

LAMORINDA SPORTS



Acalanes, Miramonte in NCS Tennis Tournament

Dons Advance to CIF Tournament Finals

By Spencer Silva



Photos Gint Federas

Since the first NCS team tennis tournament in 1999, only seven high schools have earned the distinction of champion. Acalanes had a chance to become the eighth school on that list on May 16. Under a new coach, Stephanie Lawrence, Acalanes reached the title match for the first time in school history. In the championship, the Dons faced off with DFAL rival Dougherty Valley, but fell by a final score of 5-2.

Acalanes (24-3) earned the No. 2 seed in the tournament after finishing second in the DFAL. On their way to the finals, the Dons beat Sonoma Valley 7-0 and swept Amador Valley 7-0. In the semifinals on the morning of May 16, they beat No. 3 Monte Vista (EBAL) Mustangs 4-3 in thrilling fashion. Senior doubles partners Ian Dao and Preston Tso pulled off a thrilling victory over Monte Vista's No. 1 doubles team, tipping the overall contest in their favor. "The doubles win versus Monte Vista was huge," explained Lawrence. "It wasn't nec-

essarily expected, but they came through."

In the finals, Dougherty Valley proved to be too difficult an opponent. Lawrence didn't mince words about the strength of their opponent: "Dougherty is one of the best teams in the country."

The Dons' No.1 singles player, Kyle Everly, ended his match early Saturday due to a leg cramp. Everly, a junior, earned third place in the boys' Division I singles tournament the weekend before. He lost to eventual champion and No. 1 seed Kevin Ma of Dougherty Valley.

Although the NCS title escaped them, the future of the program is bright. All four of Acalanes' top singles players will return in 2016, and the Dons were ranked Top-10 NorCal team after winning a 117-team tournament in Fresno earlier in the season. The team had strong chemistry this year and expect to carry that over to next season. "It's a great team. The seniors and the freshman root for each

other, which isn't something you get to see in a lot of sports," Lawrence said.

The team planned its year-end banquet for Sunday, the day after the NCS finals, but, as fate would have it, their season hasn't ended. Their second-place NCS finish promised a berth — their first — in the CIF NorCal tournament, which begins next Friday. They will meet Granite Bay in the first round, a team Lawrence is quite familiar with from her days coaching in the Sac-Joquin Section. "They've been a nemesis of mine for a long time. This is going to be a very exciting tournament," she said.

No. 4 seed Miramonte (15-5) fell to South Bay powerhouse Mission San Jose 4-3 on May 15. It all came down to No. 1 singles player Peter Martin who played Mission San Jose's Viam Aurora in the contest's rubber match. Both sets were eventually settled in tiebreaker fashion — 7-6 (7-5), 7-6 (7-3). Martin and No. 2 singles player, junior Alex Hwang,

were fresh off winning the NCS doubles title, a tournament in which they didn't cede a single set. Miramonte's senior doubles team, Kyle Rechnitv and Bryce Hummer, were the highlight of the afternoon for the Mats, beating Mission San Jose's No. 1 doubles team in straight sets (6-3, 6-1).

It was not the way that the senior class, winners of two NCS titles and second place finishers in 2014, had hoped to conclude the season. Martin is going to Middlebury College in Vermont to play tennis and a number of the other players are headed to elite colleges for academics. Head coach Mike McCollum spoke glowingly about his senior class. "This is the greatest tennis group we've ever had," he explained. "They're all great kids: we're talking excellence in the classroom, on the tennis court and as teammates ... they're off the charts."

SMC Rugby Wins Second Straight National Title

By Spencer Silva



Photo provided

Saint Mary's College returned to the Division 1A Rugby National Championship with one goal—to win a second title. The Gaels defeated Life University (Marietta, Ga.) 30-24 for the second year in a row to take a second straight title on May 9. It was the third year in a row they played the Running Eagles in the 1A National Championship game.

Last spring, the two teams met at Stanford University. The Gaels triumphed in front of a sympathetic home crowd, beating the Running Eagles by a score of 26-6. This year, the game took place in Life's backyard — at Third Bank Stadium at Kenesaw State University — just a 10-mile drive north from Life's campus.

The match was largely defensive and neither team dominated for any large swath of time. "Defense on both sides was very strong," said assistant coach Tony Samaniego. "We knew it was going to be that way."

The Gaels jumped out to an early

lead when game MVP Dylan Audsley scored a try and conversion in the middle of the first half — they led 13-10 at the half.

With 20 minutes left, Life nearly staged a comeback when it scored a try on a chip-kick over the Saint Mary's defense. The conversion afterward brought the score to an uncomfortable 27-24. Fortunately for the Gaels, Audsley converted a difficult penalty kick from far away minutes later to bring the score to 30-24.

In the last five minutes, up 30-24, Saint Mary's fumbled the ball over, which nearly cost them the game. With no time left, the two teams found themselves in a scrum near Saint Mary's try line. It was then that Kingsley McGowen, a U.S. National team hopeful, stole the ball and punted it out of bounds to save the day — the referees whistled the game over seconds later.

"The game lived up to the hype," explained Samaniego. "Both teams

came out with a strong desire to win back the title of the best team in the country."

All-American honors will be announced sometime this week and several Saint Mary's players are likely to be recognized. Seven players earned the distinction last year, when the Gaels were unanimously voted the No. 1 team in the country. Senior Captain Cooper Maloney — last year's national title-game MVP — along with McGowen, Audsley and co-captain Mike O'Neill, have formed the core of one of the most successful teams in school history.

The school will send a Sevens team to Colorado this weekend in hopes of capturing yet another national title. Sevens is a variation of traditional rugby, where seven players play from each team, instead of 15, for shorter periods of time. It's set to make its debut as an Olympic sport in Rio de Janeiro next summer, perhaps with some former Gaels on the squad.

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