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## Girls' Basketball will be Tough in DFAL

By Conrad Bassett



Kiara Harewood Photo Doug Kohen Janine Loutzenhiser Photo Jordon Fong Annelise Ito Photo Doug Kohen

A year ago Diablo Foothill Athletic League girls' basketball had the reputation as one of the toughest in California, five of the seven teams qualified for the Northern California Championships, including all three Lamorinda teams. The league looks to be just as tough this year.

Dougherty Valley, 54-7 over the last two seasons, will be very good and Dublin, 15-13, is returning several key players. Alhambra, behind former Dons coach Mike Wilson, looks to improve.

"In most leagues teams that usually make the NCS can plan on five or six league wins against teams that aren't as strong. That is definitely not the case in the DFAL," said Acalanes head coach Chris Russell.

Russell comes to Acalanes with plenty of experience building a boys' program at John Swett (Crockett) to be competitive and last year he led Contra Costa Christian to an NCS berth.

The Lady Dons qualified for the Northern California tournament and recorded 19 wins last year behind since-graduated second team all-DFAL players, seniors Kiara Harewood and Emani Harrison. Harewood is starting at UC

Riverside as a true freshman.

However, they do welcome back three seniors-Sophie Taylor, Meredith Collett, and Olivia Murphy. Taylor, DFAL honorable mention, is the only returning starter and she intends to play at Loyola Marymount next year.

Russell is pleased so far with his senior leadership. "Sophie, Meredith and Olivia are setting the tone in practice every day and are working hard and the rest of the team is following the example."

Other key returners include juniors Jamie Jacobs, Molly Martin, Sam Anderson, and Marie Paladino. The Dons also have a freshman-Taylor Odom. Coach Russell believes she has a "tremendous upside."

The team will stay local for all of their tournaments- traveling to one at Northgate in mid-December, Alhambra, and the West Coast Classic at the end of December.

Lamorinda rivals Miramonte welcome back Kelly Sopak for his third year after he led the Mats into the second round of the state tournament for the second straight year. The Matadors finished 23-7 (8-4 DFAL) last season.

Although Alyssa Johanson graduated and now plays at Washington University in St. Louis, the Mats return a strong nucleus from last year's team.

Senior Janine Loutzenhiser, named second team All-DFAL and sophomores Megan Reid and Breanna Alford, DFAL honorable mentions, are returning.

Sopak will also be counting on contributions from seniors Devon McDonald and Taylor Kizziee, and junior point guard Carly Gill.

The Mats will be road warriors, playing their first five games on the road-including a visit to defending state champion St. Mary's (Stockton) and to a tournament in Willits. They then will come home to host their own tournament-The Mats Tip-Off Classic December 9-10. They will also be a host site for the West Coast Jamboree.

Sopak is very enthused about what he has seen in practice so far. "At Miramonte we are going to play one way and that is fast. We are three years into my system and we are further along right now than we have ever been the previous two seasons," he said.

Campolindo finished 25-7 (8-4 DFAL) a year ago and went to the Nor-Cal semi-final game before losing a close game to Sacramento High.

The Cougars also experienced some personnel changes. Former head coach Clay Kallam moved over to Bentley in Lafayette and the new coach is Elgin Leslie.

Leslie is coming from Carondelet High School and will be challenging his squad early and often- they will be playing in the West Coast Jamboree and will take on Piedmont, TerraNova and Salesian in non-league games.

The Cougars lost first team selections Amanda Forshay and Annie Ward to graduation last year and junior honorable mention Annelise Ito to a knee injury. Ito is expected to miss the season.

The Cougars will return junior Laura Hickey along with sophomore Ashley Ewing and senior Mallory Brown. Elgin expects contributions from junior Courtney Seyranian and sophomore Kelsey Wixsom.

Leslie noted that there are opportunities as well as challenges in taking over a successful program. "The biggest challenge is the adjustment and finding a comfort level with each other," said Leslie. "Clay is a very good coach, and the girls were used to his system and expectations."

The girls are adjusting to a new coaching style. "Learning a new system and getting used to my expectations will be something that will take us a while. On my side, getting to know the girls and how to put them in the best

position to be successful on the court will be something that takes time," Leslie said.

Upcoming games:

Miramonte at St. Mary's (Stockton) at 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday, November 23

Acalanes hosts Skyline at 1:00 p.m. on Friday, November 25

Campolindo at Piedmont, time TBA, on Saturday, November 26

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