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## Lamorinda girls basketball a confluence of talent and youth

By Jon Kingdon



Karena Eberts (1) Photo Jon Kingdon

For the past few years, Acalanes (6-2) was not without talent. What they were lacking was numbers and when coach Margaret Gartner and assistant Scott Espinosa-Brown took over last year, their first goal was to enlarge the roster. Their efforts proved successful with 11 players on the varsity and a full JV roster this year.

What was their secret? "We recruited at school with free pizza at a lunchtime meeting and used the social media to get the word out," Gartner said. "We had camps and open gyms in the summer and played in a summer league. We had the girls ask their friends to come out and coaches from other sports were encouraging their girls to play basketball for the conditioning."

Last spring was Gartner's first year with the team but with the abbreviated season, no seniors, four juniors and seven freshmen and sophomores on this year's team, she is essentially starting from scratch this year. "This is a hard-working team that is very unselfish and is willing to make the extra pass," Gartner said.

It's a group that clearly wants to get better, according to Espinosa-Brown: "They're willing to be coached and they work hard. We're just trying to sustain that effort for longer periods of time."

The Dons' defense has been holding their opponents to an average of 35.5 points per game, addressing Gartner's primary goal: "It starts with defense because we're going to put a lot of pressure on our opponents because our first shots are not guaranteed to be going in. There will be games where shots are going to be hard to come by but when you can play defense, and you can get transition and more shots, then you can win the game."

The Acalanes offense is one that can adjust to the situation: "I like my team to score quickly and beat our opponents up the court," Gartner said. "We still have to have our sets because there will be games which teams will not allow us to run. Being so young and having a new offense, we are practicing on when to screen and when to cut. Our players have the green light to shoot because we don't want to put limitations on our girls, so they won't be hesitant to shoot."

Using a pressing defense and running offense, the Dons will be going deep on their bench this season. "With the pace that we want to have in our games, I'm going to try and get all of our players into the game," Gartner said. "This is the youngest team we've ever had so we have to be patient. There's a lot of unknowns and that's exciting. As long as we remember that, the players will be able to maintain their confidence."

The backcourt is led by three freshmen, Karyss Lacanlale, Sophie Chinn and Dulci Vail who have all stood out, and junior Emily Du has been very consistent. In their opening game against Windsor, Lacanlale had 17 points, Vail, 12 points, Chinn 9 points and 11 rebounds and Du 7 points.

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Lacking some height in the front court, the Lady Dons are compensating with more strength. "Our players have worked hard and shown that they love the weight room," Espinosa-Brown said. "If they can play strong and not get hurt, that's the key," added Gartner.

"We need to stay present," Espinosa-Brown said. "In our summer league, we played some very stellar teams, and the girls did not stay up with them because they did not think they could stay up with them. That confidence factor and going for it is a key which is the only way to play our defense."

Miramonte (3-6)

Having lost six players to graduation and with only two returning seniors, Miramonte is like a brand-new team that will be learning as they go along. "We don't have a lot of experience so we're rebuilding, and we have a ways to go," said head coach Vince Wirthman. "We're not what we were last year but I believe that

we can get there. We have some good players."

The backcourt starters will be junior Kendall Maurer and sophomore point guard Willa Mapaye. "Kendall is a good player and a great defender," Wirthman said. "Willa was on the varsity last season but did not get to play much. She is a talented player that just needs some experience. It's important for our guards to be solid with the ball and that should improve with experience."

The Lady Matadors have a lot of talent in the frontcourt led by Chloe Breznikar and Karena Eberts. "Eberts is a top talent and is able to play power forward and center," Wirthman said. "She averaged double doubles in the second half of last season because she is very good in the post and can shoot outside and is an aggressive rebounder (13.5/game so far). Chloe was on the varsity as a sophomore but did not play last season due to COVID, but she is a talented player and we're expecting a big year out of her."

Eberts (12.7 ppg/11.7 rpg) and Breznikar (9.7 ppg/7.7 rpg) are leading the team in scoring and rebounding, and Mapaye and Maurer are leading the team in assists.

Marissa DUBY, who sat out last year and Keawe Parker, a transfer from Pinole who was a volleyball player, are being counted on as backups in the frontcourt.

Complimenting Eberts and Breznikar in the low post are a host of outside shooters. Marianna Lawrence, Courtney and Katherine Scheingart will be relied on to score from the outside. "They are all good shooters," Wirthman said. "We are going to look to spread it out and get the ball inside to Karena and Chloe which will then allow us to get some good open threes."

Like so many coaches, the key for Wirthman is stopping the other team's offense. "Our defense is going to carry us one way or the other. We are going to press a lot and try to keep pressuring our opponents. We're really pointing for Jan. 4 when we start our league schedule."

#### Campolindo (2-4)

Campolindo's first year head coach Bill Flitter who coached the Cougar's JV team last year is starting with a clean slate. "With only one senior and two juniors, we're a young team but we have a lot of talent," Flitter said. "We've seen some early successes and even some signs of brilliance."

Flitter is looking to copy the success he saw at De La Salle where he once coached: "What made them successful was their program and I want to create that type of program at Campolindo that will outlive me. I want our team to live by three core values: always being coachable, compassionate, and competitive. If we can achieve those things, we're going to be successful. I'm in it for the long haul, not looking for short-term victories."

Flitter's philosophy can be summed up in one word: attack: "We want to always be attacking, putting a lot of pressure on the offensive and defensive sides. It's pretty simple: pressure."

Campolindo is not a big team and is going to be relying on movement. "We're a fast and quick team," Flitter said. "Some of the girls have surprised me at how well they can fill a gap. We want to get the ball out, fast break up the court and scoring quickly. We've also placed a big emphasis on rebounding and defense," Flitter said. "We held American scoreless for 10 minutes and have outrebounded both teams in our first two games. The girls showed who they can be which was very impressive."

There are a number of weapons that Flitter feels he is going to be able to call upon led by Maya Schwartz, Charlotte Arnsward, Camille Yabu, Catelyn Cereghino and Natalie Barkey. "Maya is a guard that is long, can also play the four and is a very accurate 3-point shooter, Charlotte just came back from an early season injury will bring the defensive pressure that we need. Camille is very fast player on both ends of the court and Catelyn is also a force in the frontcourt."

Flitter has been very impressed in the leadership and commitment that Barkey has displayed, along with the 27 points she scored in the opening game. "Natalie has stood up and taken on the leadership role. She will scout our opponents and write up reports, sending them to the team and commenting on how we should guard them and what to look for."

Lining up next to Barkey in the backcourt has been freshman Ali Mccauley. "Ali can play both guard positions and has done really well. She is a talented young lady."

With so many young players, Flitter anticipates constant improvement from the team. "COVID hampered the amount of playing time and experience our players have had but we're going to make up for that with our athleticism. The girls have been practicing very hard every day and it's been fun. I've been pleasantly surprised by the output."

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[back](#)

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