

Published March 1st, 2023

Dons and Mats girls' basketball compete in NorCal tournament

By Jon Kingdon



Acalanes Head Coach Margaret Gartner, with assistant coaches Scott Espinosa-Brown and Katie Rathbun Photo Jon Kingdon

With a combined 45 and 12 record, the Acalanes (21-7) and Miramonte (24-5) girls' basketball teams had superior seasons, playing in the NCS tournament. By virtue of playing in the open division, Acalanes was guaranteed a spot in the NorCal tournament and received a seventh seed in Division I, playing 10th seeded Pinewood (Los Altos) on Feb. 28. "Pinewood will be a tough matchup but every team in Division I is a good team and it will be fun to try and get to the state tournament," Coach Margaret Gartner said.

It's been a huge jump for the Acalanes girls' basketball team since Gartner became the head coach. The Dons at that point were ranked 294th in the state by MaxPreps. As they prepare for their opening game in the NorCal tournament, their rank has jumped to 43rd.

Acalanes concluded their 2021-22 season with a first round loss in the CIF state championship to Salesian High School by a score for 76-40. This year, the team lost to the same Salesian team by a score of 64-62. "It definitely showed the girls' growth and that we've gotten used to close game situations."

Gartner made it a point to have a particularly difficult schedule prior to the league games with the goal of making the team ready for the playoffs. With a 20-7 record entering the North Coast Sectional tournament, the team has been battle tested through the year. The seven losses came against teams from California, New York, Arizona, and Las Vegas that on the average were ranked 17th in their respective states and had a combined 140 and 22 record.

"Our goal was to be playing our best basketball at the end of the season," Gartner said. "The players have learned from playing tough games. We say we win, or we learn. The team has to learn from a loss and look at it, which can be hard, but if you don't review it, you won't be able to correct it."

The team has been led by a core of sophomores Karyss (K.K.) Lacanlale (16.0 points, 4.2 assists, 3 rebounds and a 2.43 assist to turnover ratio), Dulci Vail (14.8 points, 8.2 rebounds and 1.4 assist), Sophie Chinn (12.9 points, 6.4 rebounds, 2.8 assists), Natalie Frechman (3.9 points) and Ariana Hallstrom (7.0 points, 3.1 assists and 3.3 rebounds).

The team has solid depth with junior Jenna Steele (1.3 points, 2.3 rebounds) and seniors Emily Du (5.3 points, 3.8 rebounds and 1.3 assists) and Nicole McCarthy (1.5 points and 2.3 rebounds). Natalie Lyons who was averaging 6.7 points is out with a concussion. Senior Sophia Alvarado was out for all of the season except for 20 seconds on senior night due to injuries and concussions but "she did provide great leadership for us," said Gartner.

Freshmen Alexis Le (5.3 points, 1.4 assists and 3.0 rebounds) and Cameron Thornton (3.0 points and 1.8 rebounds) have both contributed a lot and have shown great potential for the future.

Running hard practices has in many ways made the games less difficult, Gartner said: "Playing an opponent may actually be easier than practice because they don't know our players' games as well as their teammates do."

Gartner also works on the mental aspect of the game. "There are things we do in practice to show the girls that no lead is safe," Gartner said. "It helps them mature as players, knowing they are never out of a game and to just always compete."

Gartner is quick to share the team's success with the players: "They are a great group of girls that believe in each other, and they all put in the work. They came in with a competitive spirit and it was just a matter of being consistent day in and day out. They know they can't turn it on and off, it just has to be there 100% of the time."

Miramonte

By only making it to the semifinals in the Division II NCS tournament, Miramonte had to rely on receiving an at-large bid for the NorCal tournament. "It came down to us and Pinole Valley as to who would be chosen," Coach Vince Wirthman said. In the end, it was Pinole Valley that got the bid, but any way to look at the Matadors season, it would have to be considered a successful year."

After their first game of the season, the challenges that Miramonte faced increased exponentially with the season-ending injury to junior Willa Mapaye who was being counted on as the team's point guard and leader on the floor. In that first game, Mapaye had scored 11 points and had 7 rebounds, 3 assists and 4 steals.

At that point, Wirthman and the players decided to not look back. "We had a team meeting and talked about it and everybody realized what they had to do and they all stepped up their games," Wirthman said. "It also helped that Willa, a co-captain, came to all our practices and games and was a pseudo-assistant for us as well."

Leading the way were senior co-captains Katherine and Courtney Scheingart. "After Willa got hurt, Katherine stepped in as the point guard and it was a real eye-opener for me," Wirthman said. "She went right at her opponents. She, Courtney and (junior co-captain) Karena Eberts, were great leaders all year long. It was also fortunate that we did not have any other major injuries during the season."

Eberts led the team averaging 18 points and 12.4 rebounds per game. Katherine Scheingart averaged 10.1 point, 5.8 rebounds, 4.7 assists and 3.7 steals per game. Courtney Scheingart averaged 14.0 points and 3.9 rebounds per game. The other starters were sophomore guard Julia Quinn Ferguson (5.0 points, 5.3 rebounds, 2.5 assists and 2.8 steals) and junior guard Marianna Lawrence (3.7 points, 3.0 rebounds and 1.6 assists).

"Julia worked into the starting lineup and played a ton," Wirthman said. "She is just a good all-around player that played good defense, rebounded and handled the ball when needed. Marianna played well and got better all year long."

With the team only graduating the Scheingarts, Wirthman is already optimistic about the team's future: "Katherine and Courtney were very valuable to this team but with our returning starters, we have young talent coming up and we'll also be getting Willa back for her senior season."

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