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Cougars Look to Fourth Straight NCS Title

By Marissa Harnett



Campolindo prepares to take the court in the NCS tournament. Photos Gint Federas

less than an hour - 25-12, 25-15, 25-13.

The Cougars appeared confident from the start and immediately surged ahead, keeping Livermore on the defensive. The Cowboys managed to string together a few winning plays, but scored mostly on Campo's few errors.

Livermore found a groove in the second set and kept the score differential hovering around one until Campo junior Ryan First started serving. His rocket serve notched seven consecutive points, creating a gap impossible for Livermore to close.

The Cowboys kept fighting into the third set. They took the lead early on, but as in the sets before, they were no match against Campo. In play after play junior Joe Worsley set the ball for senior Stephen Buhl to make the kill. Junior Jack Eisner and First also nailed winning strikes.

Campo worked hard to get to this point and feels ready for what lies ahead. "It always creates a little bit of anxiousness, and nervous excitement because finally after three and half months of work your season comes down to unique 2-3 day seasons where if you survive one round, then you have only 2-3 days to prepare and stay alive for the next," Chen explained.

Campo's semifinal match against No. 4 Redwood will be played tonight at Campo at 7 p.m. "We haven't played or seen them play so we don't know how we match up with them," Chen said. "However, as the rounds proceed the competition gets tougher so we just have to match that intensity and evolve with our opponent," he added.

Miramonte was the other Lamorinda team to earn a slot in the tournament. The No. 9 Mats lost in a first round heartbreaker to Livermore. Miramonte was up two sets, when Livermore stormed back for the win, 25-22, 28-26, 24-26, 19-25, 10-15.

Head coach Lisa Bachtold called the game a thriller. "Both teams fought hard, both teams wanted it so badly, and unfortunately we were so close and it just slipped through our fingers," Bachtold said. "They were down two games, but the crowd rallied behind them, and it was now or never. It was a well fought match," she added.

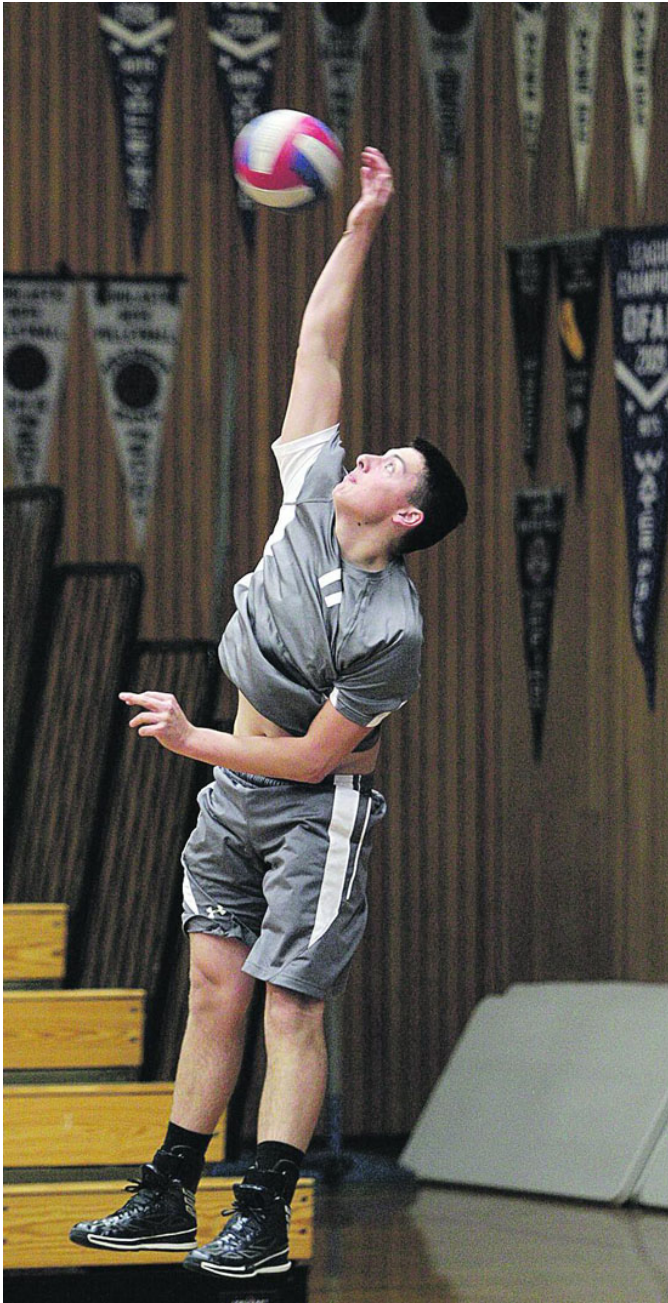
Bachtold was excited to make it into the tournament at all and is proud of her team's hard work and accomplishments. "What a tremendous turnaround from last season. They only won one match, and this season we notched six wins and made it to NCS. We really worked hard and deserved it," she said.

Halfway through the NCS volleyball championship, top-seeded Campolindo is the only Lamorinda team remaining. The Cougars, who boast an overall season record of 32-2 and went undefeated, 10-0, in league play, have held the NCS title for the last three years and their chances of a fourth look promising.

"I feel like if we choose to keep our focus and our motivation to play fundamentally sound disciplined volleyball our chances are high," head coach David Chen said. Chen knows not to take anything for granted though. "We're also focusing on the concept of the team's worth and how that alone can help to lead the team toward success or without it, drive us to fail," he added.

With only 11 teams in the bracket, Campo enjoyed a first round bye and moved directly to the quarterfinals. In that round on May 16, the Cougars dispatched Miramonte's ouster, No. 8 Livermore, in

This season was Bachtold's first with Miramonte, and she is excited about the future. "Coaching the team this season has been such a rewarding experience bringing a new group of guys together with such different backgrounds and experience to play volleyball," she said. "Now that we have had a taste of NCS I can only anticipate what's to come."



Jack Eisner (11) recorded key hits in the win over Livermore.



Joe Worsley (1) led the Cougars' rally with strong serves.

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