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Lots of fresh faces on Lamorinda girls' volleyball teams

By Jon Kingdon



Miramonte #10 Emma Romweber, Campolindo #15 Clara Biddle / Miramonte #8 Hannah Rush, Campolindo #19 Maddie Carpenter Photos Mark Bell

As a rule, there is always a certain amount of turnover with every high school team, mostly through graduation. This is a year that has seen the Lamorinda girls' volleyball teams having lost more than their share of players from last year and having to rely on a large number of underclassmen and first year players up from their JV teams.

Acalanes

With a roster having only two seniors, the Dons are relying on a core of seven juniors and two sophomores this season. So far, so good with Acalanes having a record of 8-4. "In our first few games, it was knowing that it is a growing experience for our players because a lot of them haven't been on varsity," head coach Haley Walsh said. "They were still getting used to the rhythm and the pace of playing at a higher level and after a big win against Rancho Cotate in our third match, it looks like we're just about there."

Both the varsity and JV teams have a lot of size which has helped in the team's early success. The front line has only one returning player, junior outside hitter MaeLin Mason along with six other juniors and three sophomores. "We're excited about the different front row players on our roster that we have to utilize," Walsh said. "We're also able to use all of them multiple times with multiple positions and it's nice to have that flexibility."

Walsh has made it a point to use every one of her frontline players: "We have a number of players from last year's JV team that had a 21-7 record and none of them seem to be intimidated at playing on the varsity and by playing them all, when we get to the NCS, I will know that I can call on anyone off the bench. We've played some tough teams early and it has helped with the maturation process."

Three sophomores - Sophia Terry, Piper Coy and Kylah Rose Fox - have all been effective players on the front line. "It can be a little bit intimidating to play as sophomores and we saw that in the first set of the first match, but ever since then they've been balling out and not looking back," Walsh said. "Sophia and Piper have made a great transition. Kylah is injured right now, but we're looking forward to her return hopefully in a couple of weeks. Junior Annie Baker has also stepped up on the right side."

There is senior leadership on the back line led by libero Jade Profilio and defensive specialist Mika Bocobo. "Jade and Mika have really stepped up in terms of running our defense and solidifying it so that everyone feels comfortable in their zones," Walsh said. "Junior setter Emma Seelenbacher is also part of the group that has helped players like sophomore Christina Hageboeck in adjusting to the setter position. As a junior, Jade had 540 digs last season and is hoping to conclude her career with over 1,000 digs."

For Walsh, at this point, the strength of the team's offense and its ability to attack from multiple positions and out of system, along with the flexibility helped by having nine players on the front that she has the confidence to use.

"For us to be successful, we have to improve our serving and passing," Walsh said. "We've been working hard to improve our overall consistency in our serving and our side out percentages."

Miramonte

Miramonte head coach Leslie Ray doesn't beat around the bush. "We're in a rebuilding phase," Ray said. "I lost 10 seniors from last year, seven of whom were the top killers on offense, so last year's underclassmen are stepping into big shoes that they have to fill." With a roster of six seniors, four juniors, four sophomores and two freshmen, this is a team that is building for the future. "We're working hard and striving in every practice to get better," Ray said. "We're trying to figure out what our DNA is and what defines us as a team and all that will all come with the growth of the team."

Being a little undersized, Ray is working hard to put together the right combination on the front line. "It's about building the mentality that they can get out there and compete with anybody," Ray said. "We're going to work more on making sure that we're more control driven and taking our swings when we need to and

just being smart with the ball."

The front line is led by co-captain Sadie Symonds, Hannah Rush, junior Amanda Roach, and freshman Sena Hens. "Sadie has been one of my top hitters and Hannah who played in the back line last year is now playing opposite and has one of the best arm swings as a lefty on the team. Amanda has been playing very well and Sena has a nice swing and has been doing very well as an outside hitter. I'm not afraid to play freshmen and in a year like this, I have to get them on the court."

The strength of the team is on the back line led by co-captain and four-year starter, libero Nicole Tuszynski and senior setter Keira Elliot. Also being used in the back line are senior co-captain Tara Dao, sophomore libero Ava Burton and freshman setter Maddie Yun.

"Nicole is one of the top liberos in our league and with Keira are a strong pair," Ray said. "Tara who is listed as an outside hitter will also be playing as a defensive specialist along with Sadie Symonds. Ava Burton should also see a lot more time as a libero as the season develops. Maddie, who played club prior to entering high school, plays so calm and is really mature for a freshman and is playing a lot behind Keira."

Having coached for so many years, Ray knows what it takes to put together a winning team. "For us to be successful it's just not letting any team that comes your way win, or lose, but knowing how to deal with it. It's up to us to grow from every experience and our ultimate plan for every game is to get better."

Campolindo

It's accepted that every team will lose players to graduation but for the Campolindo team, there were other key losses for the team that had not been expected. Charlotta Bell, the team's MVP last season, is coming off knee surgery and is out for the beginning of the season, Makenna Crosson moved with her family to San Jose and another starter simply opted to no longer play high school volleyball which has led to Campolindo having an uncharacteristic 3-4 record.

"When you lose three starters that had Division I college potential, you have to build with what you've got," head coach John Vuong said. "We're improving and progressing but with those losses, that's why we are where we are at today."

At this point, Vuong is looking for the chemistry on the team to develop. "We've had a lot of unforced errors which is showing that the girls don't have the necessary understanding of each other on the court," Vuong said.

Right now, our leader in the front court is Aveya Stone who is getting a lot of looks," Vuong said "We also have Hanna Bjornson, Gwen Koplan, and Charlotte Eirich on the outside. Mia Walloch and

Ava Rogers are up from JV and we have a junior transfer that came in from Texas, Gia Okulicz, who is an athletic, well-rounded player who will be playing on the outside."

Things just don't come together that quickly with so many new players. "It's going to take about a half a season for these guys to come together," Vuong said.

Things are also in a bit of flux on the back row as well. "At this point it's still wide open as to who among six players is going to establish themselves as the starting libero and another five who are competing for the defensive specialist position," Vuong said. "We don't have a true, established lineup and we're still trying to figure out whether to run a 5-1 or 6-2 lineup. There is a lot of uncertainty right now for us to define who we are."

Rachel Andre is the Cougars' senior setter along with sophomore Cassidy Woo who is up from last year's JV team. "It's a challenge now," Vuong said, "and I believe that it is going to be wide open in our league and anybody can win it, so it does make it more interesting and exciting."

Vuong's advice to his players is simple and succinct: "I tell them to accept who you are. You can't be last year's team or other teams from the past. You have to be who you are. Be better than yesterday and set small goals. That's what I am asking of them, and I've seen it in practice."

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