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Lamorinda Volleyball a mixture of success, potential, and development

By Jon Kingdon



Evan Sverak spiking the ball against College Park
Photo Jon Kingdon

CAMPOLINDO

Heading into spring break, Campolindo has already won 20 games with only seven losses. Despite only eight returners and ten new players, Head Coach David Chen is very comfortable with this team: "There's an energy and a focus that reminds me of the earlier years when we first got started and it's getting back to our roots in the best possible way. There's a connection that the players have with each other, celebrating each other's success on the court."

The Cougars have good size up front with 6'5" Tim Smith, 6'8" Will Marusich, and 6'3" Will Balassi and Adrian Brown. "That allows us to have a presence at the net and the ability to control things," Chen said. "However, we're trying to get them to play team defense and be fluid on the defensive end."

Campolindo runs a 6-2 set using Graham Volk, Alex Chng, and Braden Purcell as setters. "It's great to have three people that can run the offense," Chen said. "They all have great knowledge and vision. Each is a little different but in a great way. Andre Hanhan and Kai Iwasaki anchor our defense and Andrew Hanhan is our starting libero and is backed up by Kyler Hastings."

With nine seniors on the roster, Chen is already preparing for next year. "We need to share as much information as we can with our underclassmen to make sure we will have consistency," Chen said. "They're coming along quicker than they realize even without getting that much court time."

The only freshman on the team, outside hitter Claes Bell, has been a key addition. "Claes' technique and form are there, and he shows good instincts, footwork and passing form with good knowledge," Chen said.

With so many players that have come up from the J.V., their coach, Scott Forney, has joined Chen and John Vuong on the varsity staff. "Scott has done a great job in preparing the players coming up, they're a tough group," Chen said.

Campolindo is playing in four different tournaments this season. "We have to learn how to play against teams with different styles," Chen said. "We get to play against big teams with power and finesse teams, so we can figure out what type of system gives us a problem, so we can adapt and prepare for the postseason."

Chen is still looking for the team to elevate its game. "We have to improve our team defense and making sure that with our first touch, it's a touch where we can get an effective attack. We are also working on our serve-receive game, which is important because every team succeeds or fails with that and having the mental toughness to grind through a game when we're not at our best, not giving in to doubt."

ACALANES

With a 6-5 record, Acalanes has a roster of six seniors and six juniors, with only two sophomores. "What's nice is that I've coached all of the upperclassmen the last three years here at Acalanes," Head Coach Lexi Hammer said. "It's the making of community and knowing how the players work, and they're knowing how to work. We have a very positive attitude when it comes to playing aggressively and working together, which builds character within them and within our team."

The front line is led by senior Evan Sverak and juniors Matt Law and Avyn Morales. "They're my front three and they rocket," Hammer said. Evan is a whiz at blocking and reading the other players, being able to put

up a block. Though Matt is only 5'6", he's up there with kills and aces. He knows where to put the ball and he reads the blockers so well and knows how to play it smart."

Junior Miles Thomas leads the team in blocks, digs, and assists as the team's setter, and he and Law are the team's leading servers. "Miles finally got down his top jump spin," Hammer said. He's really communicative and he wants everyone to be successful, and that's the mindset you need, setting everyone else up for success."

The team's two sophomores, Arthur Tam and Mason Briones, have been helped along by the upperclassmen. "All the seniors, especially Miles, have been taking them under their wings, making sure that they're following along and understanding everything."

Senior co-captain Douglas Roberts is the team's libero. "Douglas does a great job in communicating with his teammates and with Law, they both just know how it works with the ability adjust so I know that they will get the job done."

With a tournament coming up in Granite Bay, Hammer is looking for the team to improve their team defense: "We're letting a lot of balls drop due to miscommunication with the newer players," Hammer said. "Our hitting is strong and our serving has very much improved since the beginning of the year."

MIRAMONTE

First year Head Coach Aria Jahangiri has brought his own ideas to Miramonte. "My philosophy is that volleyball is a sport that's growing, so we have to grow with it," Jahangiri said. "It's about fun volleyball and hard work and commitment as a team. We've got to learn new ways to do what we already do, making sure we understand every skill and grow a culture that will take over and make volleyball important to the players."

Two thirds of the team are juniors and seniors, but a number of them are new, with some returners from last year; many of the players are learning from Jahangiri that volleyball can be a fun and rewarding sport.

The offense is led by the team's outside hitting co-captains, junior Pierson Smith and sophomore Ryan Balonic, who is also used as a setter. Outside hitter Ian Luquis-Diaz and the team's two middle blockers, Will Hashimoto and Sebastian Hall, are all playing well.

"Pierson and Ryan have been very good leaders, showing their teammates the rewards that can come from hard work in volleyball," Jahangiri said. "They've played for a number of years and seen firsthand the challenges and rewards of being a committed player."

The defense is led by freshman libero Brandon Collins, and Orion Swanson, a libero and defensive specialist. "Brandon is a committed athlete that is mentally strong, balancing his time with cross country and volleyball," Jahangiri said.

Jahangiri is focusing on improving the team's offense. "It might seem like most teams are fine at offense, but when it comes to boys' volleyball, everybody needs to have a decent base of serve-receive defensive mechanics," Jahangiri said. "However, what really wins a game is being able to put up a block wherever their hole is and then being able to finish with a swing. If you can't score on that swing with a perfect set, you're not going to win a lot of games."

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