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Lamorinda basketball teams spend winter break in tournament play

By Jon Kingdon

For the local girls basketball teams, winter break means tournament time. For the girls, it's the West Coast Jamboree, which entails 120 different schools from all over the state and some out-of-state schools as well. In the past 22 years, there have been over 25,000 players and around 2,500 different teams that have played in the Jamboree. From the proceeds of the tournament, three scholar-athletes will each be awarded \$2,500 scholarships based on their GPA and written essay.

Former Miramonte head coach and current Carondelet head coach Kelly Sopak, in his eighth year as co-director, was excited at the return of the tournament after last year's hiatus. "It's really special to be back and it feels great," Sopak said. "It's been an all-year project to get it done from registering the teams to bracketing and the on-sight management of each of the divisions."

After arranging the teams into 14 brackets (each named after gems and minerals), changes due to the virus and weather issues forced the tournament heads to make some adjustments. "Originally, we were at 120 schools, but we had some cancellations due to COVID and only one of the Nevada teams was able to make it over the hill due to the weather," Sopak said. "Still, we were able to replace teams and move teams around the brackets."

The tournament was scheduled to utilize 10 area high schools for each bracket, but Northridge High School had an electrical explosion which forced the tournament to shift and double up on some of the schools. Campolindo (Amber Bracket) assistant coach Mark Ayers, filling in for head coach Bill Flitter in his first Jamboree, acknowledge the effort needed to put on such a large affair. "The girls and I appreciate the work and effort that went into it, setting up the divisions so they're competitive for everybody."

Highlighting the play for Campolindo has been two freshmen starters, Ali McCauley and Reagan Schum. "It's unexpected to have two freshmen starters," Ayers said. "Reagan has done very well, and Ali has been composed, strong and a great ball handler."

Campolindo defeated Sheldon 43-37, Liberty Ranch 47-44 and fell to McFarland in the championship game 57-51.

Miramonte (Jade Bracket) coach Vince Wirthman, coaching his first Jamboree, was glad to be back playing over the break. "All tournaments are fun, and you get to see teams you wouldn't normally play," Wirthman said. "If we were in one of the more elite brackets, it might mean a little more to the girls, but they are still very glad to be in the tournament."

After a slow start (1-6), the Lady Matadors have won their last six games.

The frontcourt players, Karena Eberts and Chloe Breznikar, have led the team. "They are the heart of the team," Wirthman said. "We're getting better for sure. We just need to get our guards going more consistently and hitting the open shots. Once we figure that out, we're going to be pretty good."

Miramonte defeated Irvington 51-38, Marin Academy 59-28 and defeated Encinal in the championship game 72-58.

Acalanes (Ivory Bracket) head coach Margaret Gartner has coached in almost all the prior Jamborees before coming to Acalanes and acknowledged how much work is put in to bring in so many teams from such varied distances.

The Lady Dons, with no seniors and seven freshmen and sophomores that all play, has a record (10-2) that belies their youth. "There is just too much for them to slow down and think about, so they don't realize how big this tournament is," Gartner said. "My team is special, and they have bought into and believe in our system, even when things are not going right. We're a very unselfish team that believes in each other."

Acalanes defeated Terre Linda 78-37, Eureka 51-37, and defeated Carlsbad in the championship game 69-46.

The boys teams' tournaments were more spread out with Campolindo playing in San Diego, Miramonte in Marin and Acalanes hosting the Chris Huber Memorial Tournament.

Campolindo's winning streak ended at 25 losing to Oak Cliff Faith Family Academy, ranked 12th in the state of Texas, 69-64. Coming into the game, Campolindo had played six games and Oak Cliff had played 18 games.

Shaking off the loss, Campolindo went on to defeat San Ysidro (San Diego) 70-58, Mira Costa (Manhattan Beach) 71-49 and St. Mary's (Phoenix) 54-49.

Miramonte entered tournament play with a 6-1 record. They proceeded to defeat San Martin (Novato) 79-37, Serra (San Mateo) 50-48, Folsom 61-48 and defeated King (Riverside) 72-64 in the championship game. Acalanes had a limited number of games early in the season due to COVID considerations. After the slow start, the Dons are still coming together. Acalanes defeated El Cerrito 74-59 before coming up short against Branson (Ross) 45-29 and Redwood 51-48.

League play begins this week.

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