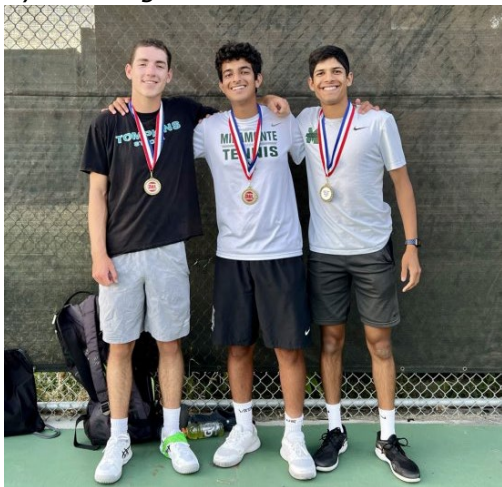


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## Miramonte leads way in return to DAL Championships

By Jon Kingdon



Miramonte's DAL champions: Singles champ Nishad Elias (right) and Doubles champions Liam Sullivan (left) and Leo Cardozo (middle) Photo Andrew Lee

This has been a stellar year for the boy's tennis teams of Lamorinda. They have a combined record of 38-16 (Miramonte 17-4), Acalanes (9-4) and Campolindo (12-8). The Lamorinda teams were heavily represented in the Diablo Athletic League tournament with 20 of the 32 players coming from Miramonte (7), Campolindo (6) and Acalanes (7). The No. 1 and No. 2 seeds were Miramonte's Nishad Elias and Acalanes' Tyler Toni. Elias went on to win the single's championship defeating College Prep's Dibyan Dikhit 6-4, 6-2 and Toni made it to the tournaments semifinals. Elias then competed in the North Coast Section as the second seed, going on to win his first two matches, losing the next two and finishing in fourth place.

The doubles teams from Lamorinda were equally dominant with seven of the top 10 seeds. Miramonte had the No. 1 seed with Liam Sullivan and Leo Cardozo, No. 3 seed, Gavin Dille and Nishad Elias and the No. 7 seed, Ben Torres and Ethan Haines. Campolindo had the No. 2 seed, Kiumars Koopah and Jake Hammerman, No. 5 seed, James Martin and Rex Pastore and the No. 9 seed - Diego Ledezma and Viggo Wistrom. Acalanes had the No. 4 seed, Tyler Holder and Liam McGlynn and the No. 6

seed - Matthew Muren and Aaron Brown. Overall, Miramonte entered three doubles teams, Campolindo, four teams and Acalanes five teams.

Miramonte also won the doubles championship with Sullivan and Cardozo, defeating Campolindo's Koopah and Hammerman in three sets 6-7, 6-4, 10-6.

Miramonte head coach Andrew Lee, a Carnegie-Mellon graduate, was asked to take over the team a month prior to the start of the season.

This is a veteran team with their first four singles players all seniors - Elias, Clemens van Dongen (missed the DAL with an injury), Sullivan and Cardozo which facilitated things for Lee. "Our seniors are the top class, and they lost the last two seasons," Lee said. "They showed a lot of promise their freshman year and then lost their next two years to the virus, so they really wanted to take advantage of this last chance and do well, which they certainly did."

Lee was particularly enthused with the performance of senior and co-captain Leo Cardozo who really elevated his game this year: "Leo did not have a lot of tournament experience. He had a great desire and found a way to get better and better, showing a massive improvement and being named second team all-league singles. He was undefeated in the regular season and is the type of player that all teams need."

Lee was also pleasantly surprised at the play of his doubles team of two freshmen, Gavin Dille and Jonah Elias. "They had a remarkable chemistry on the court," Lee said. "They had never played doubles together prior to this season and they really understood what each was doing on the court."

It was a team attitude that contributed to their success. "There were no specific things that tied us together, but they all wanted to support each other and to see each other do well," Lee said. "We brought a competitive spirit, supporting each other. Our goal was to be better at the end of the season than we were at the beginning. Nisham brought a lot of experience and was a good leader in setting an example for the younger players to follow."

### Acalanes

In his first year at Acalanes, head coach Rick O'Brien brought 20 years of coaching experience, mostly at Alhambra High School.

O'Brien appreciated that he stepped into a positive situation with his players. "The thing I like about the team was that there are no freshmen or seniors," O'Brien said. "They're one big family with unconditional support across the team. There's no jealousy and arguing. They want to be together, play together and support each other. This year is even more special for the juniors and seniors because there was no DAL and NCS the last two years due to COVID. Everyone on the team wanted to play in the post-season. Our three co-captains Tyler Toni, Luke Brightbill and Liam McGlynn were the leaders that the players looked up to."

The singles players were led by junior Toni and freshman Nick Owens who were listed 1 and 2 on the team. Toni missed most of the season due to an injury but did make it back for the DAL tournament and won three matches before losing in the semifinals.

"Owens had to step up and play No. 1 for us in seven matches," O'Brien said. "Though his won-loss record did not reflect it, he grew up a lot playing in the top spot against a lot of very talented players."

The lead doubles team was junior Aaron Brown who won all 10 of his matches this year and Matthew Muren who won nine doubles matches to end the season. Brown and Muren were paired in seven matches. As the sixth seed in the DAL, they got a first-round bye, won a match, and then lost in the quarterfinals.

The team often refers to O'Brien as Rich 4-S's because of the four things he stresses to his players. "I

tell them they're all critical, but I put them in order in how I rank them," O'Brien said: 1) Safety - This always comes first. I don't want them on the court if they're injured or sick. I always tell them to make sure there are no balls around their feet on the court; 2) Scholastics - They're all straight A students so I don't worry about that; 3) Sportsmanship - Be a gentleman on the court; and 4) Success - Win the match.

Campolindo

In his sixth year at Campolindo coach Jimmy Scott has the youngest team in Lamorinda with four seniors, four juniors, four sophomores and three freshmen.

"We're a pretty young team with a lot of our newcomers having to fill the singles spots, taking on a big role," Scott said. "The overall feel of the team is that they all enjoy being around each other and that really showed on the court as well."

There were 14 players for Campolindo playing singles and doubles in the DAL tournament. "To get back to a full season is so much better than it has been with the abbreviated seasons," Scott said. "The players definitely enjoyed having a full season that included the playoffs."

Leading the singles players for the Cougars were freshmen Kiumars Koopah and Jake Hammerman. "Kiumars did a phenomenal job, exceeding my expectations and Jake also did a very good job and should continue to improve next year," Scott said.

With various injuries and illnesses, the doubles teams were a group in transition much of the season. "There was a lot of fluctuation among those teams, and we had to shift a lot of players around, but they all did a good job in playing with people that they had little experience with prior to their matches," Scott said."

The team's captains were seniors Tobias Kofman and Elton Yu who, according to Scott, "were good in keeping the team together."

In a league with such tough competition, Scott kept things in perspective for his players; "We worked hard on the courts but also in a fun setting. I also made sure that they knew when it was time to work and take care of business."

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