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Top Water Polo Clubs Gear Up for Junior Olympics

By Emily Dugdale



Goalie Spencer Tagg Photo Gint Federas

The three clubs have shown well in other tournaments - most notably, the Lamorinda 18U boys placed fourth in the Ironman Superfinals tournament earlier in the month. (Head Coach Clarke Tamariki was recognized as the tournament's best coach.)

Speaking to the clout of the 18U team, Director James Lathrop remarked that the strength of the team "is really in the depth of the team as a whole. We have a really good mix of kids, so I'd be hard-pressed to pick just a few stand-out players."

The 680 Drivers will expect to see plenty of support at Junior Olympics from an influx of incoming freshmen, according to head coach Miles Price. "We've been doing a lot of summer practices, just to build up chemistry," he said. "It's good to get all the guys together."

"I think we have a very solid team going. We're really young, so I think that could either play to our advantage or be a disadvantage," said Campo standout Cole Stevens of the tournament.

At the Ironman tournament, the team placed sixth, a few spots behind Lamorinda Blue. Goalie Spencer Tagg was recognized as the tournament's best goalie. "We like what we see," Price explained. "We're feeling very confident about the team ahead."

Contra Costa's teams will bring experience and top honors to the competition. While ranked in the middle of the contending champion teams, the 18U club boasts a strong lineup of veteran older players.

"I am very proud of our team qualifying for the Championship Division of Junior Olympics," 18U head coach Ken Harmon said. The team has 12 players on the roster, including Liam Williams, a top goalie in Northern California who will attend the University of Pacific in the fall, and Ben Harmon, 10th team All-American and First Team All-East Bay Athletic League (EBAL).

Williams noted that this year's squad is a "well-defined, directed team," whose only speed bump might be the small stature of many of the players. "We're a little smaller than the other guys, so we're going to have to work around that," he said.

As of Sunday: Lamorinda (2-3), 680 Drivers (3-1), CC United (3-2)

Girls' Preview

The girls' teams will look to retain their dominance at Junior Olympics this year after several top rankings at last year's championship. With plenty of talent in some of their younger squads, expect to see solid defense and excellence in the cage from rising high school stars.

The Water Polo Junior Olympics began in Orange County, Calif., this past weekend. The boys' tournament was held July 25-28, and the girls' tournament is slated for July 29 to Aug 2. The tournament consists of three divisions: Championship, Classic, and Invitation. The top 48 teams in the country compete in the Championship Division, the next 49-96 teams compete in the Classic, and the 97-108 ranked teams battle it out in the Invitational. Three local teams will play in the Championship Division: the Lamorinda Blue, the 680 Drivers and Contra Costa United.

Boys' Preview

After a middle-of-the-pack finish in 2014, the boys' club teams are looking to advance this summer. They boast multiple teams across age groups and a bevy of confident coaches. They'll look to capitalize on both experience and youth.

The 18U squad has plenty of returning players who will look to be a contending force at the tournament. "Our girls are super strong this year," said Cat Arroyo, director of the Lamorinda girls' water polo program. "[The 16U's are] a fairly new team, so it's hard to measure up with last year's team. We're just hoping to play above our potential and see where we end up."

According to Arroyo, the youngest squads are showing the most potential. The 14U and 12U teams are the tightest groups as far as consistency and they expect to turn out some of the club's best performances.

"They're playing really well together as a team - they're going to be pretty hard to take down," Arroyo said.

Expect strong performances from 18U players Kelsey Kneele, Adrian Martin, and Dom Clark, as well as 14U Cameron Sutter, and 12U all-around force Sally Feldner.

The 680 Drivers will be sending six girls' teams and one co-ed team to the upcoming tournament. Their strength lies in the performances of some of their younger squads, including knockout performances from their 12U and 14U squads.

"Speed is our forte," 680 director Miles "Mundy" Mundelius said when reflecting on his teams.

For this club, the girls blocking the net are the keys to victory. "We have some phenomenal goalies that keep us in the game - they're the strength of our team," 14U head coach Todd Halvorson said. He highlighted performances from 14U goalie Madison Davis and 12U Natasha Kantor as reasons for the club's solid season this summer.

Two weeks ago, his team played some of the top teams in the nation and came out in second place at the US Club Championships. "They've got some great momentum," Halvorson said. "Now it's just fine tuning it, and making some corrections."

He commented that playing six to 10 games over the course of four days always turns into a battle for all of the team.

"Everything's on the line," he said. "Two years ago we won it all, and we hope to get back into it and do it again."

Boys' Teams Results Through Sunday:

Lamorinda 18U - W 2, L 3

Lamorinda 16U - W 2, L 3

Lamorinda 14U - W 4, L 0

Lamorinda 12U - W 2, L 2

680 18U - W 3, L 1

680 16U - W 4, L 2

680 14U - W 3, L 2

680 12U - W 3, L 1

CCU 18U - W 3, L 2

CCU 16U - W 2, L 4

CCU 14U - W 3, L 2

CCU 12U - W 4, L 0

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