

Great anticipation for Lamorinda Football this season



Photo Ann Murphy

Miramonte players: #9 Preston Rguem (far left), #53 John Kelly, #2 QB Carson Blair and #11 Luke Milmoe

By Jon Kingdon

The bar as usual has been set high for the Lamorinda football teams, with all three having made NCS playoffs last season. With a constant turnover through graduation, maintaining excellence requires constant adjustment at every position.

Acalanes

After a 10-2 season, there is great anticipation for the Dons this season. "We've got a lot of talent and experienced players in key positions," Acalanes head coach Floyd Burnsed said. "With both of our quarterbacks returning and a lot of talented receivers, along with a number of talented defensive players, we should be good this year."

Seniors Sully Bailey and Jake Boselli split the quarterback role with equal effectiveness. "Both played well," Burnsed said. "One week, Sully played better and the next week, Jake played better but whoever was out there, I was confident that they were going to get the job done."

Even with the graduation of Ellis Burger, Burnsed is confident with his running backs. "Jack Miller will be the starter and Jack Giorgianni, a three-year starter at linebacker is very talented at both positions," Burnsed said. "We have another player that's very talented, sophomore Deonte Littlejohn, who's going to be a superstar."

With two returning seniors who were on the 4x100 relay team that finished second in the state, Trevor Rogers (19.3/catch and 15 touchdowns) and Paul Kuhner (33 receptions and 13.4/catch), there is no shortage of speed among the wide receivers. "We also have a lot of depth here with seniors Henry Souza and Mason Zirkel along with Niko White, who was a dominating player on the JV and can also be used in the backfield," Burnsed said.

The offensive line has both

experienced and young seniors Henry Hagel, Trevor Carrillo, J.D. O'Rear (whose father played center for Burnsed at Miramonte), Brady Morrow and junior Drew McKenzie who played JV last year and will be lining up at left tackle.

The defensive line will be led by two returners, Morrow and Chase Caicedo. Aiden Yates (3 sacks) is also back playing defensive end.

Besides Giorgianni (94 tackles), Collin Malmquist is also a returning player. Burnsed is very excited about a new player, a junior, Wyatt Cooper, a top baseball player, playing his first year of football. "Wyatt is a great athlete with good size who runs well and shows great potential. He just needs a little playing time."

Gavin Bender (42 tackles), Everet Glass (30 tackles) and Trevor Rogers will be the key cornerbacks for the Dons and Kuhner has really stood out at safety. "Paul really showed great range at our camp in Lake Tahoe, being able to start on one hash mark and make an interception on the opposite sideline and he's going to be hard to get him off the field."

There is still a consistent character and attitude of the team from the success of last season. "We've improved in a couple of areas and maybe quite a couple of other areas," Burnsed said. "The main thing is that I'm really confident with our starting offense and defense but staying healthy is also a big concern and we need to get backups ready to go. Like all high schools in certain positions, we can't afford to lose key kids. It makes a big difference so those are the big things we have to do."

The Dons lost their opening game on the road to San Marin (Novato) 27-20.

Miramonte

Coming off an 8-5 season and making it to the third round of the NCS playoffs, losing in the finals to the eventual state champion, San Marin, Miramonte looks to be battle

hardened. "This is a good group," said head coach Jack Schram. "Two years ago, when most of them were sophomores and juniors on the JV team, they went eight and two and we can build off of that."

Quarterback coach Ross Bowers also sees that focus with the team: "When you lose a championship, it only motivates the next group. We were just a couple plays short to a very good San Marin team so at the end of the day, we learned from it, and I think the juniors on that team took it personally and really wanted to make sure that we finished the season the right way this year."

Senior Myles Bastani, who saw limited playing time last year backing up Luke Duncan at quarterback has established himself as the team's starter. With Duncan (now at UCLA), the offense has made some early adjustments. "We'll probably be a bit more balanced," Schram said. "We do have very good receivers and if teams stack the lines on us, we'll throw it and if they don't, we'll run it. We have some good run-pass options, so we'll be able to fake the run and we had some success with it in our scrimmage."

There are two solid backups for Bastani in junior Mitch Reichenbach and sophomore Carson Blair. "Both of them have done tremendous jobs as leaders and in running the offense," Bowers said. "They all have different strengths and we're lucky to have three guys that have really stepped up this offseason to really push themselves to lead by example and it's been a lot of fun to watch."

The team is looking to have a more balanced passing and running game. "We do have very good receivers and if teams stack the lines of us, we'll throw it and if they don't, we'll run it," Schram said. "We have some good run-pass options, so we'll be able to fake the run and we had some success with it in our scrimmage. Matt Litwin and Gabe Roman

have been great so far in the backfield along with Luke Milmoe who is also a good receiver out of the backfield. We also used Reichenbach as a running back in our scrimmage and he made a big run."

J.D. Pearce is the top returning wide receiver and Schram is looking to make use of the tight end position. "We are going to use the tight end in a lot of our sets, and we will also go with two tight ends at times," Schram said. "We'll be using sophomore Andrew Bjornson, junior Tanner Gunn and seniors Joe Shallat and Finn McManus and Milmoe can also play there and in the slot."

