

familiarity with each other and were able to maintain their confidence and working through the tough games is what ultimately brought them together."

Junior Goalie Shayne Clancy's play since moving over as a field player has been a constant source of pride for Everist: "She just keeps getting better and better. To see her improvement has been spectacular through the course of the season. She's been the backbone of our defense."

The Cougars held their opponents to single figures in 11 of their games. "In the back end of the season, our team defense really came together," Everist said. "Everybody in that primary group has really played a role on defense. Our center defenders were posting up and our attackers were playing center defenders, and everyone has had to pick up some different roles and filled them with great pride."

Maggie Hawkins, Kaia Levenfeld, Ana Pieper, and Paige Chivers were the leaders on offense. "With our strong center and outside shooters, we were able to make it tough on our opponents because they could not shut down the pockets," Everist said.

The growth of confidence the players developed were a key to their ultimate success. "Initially we did not know what we were capable of but, in the end, the girls were able to see within themselves as to what they can be capable of."

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