

LAMORINDA SPORTS

Acalanes Volleyball Advance to D3 CIF State Title Game

By Karl Buscheck



Photos Gint Federas



Parker Jones



Melissa Elliott



From left: Devin Grobeck, Melissa Elliott, Parker Jones, Zoe McPhail and Samantha Darin

Ernie Rodriguez, the head coach of the Acalanes girls volleyball team, can pinpoint the exact moment when it all came together for his squad – the most successful in program history.

“I honestly believe our season turned around when we won the San Ramon Valley Tournament and we beat James Logan in the finals,” Rodriguez said, referring to the end-of-October invitational. “That was the turning point for us. We started really believing as a team.”

That belief helped carry the second-seeded Dons all the way to the Division 3 CIF State title game where they’ll face No. 11 Crossroads of Santa Monica.

Acalanes reached the championship, which will be played on Dec. 3 at Santiago Canyon College in Orange, by topping No. 4 Sonora in the NorCal D3 State Championship on Nov. 26.

Against Sonora, Acalanes fell behind 2-1 at their home gym in Lafayette. The Dons then roared back to win the final two sets and book their spot in the finals.

Prior to this group, no Dons team had advanced to the NorCal title game – much less the state championship. Neither had Rodriguez.

“I as a coach, 18 years of coaching high school, I’ve never been this far,” Rodriguez. “I’ve gotten to NorCal but I’ve never made it to the finals.”

“Not once in my wildest imagination did I think we were going to be at this point. I thought we were going to have a very successful season and I thought we were going to compete for an NCS title, but not once did I ever think beyond that.”

The Dons, who have posted

a 30-9 record (7-3 in DAL), arrived in the championship after securing the second seed in the bracket. Acalanes earned a bye in the opening round, and then cruised past No. 7 Aptos and No. 6 Buhach Colony, 3-0 and 3-1, respectively.

From the outset of the season, the Dons leaned heavily on veterans Parker Jones and Melissa

Elliott.

“Our two captains are just phenomenal kids – not only talent-wise in volleyball – but they’re just phenomenal leaders,” Rodriguez said of the pair of seniors.

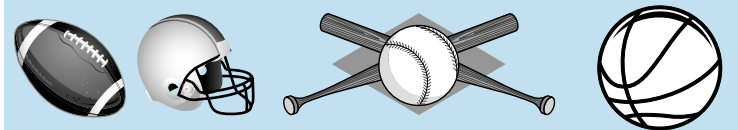
“Those two absolutely did a phenomenal job the entire year getting the team ready, focusing on what we had to focus on and being great communicators.”

While the Dons were the second seed in the D3 bracket, the Mats were seeded No. 1. Miramonte, who posted a 23-11 record (7-3 in league), saw their season end against Sonora, the Dons’ championship opponent. Playing at home in Orinda on Nov. 22, the Mats lost 3-2 to Sonora. Before that defeat, Miramonte had an opening-round bye and topped El Camino, 3-0, on Nov. 19.

Campolindo, which took part in the Open Division competition, also exited the bracket in the regional semifinals. The Cougars – seeded sixth in the tournament – beat Sacred Heart Catholic Preparatory, 3-1, on Nov. 17 before running into No. 2 St. Ignatius on Nov. 22. The match at St. Ignatius’ court in San Francisco ended in a 3-1 defeat for the visitors.

The Cougars, who MaxPreps ranked as the No. 35 team in the state, ended the year with a 30-11 record (10-0 in league).

Youth Sports Registration



Lamorinda Rugby Football Club

On-line Registration opens Oct 1st for the 2016 rugby season! Season runs December through March for youth, and through April for High School. Teams for girls and guys ages 6-19. No prior rugby experience necessary. Practices are located at the Wilder Fields in Orinda. Find out more about our team and how to register online at www.lamorugby.com. For questions, contact Doug Pearson at dpearson@lee-associates.com.



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