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Acalanes girls tennis finishes year with tough loss

By John T. Miller



Ella Morris Photos Gint Federas

For Acalanes High School girls tennis coach Drew Diefenbach, finishing off this year with a 5-4 loss to Miramonte was tough.

In that loss there were four third-set tie-breakers, including No. 4 singles Ella Morris, who barely lost her match, and a hard-fought win by the No. 2 doubles team of Kayli Harley and Emily Burkowitz, who won in a third tie-breaker.

According to coach Drew Diefenbach, the Dons' season was a matter of "having fun and coming together as a team."

They accomplished that and more with an excellent season, finishing 6-4 in the competitive Foothill Division of the Diablo Athletic League and 9-10 overall.

Diefenbach, in his fourth year at Acalanes, is a Miramonte High School and Saint Mary's College graduate, having played tennis as an undergraduate at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. He also earned a master's in sports psychology from JFK-University and runs a program called Paragon Tennis in Orinda.

The team boasted a good amount of returning players, and, with only three seniors graduating and a good JV crew, their prospects look good for next year.

Analese Ruczynski and Martha Burns, both juniors, played the No. 1 and No. 2 singles positions. They are both lefties, presenting some additional problems for opponents.

Kit Scheirer, a sophomore, No. 2 or No. 3 singles, pulled out a lot of great wins for the team, according to Diefenbach. Senior co-captains Ella Morris played No. 3 or No. 4 singles, with Kayli Harley occupying the No. 1 doubles position.

Diefenbach gives additional credit to Cate Condy, a junior, at the No. 5 singles: "Cate brought special enthusiasm to games and practice, really helping to push the team spirits." He also mentioned Avery Bahl, who rounded out the team as No. 2 doubles. "Avery stepped up as a senior in her first year on varsity and really helped contribute to the team."

In addition to beating DAL rival Miramonte earlier this year, 8-1, Diefenbach points to a nonleague win against a tough Burlingame High opponent, 6-0, as a highlight of the year

Helping out with the team was volunteer Mike Toni, who is in his fourth year as assistant to Diefenbach, and another special "coach," a stuffed animal sloth named Gilbert, Jr. who attends all the practices and games.

At the JV level, Diefenbach credits coaches Gary Fiammengo and Lee Ann Gove for doing an excellent job. "We're pretty well set up for next year," he says.

Diefenbach is also an aficionado in pickleball, hoping to promote it as a sport for high school athletics.



Kayli Harley Photos Gint Federas



Emily Burkowitz Photos Gint Federas

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