

Lady Mats Secure First NCS Title in 17 Years

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Cougar freshman Zoe Crouch rips a shot in the second half

Throughout the season, coach Murphy has emphasized the importance of steely defense. Once again, versus Campo, defense took the day.

“Defense was key,” Murphy said. “We were able to lock down their key players for most of the match.”

The centerpiece of the team’s defense, senior Paige Miller, was at the heart of the team’s success all season. On Saturday, she tallied 13 saves, including a 5-meter penalty block with time expiring. Miller is headed to San Diego State for water polo next fall, so notching an NCS title after coming up short the last two years was particularly special.

Asked of the difference between this year’s team and previous ones, Miller said: “The team chemistry this year was unbelievable.”

It was a charmed season for the Matadors, and first-year head coach Murphy was quick to point out that number 17 is not only his lucky number, but also the number he wore on his cap at Cal during his playing days.

“It’s a really special moment for this program,” Murphy added. “It was just our year, it was our turn.”

Coincidentally, the last time the Lady Mats won the NCS Championship, a familiar face was coaching the team: Cougars’ head coach Kim Everist.

“It’s been a long time coming for the Mats,” Everist said after the match. “I’m excited for them.”

The Cougars had a tough season in 2015, by their standards. They graduated much of the talent that netted them three straight NCS titles (and

four in five years), and failed to eclipse the 20-win mark for the first time since 2010.

“Our team motto this year has been: improvise, adapt, and overcome,” Everist explained. “That’s the kind of season it’s been.”

The road to the NCS Championship was a roller coaster ride. The season reached a low point when the Cougars dropped consecutive matches to Acalanes and Miramonte in DFAL play. Everist was ejected from the double-overtime, sudden death loss to the Lady Dons, which meant missing the following match against Miramonte: the first absence of her 24-year coaching career.

In the semifinal, the Cougars found themselves in another thriller with the Dons. This time, it was the Cougars that came out on top in overtime, winning by a score of 6-5.

The Cougars graduate just two seniors, Tal Shoshan and Ellen Gerst, and a number of its key players – including junior attacker Olivia Price, who scored three of Campo’s four goals Saturday – will return to the pool next fall.

With both teams returning the bulk of their talent next season, the classic Miramonte-Campolindo rivalry has the potential to reach all-time heights in the coming years.

“North Coast always comes down to your rival games,” Everist said. “We’re always going to do our best to beat Miramonte and Acalanes, and I would expect nothing less from them.”



Miramonte head coach Noel Murphy

Photos Gint Federas

Orinda

Crossroads' Scene Changing

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Asked about the inevitable comparison with La Piazza, his restaurant’s popular Italian cuisine neighbor down the street, Hadjian pointed to his successful North Beach restaurant, Piazza Pellegrini, as an indication that people seem to gravitate to places that offer several Italian eateries. He wishes La Piazza only the best, he says, and offers his regionally varied menu, which “puts the best of all of Italy” in one place, as the distinction between their approaches to food.

Whether these relatively small developments are a bellwether for the bigger changes some Orinda residents seek, only time will tell. But there is no doubt that change is in the wind. Skeptics might well remember that the storefront occupied by La Piazza

was previously home to a downscale burrito joint popular with weary soccer moms and dads and their young players, as Theatre Square was just opening its first-floor retail spaces. When the new owner spent a prodigious sum to remodel the space and add a wood-fired pizza oven, the word was that he was crazy, and would go broke within a year.

Try telling him that any Saturday night, if you can get in the door. And try finding a non-food retail space inside Theatre Square.

As reported elsewhere, it seems those little soccer players have grown up and returned to Orinda with their own families, and they aren’t looking for burritos.

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