

# Campolindo comes up short in state finals



Erin Thomas

Photo Gint Federas

## By Jon Kingdon

Campolindo girls volleyball head coach John Vuong was concerned when the Cougars were up to Division I for the NCS playoffs, having to compete against teams that had far larger student bodies. Ironically, the schools with the smallest student bodies, Campolindo and Bishop O'Dowd, met in the finals with O'Dowd besting Campolindo. Each qualified for the

NorCal state tournament, with O'Dowd playing in the open division and Campolindo playing in Division I bracket.

With the No. 1 seed, Campolindo earned a first round bye and then defeated Clovis North and Palo Alto by 3-0 scores to then play and defeat Menlo-Atherton 3-1, earning the right to represent Northern California in the state finals against Vista Murrieta. In the match, Campolindo ran into a freshman buzz saw named Claire Lit-

tle who had 30 kills and the Cougars lost to Vista Murrieta by a score of 20-25, 30-28, 25-22 and 25-21. Particularly frustrating for Campolindo was losing the second set when they were ahead 24-19 and could not close out the game.

Vuong and assistant coach Dave Chen made it to their third state finals with the Cougars. Vuong still spoke highly about the team: "They worked hard all season and it was a reward for their efforts to play the championship game. I told them that getting here was not easy and that every other school in the state would have loved to have been in our place. It just wasn't our night tonight."

Erin Thomas, Molly Mitchell and Audrey Pak stood out for the team. "Audrey has gone above and beyond everything I expected," said Vuong. "She's played every position we've asked her to play. There's been nothing she can't do on the court. She really put the team on her shoulders through the whole season."

Vuong also highlighted junior Madison Xiong who had to step in for an injured player: "Maddie had a number of kills. She was ready to play and took advantage of the opportunity and did not disappoint at all. She showed the ability to step up and gave us a chance to win."

There was a special chemistry that pervaded the team. "The best part of this team is that we're such a family and we play for each other," said senior Arielle Allen. "We all

wanted it so bad."

Senior Sophia Newman took great joy in winning the Northern Regional finals: "As this was my last year at Campolindo, I wanted us to take one of these big games, playing our hearts out and having fun and I'm so happy that we beat Menlo-Atherton to make it to the finals. Everything is special about this team. I've never been on a team like this where everybody wanted to play for each other and be there for each other. John and (assistant coach) Dave Chen were the best coaches I've had in my volleyball career. They always gave 100%, coming in on off days, giving us the best opportunity to win and allowing us to believe that we could do it."

The lone freshman on the team, Olivia Wiseman, appreciated the uniqueness of her situation after the Menlo-Atherton game: "It's such a unique experience as a freshman to go to the state tournament. My heart was pounding. I love being on the team and everyone has been really nice to me."

It was a long process for Vuong: "At the beginning of the season, I did not see us making it to the state finals. Playing in Division I was training on the job and we had to adjust as we went on. The team improved a lot in the sense of cohesiveness and team chemistry. We had the talent to play as one unit, led by captains Audrey Pak and Sophia and all of the seniors. They realized the opportunity to make it to the finals and they took it."

## Lamorinda Freshmen and JV Teams – Foundations for Success



Photo provided

From Left: 35- Robby Horst, 30- Dashed Weaver, 28- Robbie Mascheroni, 2- Greg Palamountain, 36- Lucas Concepcion, 59- Maddex Mastrov and 26- Brendan Comerford

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If you were to peruse the rosters of the Acalanes, Campolindo and Miramonte football teams, every player would have at least one thing in common – at one point, they all played for a freshman and/or JV team. These are teams that practice and play as hard as the varsity players but generally perform in front of much smaller crowds, primarily made up of parents and friends.

Having an undefeated team at any level merits great appreciation due to its rarity. Three years ago, the Miramonte Girls Water Polo team and the past two years, the Acalanes Girls Water Polo teams have gone undefeated and were duly praised.

Flying way under the radar this past fall, there were two teams that went through their seasons undefeated. They were the Campolindo freshmen football team that went 10-0 and the Acalanes JV football team that went 9-0. The closest margin of victory for Acalanes was by 22 points and they averaged 38 points while only giving up 2 points per game. They also earned local bragging rights by de-

feating Campolindo and Miramonte by a combined score of 71-0. Campolindo had only three games that were decided by seven points or less and returned the favor by defeating Acalanes by a score of 49-12

Acalanes' varsity head coach Floyd Burnsed witnessed the commitment the JV team showed all season: "They are a very dedicated group. These kids lifted on Tuesday and Thursday at 6:45 a.m. and we always had a great turnout each of those days."

As a rule, Burnsed keeps his sophomores on the JV roster but "when there was a need where we had an injury or two on the varsity, we would bring up some of the sophomores for that game and then send them back to the JV."

Burnsed brought up a number of their sophomores to the varsity for the playoffs though few get to see the field. "It's a huge jump from their sophomore to their junior year," said Burnsed. "That's why it's going to really help them coming up with us now to see how we practice and play. It'll give them a leg up."

