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Mats Hunt for DFAL Title, Cougars and Dons in NCS Mix

By Karl Buscheck



Eddy Ionescu (4) and Madison Young (24)
Photos Gint Federas

eight after Eddy."

The Mats have just two league games left - including a crucial tilt against Dougherty Valley on Feb. 11. But in the stacked DFAL, the team can't afford to look ahead to the NCS Division III playoffs.

"The league season has been competitive and it's a challenge to win game in and game out, regardless of the opponent," McDonald said. "It's very difficult to win consistently in our league."

Kearey Smith, the head coach of the fourth-place Cougars, echoed McDonald's sentiment.

"I'll be honest with you, this year [in] DFAL, the parity is pretty amazing," Smith said.

Campo's record stands at 4-5 in league (11-12 overall), but it would be even better if not for a couple of January losses to Dougherty Valley and third-place Dublin by a combined eight points. As the Cougars close out the DFAL slate, Smith has a simple message for his players: "effort and consistency."

Miramonte dished out some revenge against Campolindo on Feb. 2, claiming round two of the rivalry matchup 60-48. The victory also positioned the Mats to make a play for the DFAL boys basketball crown.

After beating their neighbors in Orinda, the Mats topped Alhambra 65-49 at home on Feb. 5 and have now reeled off four consecutive wins.

"I think that we're taking some strides towards being the best team that we can and I think that we've gotten stronger as the season's progressed," head coach Drew McDonald said, as his Mats sit in second place (7-2 in league and 17-6 overall). "We still have a chance to win the league and once that's over we'll start thinking about postseason."

If Miramonte does manage to catch the front-runners, Dougherty Valley (8-1), the lion's share of the credit will go to senior Eddy Ionescu.

"Quite frankly, I think that Eddy Ionescu has been the best player in the league," McDonald declared. "Offensively he's been the dominant player - scoring in the mid-20s game in and game out."

It hasn't just been a one-man show, as the Mats have called upon a deep supporting cast.

"It's really been a team effort because the rest of the guys compete as a group," McDonald said. "I could name individuals but I would be listing six to

"That's the consistent thing that I say each and every practice - each and every game," Smith explained.

Like the Mats, the Cougars have benefited from having a talented corps of role players, but the team has also leaned heavily on a trio of senior stars.

"Austin Clarke is primarily our number one scorer and he's a guy that can really get things going," Smith said. "And when we have a balanced scoring attack, it usually follows up with both Will Hicks and Sterling Strothers. When those three guys are filling it up, it's pretty tough for teams to compete against us."

Acalanes will be competing with Campo on Feb. 11 when they travel to Moraga to clash with the Cougars. As Dons head coach Dave Goldman explained, the team will be looking to put to rest an unfortunate streak.

Goldman admitted that Acalanes rarely beats Campolindo. "To my knowledge, neither the football nor basketball team has won a game in over six years."

Goldman pointed to his team's encouraging showing in their 63-51 loss to Campo on Jan. 21 as a reason for optimism.

"We played them last time very close," Goldman said. "So, we hope we can pull off an upset at their gym."

Edging the Cougars will be a necessity for the Dons if the team is going to accomplish the first of its two remaining goals.

"We'd like to be a .500 team," Goldman said. "We'd have to win out the last four games to do that."

The second objective for the sixth-place Dons (2-6 in DFAL and 9-13 overall) is to sneak into the NCS Division II postseason bracket.

"We are actually 2-2 against Division II schools, which does qualify us potentially for the playoffs," Goldman said. "So, we've really just been focused in practice on getting better every day and raising the level of intensity to a game level so that the boys are improving at that game speed."



Austin Clarke (24) and Aaron Hill (24)



Andrew McKendell (5) and Trevin Kroichick

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