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Competition Fierce Among Water Polo Rivals

By Spencer Silva



Alexander Zamanian's goal clinched the win for the Mats. Photo Andy Scheck

Miramonte looked strong early, and, in spite of the late fireworks, they still managed to maintain the lead from sprint to final whistle. They looked to be in mid-season form, fresh off a tournament where they played a number of elite teams. The week before, on Oct. 8, the Mats suffered a heartbreaking 8-11 loss to crosstown rivals Campolindo, a rematch of last season's NCS championship game.

Lathrop believes the tough matches in the early season have prepared his team for the long haul. "We played a tournament in Southern California earlier in the season and got sixth place out of 32 teams," he explained, "it was good see the team go up against some of the best competition around."

Acalanes, on the other hand, has struggled early, but the team is rapidly improving. They lost seven seniors from last year's team and their new starters seem to be stepping into their expanded roles.

The Oct. 15 match was a crucial step in the right direction, as they gave one of the area's best teams a run for their money. "Miramonte is a really good team," said coach Clarke Tamariki after the match. "Towards the end of the match against Miramonte we focused on defense. We got some fortunate match-ups and capitalized."

Playing defense and capitalizing on "man-ups," plays in which the opposing team has one fewer man in the pool because of a penalty, will be the ingredients of greater success moving forward. "If we can do that, who knows?" he asked rhetorically, leaving room for a possible run in the playoffs.

Campo (11-4) is off to a hot start too. They're 2-0 in the DFAL, and have beaten both of their Lamorinda rivals. Two of their four losses have come at the hands of Sacred Heart (13-1), arguably Northern California's best team. In their latest meeting, the Cougars nearly bested the Gators, losing 14-15 in the finals of the NCS-Challenge tournament.

The DFAL ended in a three-way tie between Campo, Miramonte and Las Lomas in 2013. The landscape is similar as all three teams are poised for success in 2014. Campo head coach Miles Price noted that the Cougars have an important match against the Las Lomas Knights (12-6) on Oct. 22.

At the end of the third quarter of their match against Miramonte, the Acalanes boys' water polo team's chances looked bleak. On Oct. 15, Miramonte (10-4) pushed its 6-4 halftime lead to 12-7 on the back of Cal-bound senior Jordan Hoover's four-goal quarter.

However, even with the match seemingly out of reach, the Dons (6-11) refused to quit. They scored four unanswered goals in the fourth to cut the lead to 12-11, and, with minutes left, they were suddenly within reach of victory. But with 2:07 left Mats' junior Alexander Zamanian buried the match's final goal, and along with it, the threat of an Acalanes comeback.

It was an exciting final quarter, as these two rival teams left their hearts floating in the pool. "These guys play for the same club team," said Miramonte coach James Lathrop, "playing guys you're friends with is always an extra challenge."

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