The Don's JV team did not have an easy schedule

defeating teams like Vintage (10-1), Oakland (7-3), Las Lomas (7-2-1) and Campolindo (7-3). Head coach Greg Young appreciated how special his team was this season: "It wasn't just the athletic talent of this group. There was tremendous leadership along with a hard-working personality, a passion for the game and a fearlessness made for football. It all just came together." The success of the team was no surprise to Young as he had been the team's freshmen head coach the prior season that had an 8-1-1 record: "We predicted that we would be undefeated this year."

The health and depth of a team can always dictate the success or failure of a season and for Acalanes, the team stayed remarkably healthy, said Young: "We only had one player that went both ways, which was running back Evan Malmquist, but he also shared the running with Dante Montgomery while starting on defense. We had 20 players that started and we dressed 42 out of 42 for our last three games. There were no concussions or broken bones, which I feel is as impressive as our points on offense and defense."

The individual statistics for the players were as impressive as the team's record. Malmquist averaged 9.2 yards/carry and scored eight touchdowns. Logan Ketchum had 14 tackles when called up to the varsity and averaged seven tackles/game for the JV, quarterback Luke Suza completed 71.4% of his passes and threw 24 touchdowns and only two interceptions and wide receiver Will Berrian caught 30 passes and scored 13 touchdowns, averaging 21.2 yards/reception.

It's the consistency of the program that Young feels led to the team's current success: "With Coach Burnsed, we are able to have the same offense, defense and special teams."

For Young, it's the players that are ultimately responsible for the team's record: "As soon as the season ends, they're back to work. They believe in their hearts that they have a destiny as a varsity team they will go far and they're all about working hard and that leadership permeates throughout the team with a real positive attitude. They're a joy to be around."

With a freshmen team,

it's a lot harder to predict how your season is going to evolve, says Campolindo head coach Darell Breedlove, in his eighth-year coaching for the Cougars: "It's always tough to know in advance with a freshmen team how good it will be. They've mostly played in flag football leagues. You never know what you're going to get. We were blessed this year with an abundance of talent and kids that had a strong aptitude as well as an understanding what a team situation is."

For freshmen teams, it's primarily a learning experience, says Breedlove: "At the freshmen level, there is a ton of teaching that goes on before the season and it continues throughout the year. The hardest things to get are the fundamentals of football. We were fortunate to have a pretty solid group that paid attention, better than any other freshmen team that I had coached before and they really worked to improve on their fundamentals and how we approached the game which is why we performed so well."

The value of a freshmen team is not lost on varsity head coach Kevin Macy: "We are fighting to keep our freshmen team going. Some schools are more than willing to drop their freshmen football teams and if we took that path, we just wouldn't exist. Everyone here is invested at every level. The freshmen, JV and varsity integrate very well together."

Breedlove attributes the success at Campolindo to Macy: "Kevin is a coach for all of the teams. When I have a specific question or need for an upcoming game, I ask him what drill he recommends and what method he believes would help the team get through this obstacle the best and he brings it over and we go through it and the kids learn a ton."

The connection between Breedlove, assistant varsity coach Bill Levy and Macy goes back 50 years to junior high school and when they played together on the same high school football team. It's this connection that contributes to the consistency of the program, says Breedlove: "Whatever you got that works, we're going to share it with the other groups."

The test of character for the freshmen teams can be as strong as it is for the varsity, even as they learn the physi-

cality, subtlety and nuances of the game, according to Breedlove: "The improvement of the players through the freshmen year is astronomical. There was great athleticism and commitment that our team brought this year. In our first game at Rio Vista, it was 104 degrees and was played on a dry grass field. We were severely tested in a lot of areas and we had to put our quarterback, Dash Weaver, in at linebacker where he forced a fumble late in the game allowing us to win 25-22. It's those type of situations where kids get tested and they show their stripes."

It's the entire freshman experience that Macy deems so crucial: "The freshmen need to know who their leaders are and let the leaders elevate and learn that experience. We play with a commitment that these kids have to each other and develop a spirit in the way they play."

Breedlove concurs with that assessment: "Many of the kids play other sports so they're not coming to us without a competitive background. However, they do have to buy in to the program and there's a lot to learn. You don't get them all in at the freshman level but if you get enough of them, you can have success. Our 10-0 record was a great accomplishment but you don't go in anticipating or making it your goal to go undefeated. You want to see great improvement, you want a wonderful time and you want to build a rapport with the kids so they stay in the program."

Macy is not above having sophomores on the varsity with one proviso: "We'll only bring up sophomores to the varsity if they're going to play. We brought up seven freshmen to dress for our playoff games (pictured) because it's an honor for these kids to witness the game from the sidelines."

The freshmen that earned that distinction are: QB/DB Dashed Weaver, LB/EB Robby Horst, RB/S Greg Palamountain, RB/LB Brendan Comerford, OT/DT Maddex Mastrov, WR/DE Robbie Mascheroni and RB/WR/DB Lucas Concepcion.

"They've all done a great job," Breedlove says. "It's a real opportunity for them to get guidance by being around the varsity players and learning what it's like on that level."