The offensive line is set with Andrew Davenport at right tackle, Palmer Rhodes at left tackle, with John Kelly and Preston Hawthorne and Nick Blair at center. And it's a veteran defensive line led by Will Scott, Davenport and Kelly and the linebackers are a solid group led by Finn McManus, Gabe Roman and Milmoe.

"We'll also be counting on Wyatt Feusier who was hurt all of last year and is looking very good in the middle," Schram said.

The key for Schram as it has been for every season? "We need to stay healthy, and our goal once again is to make it to the Division 5 playoffs."

Led by Blair's three touchdown passes, Miramonte defeated Berkeley 28-12 in their home opener.

Campolindo

With the graduation of a number of key players from last year's 12-1 team, the goal for head coach Kevin Macy was to rearm and add depth coming into the season. "We lacked backup in key positions last season and that caught up to us in the section championship," Macy said. "The theme this year is 'Noah's Ark.' We need two of everything though there is more depth on the defense with a lot of players playing new positions." Max Robeson, a 6'4" junior, will be the team's starting quarterback after leading the JV last season. "We are only asking for simple efficiency from the QB position early in the season and we'll go from there," Macy said.

"Max showed in our scrimmages that he can step up and be a leader in the offense and put the ball where it needs to be and he'll certainly be helped out by our offensive coordinator Chris Schofield who knows his strengths and weakness," Senior wide receiver Tim Daugherty said.

With the loss of starting running back Blaise Clancy to a season ending knee injury, the team will be counting on junior Matthew Sugiyama. "Sugi is a really good running back and we've told him that we trust him to be able to run the ball," said guard Max O'Balle.

Senior wide receivers Scott Lyon (46/467) and Tim Daugherty (33/567) bring a lot of experience that should facilitate

Robeson's play at quarterback. "We really have to pay a lot of attention to detail, knowing what we're doing all the time and developing that trust in each other," Lyon said.

The most stable position for the Cougars has to be on the all-senior offensive line which has the same five starters from last season. They will line up with Frank Anderson at LT, Max O'Balle at LG, Nick Walker at Center, Shane Harris at RG, and Bryce McLaverty at right tackle.

"We passed most of the time last year and this year it may be other way around," Anderson said. "It's all going to come down to team effort."

O'Balle accepts the responsibility the offensive line has taken on: "We are the only true unit coming back and we really have to take care of this team. Our job has been to show the coaches that they can trust us. Once we can run the ball, everything else will open up."

The defensive line is being led by Henry Fitzinger, Anderson, O'Balle, Crosby and Rafael Alvarez. "Our aim is to definitely play as nasty as we can and stuff in the run and be just as nasty on our pass rush," Fitzinger said.

For Kelly, who will also line up as a linebacker, it's been a big change from last year's JV team. "The game is a lot faster, but I'm getting more adjusted to it," Kelly said. "The upperclassmen have been great mentors to me, showing me the way."

As co-captain of the defense, outside linebacker James Erickson is taking charge this year. "We had a lot of good leaders on defense and I'm just trying to emulate how they led the underclassmen like me," Erickson said. "We're going to have to play tough in the box, rallying to every tackle, not relying on solo tackles."

Josh Tsai has welcomed his move to linebacker from the defensive line. "The change has not been that big of a deal," Tsai said. "I can move around a lot more rather than just being stuck in the gap. I have been working more on my eye discipline to avoid looking in the wrong place."

Jake Spencer is another returning starter in the veteran defensive backfield. "We've spent a lot of time on the field together and we've built a bond that way," Spencer said. "We've spent a lot of time practicing with Luke Bonardi and we've come to know him well and his tendencies. We're just trying to emphasize grit and turnovers and that's the main force of our DB group."

"We're looking for our offensive line to give us a degree of stability while we sort out some issues in the offense," Macy said. "Our defense will have to be the strong point for the team if we are going to have any success." Behind a stellar defense, Campolindo defeated Vanden (Fairfield) 29-23 in double overtime.

Flag football for girls begins its first season in Lamorinda

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Even at the youngest level, the game can be a little physical, but for Dylan it's been really enjoyable. "After catching a ball, you may get tripped," she said. "It's been a lot of fun playing with my teammates,

especially when you score a touchdown and I found that people were impressed when they heard that I was playing flag football."

Dylan's advice to new players: "Don't be intimidated. It's hard to start a new sport but it's really fun when you get the hang of it. I'm looking forward to playing in high school."

Last year, flag football was played in Southern California and proved to be very successful. Corey Thedford, the flag football coach at Hawthorne High School, was excited at the growth potential of the sport. "I don't think everybody understands how big this thing is go-

ing to be," Thedford said.

When the first American woman won a gold medal in wrestling in 2016 at the Olympics the number of females going out for wrestling skyrocketed. All 32 teams in the National Football League have a community liaison aiming for the sport's inclusion in high

school and other arenas and the league is working very hard to see that flag football will be an Olympic event in 2028 in Los Angeles and will be anticipating a similar jump in participation after those games.

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