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Lamorinda battling their opponents and the weather

By Jon Kingdon



Acalanes pitcher Henry Souza Photo provided

Throughout this year, hot weather, cold weather and wet weather has interfered with all of the sports teams. For the baseball teams, it all came together with a combination of cold, wet and wind that has interfered with the teams' practices and scheduled games.

"The weather has been a challenge but there's nothing you can do about it so you have to play this scheduling Tetris game. I'd rather have three game weeks than try to play on a sloppy field. It's challenging but you just try to be as easy to work with as possible and we're trying to get games in," Miramonte head coach Sean Hennessey said.

Acalanes

Even with the bad weather, Acalanes has been able to have a 6-4 record and are ranked fifth by the Bay Area News Group. "A lot can happen but our wins over two big named Division I schools, Monte Vista (5-0) and Foothill (3-0), put us on the radar, but we still have to keep winning," coach Connor Hornsby said.

Hornsby has become most comfortable with this year's team. "This is the first year that I've been able to have a lot of my own guys and establish a culture around a blue-collar program," Hornsby said. "I preach mentality, culture, grit and grim as to how the game should be played which a lot of teams have gotten away from."

With the loss of 12 seniors to graduation, the team is only returning three starters. "We did lose some talent, but we have a younger class that puts in the extra time," Hornsby said.

The team defense has been solid with only seven errors so far this season. Sophomore shortstop James Stadt and junior third baseman Gavin Bender have been solid on the left side of the infield. "James has played very well and Gavin, who was a middle infielder, is getting more comfortable at third," Hornsby said. "Coach Hal Marty has put a fire under our outfielders with Andrew Habas in center, Keegan Goddard in left and Benji O'Rourke in right."

The pitching staff has only given up six runs in their six wins, including two shutouts and are led by Henry Souza, Mason Zirkel and Peter Thorn.

"Souza had a tired arm early in the season but has been ramping it up and has the most experience and success," Hornsby said. "This is Zirkel's first time on the varsity and he's being used as a starter and a closer and he should keep adding quality starts and innings for us. Thorn is a very confident pitcher that does a great job in throwing strikes."

Senior catcher Sammy Lee has been a good leader for the young pitching staff. "Sammy has done a great job behind the plate," Hornsby said. "He's an intense player and when the pitchers miss their spots, he will let them know and hold them accountable."

The offense has been led by Habas, O'Rourke, Lee, and Stadt who are all batting over .300. "Stadt is my 'second leadoff hitter' who bats in the ninth spot. I like guys at the bottom of the order that can handle the bat," Hornsby said. "We're a small ball program and it's starting to unfold and show that the old school, west coast way of baseball can produce wins."

Hornsby likes to play the role of underdog and just do things a little better than their opponents: "We're the smallest team in Division I and we understand that we're going to have to work harder, run the bases better, and execute better. We preach being confident and leaning on each other when guys are struggling and to be ready when their name is called upon."

Campolindo

Having been hired last January, it was a short off-season for Julian Fiammengo who has seen the team start off with a 4-4-1 record. "We definitely have the ability and the potential to be good," Fiammengo said. "We need to come focused and engaged every day and with every pitch. If we can continue to buy in and look to engage every pitch, we'll be okay. I try to plan as much as I can, but things happen like the weather and


our depth and injuries and whatnot. It's just putting the pieces of the puzzle together every day."

The Cougars are an amalgam of experience and youth with nine seniors and three juniors and two sophomores and three freshmen on the roster.

Leading the offense is senior Hideki Prather who will be playing for Clemson next year. "Hideki is a top catcher that can also play the infield and be a designated hitter," Fiammengo said. "He's a competitive batter and junior Cameron Imberg is getting a lot of experience behind the plate as well."

Fiammengo's philosophy is to be aggressive on offense: "We love to run and put pressure on our opponents and hopefully we can put good swings on balls. We really preach hitting the ball hard on the line and on the ground and making the defense play catch."

There is good depth on the pitching staff which is crucial because with all of the bad weather and games to be made up, Campolindo, again depending on the weather, may be playing six games in seven days. "We've really been monitoring the pitch counts to make sure that the pitchers stay fresh," Fiammengo said. "We have tournament game and double headers coming up."

The staff is led by seniors Philip Jagard, Adrian Blumberg and Hudson Pergamit and freshman Graham Schlicht and has the depth to use others as starters as the need arises. It's still early in the season to know who will establish themselves as the team's closer. "We're still figuring out who is going to fill that role," Fiammengo said. "At this point, it's week to week depending on what happens but I feel confident in a number of guys like freshman Dom Caruso, a left hander who had a 2  save at San Ramon Valley."

The defense has been solid in both the infield and outfield. "Andy Moon (SS) and Miles Clayton (2nd base) have had good games up the middle and Nick Rogers will go and get the ball in center field," Fiammengo said.

Fiammengo is not one to be afraid to play his freshmen: "Obviously they're young and a little green and have a lot of learning to do but they're physical and talented and we're looking to get them some experience so that they can come back as sophomores and juniors and really compete. Blake Robeson is our right fielder, and his backup is Graham Schlicht and we've also used some freshmen in pinch hit opportunities."

Fiammengo won't let the team get complacent: "There's still a lot of room for improvement everywhere on the team. We just really need to keep digging in all areas - defense, pitching, hitting and base running."

Miramonte

Despite only having played six games (3-3), head coach Sean Hennessey feels good about his team. "I've been pleased. We played well against a top team in Amador Valley which was a good lead into our league and then we had a two-week gap because of the weather," Hennessey said.

This is a mature team with 21 seniors (12) and juniors (9) and three sophomores. "We have very good leadership on this team, led by Mike Bohm and football players Cooper Bohlig and John Williams," Hennessey said. "Overall, the upperclassmen are very businesslike and they want to do well and I couldn't be happier with the team. They're a lot of fun to be around."

The pitching staff looks to be the strength of the team with Bohm and junior J.D. Pearce being the aces of the staff. "Michael has pitched a lot since his sophomore year and I've been thrilled to coach him and J.D. is just as good a pitcher," Hennessey said. "We can go 7-8 deep with varsity arms than can help us if we have three or four game weeks. After Bohm and Pearce, we have Alex Fordyce, Luca Gamboa and Justin Bellamy that can all be starters and also fill in as relievers and when we can play more games, we'll be able to really know who will fill those roles."

Complementing the pitching has been the defensive play of the Matadors. "We've been playing excellent defense in the infield, outfield, catching and pitching," Hennessey said. Max Friedman (SS) and Carson Beury (2nd base) and Gardner Dunne in left and Bohlig and the catchers senior John Williams and junior Joe Shallat have been the foundation for the defense.

The offense has been led by Bohlig, Friedman and Beury. "Once we can actually put some games together, we'll be able to figure out our offensive identity," Hennessey said. "We are more aggressive on the base paths than last year and we can do more with hit and run and bunting. I like to put pressure on the defense which is what we did late in the Berean Christian game."

As the team enters league play, Hennessey sees his pitching as the key to be successful. "We're in a league with Las Lomas, Concord, Alhambra and Berean this year and we will be competing for the league championship," Hennessey said. "We are all blessed with good pitching so it's going to be who can execute on the offensive end, being able to drive the ball and manufacturing runs."

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