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## NCS Experience Prepares Acalanes Softball for Next Season

By Michael Sakoda



Brooke Panfili



Alex Grant-Hudd

Photos Gint Federas

The Acalanes Dons had their season come to an end when they ran into San Rafael's Ellie Bauer in the first round of the Division III NCS softball playoffs. Bauer struck out 14 Dons' batters, while allowing just two hits and one walk, propelling the Bulldogs to a 6-0 win on May 26.

"We just ran into good pitching," said head coach Victor Silva. "It's hard to win a game when you don't score any runs."

Acalanes, the only Lamorinda team to qualify for the postseason, earned the No. 10 seed after finishing the regular season 9-10 with a 6-6 mark in DFAL play, but the pressure of NCS got to his young team.

"We probably played our worst game of the year that day," he said. "It was nerves, just one of those games when a couple infielders get bad hops, and the balls they hit were placed perfectly between the outfielders."

Despite the 6-0 score, starting pitcher Brooke Panfili and reliever Alex Grant-Hudd only allowed three earned runs in a game that will, hopefully, be a learning experience for the Dons, one that marks the beginning of something special for Acalanes softball.

"I'm really happy we made NCS because now these young kids know what it's like," said Silva. "They realize how important it is."

The Dons' season got off to a rocky start due

in large part to inexperience and a slew of injuries. Junior standout Zoe Marrot missed the first half of the season but was able to come back and lead her team.

"She's our best player, and she really held things together," said Silva.

The rest of the starting infield, Kailey Meyer, Kylie Berry and Rosetta Shackett, are all freshmen on the rise.

"I think it took a long time for them to get used to the pressure of high school softball, but they did a great job," said Silva. "I don't see a ceiling for them if they keep working hard."

On paper, Acalanes' season might seem average, even underwhelming, but Silva sees it differently.

"I could see the improvement that the kids were making every game," he said while talking about the value of experience to a young team. "Plus, we beat Campo twice, we beat Miramonte twice, and that always makes the season perfect for us."

The Dons will return all their starters next year except catcher Meagan Hornsby, a huge loss according to Silva, though not an insurmountable one.

"We had a young team this year, but they kept improving, and I was really proud of them," he said. "I'm really lucky ... to have everybody coming back, and I'm really excited."



Zoe Marrott and Kylie Berry

## Three-peat!

Campolindo boys' volleyball wins third consecutive NorCal title

By Karl Buscheck



Ryan First



Michael Standing Photos Gint Federas

The Campolindo boys' volleyball team claimed its third consecutive CIF NorCal Division II title, topping Rio Americano 3-0 on May 30 at Dublin High.

"It's an absolutely huge accomplishment for the team and especially the seniors," head coach David Chen said of his team team that smashed past the competition in both the NorCal tournament and the NCS playoffs. "It's always huge to go through playoffs playing strong and confident," said Chen.

The key for the Cougars playoff success was that it was a true team effort. "We've had equal contributions from all players and all players have definitely stepped up for us at different points during the season," Chen said. "All these guys can be the go-to guy on any other team, but here for us we need them to be role players and all play equal balanced parts to keep the offense and defense diverse."

In the title game, the stars of the show were seniors Ryan First and Michael Standing along with sophomore Gage Worsley. First set the pace with a team-leading 11 kills, while Standing checked in with eight and Worsley pitched in seven.

After securing the No. 1 seed in the NorCal bracket, Campolindo made quick work of the opposition on its way to winning the title. In the opening round on May 26, the Cougars cruised past Berean Christian 3-0. Two days later, the

Cougars handled Ponderosa 3-1 in the regional semifinals before facing Rio Americano in the finals.

Before the team's NorCal run, the Cougars, who topped the DFAL standings with a perfect 10-0 league record, added a fifth consecutive NCS banner to the program's collection.

"The guys have won NCS all four years they've been here and it's great to see them accomplish this for the school," Chen said.

The march to the latest NCS title began with a 3-1 win over Alhambra on May 15. Four days later, the Cougars knocked off Northgate 3-0. That win set up the team's 3-0 win over DFAL rival Las Lomas in the NCS championship on May 22.

While Campolindo never lost more than a single game against a given opponent during its six playoff clashes, the journey to the top was not without its obstacles. As Chen explained, just staying healthy was the biggest hurdle that the team faced.

"These unexpected challenges have definitely made this playoff run more challenging yet more rewarding," Chen said. "We've had to restructure our starting line up three times in the past week and I can't say enough about the maturity and the leadership this team has shown in order to overcome and push through these bumps in the road in order to defend their NorCal title."

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