

Published July 19th, 2023

Lamorindans on NCAA Championship Teams this spring

By Jon Kingdon



Stanford women's championship team. Photo Stanford Athletics

(Campolindo).

What facilitated the recruiting process for Emerson Bohlig was her being named to the U.S. High school all-American team. Going to a winning program was a key for Bohlig in choosing to attend Northwestern, a school whose women's lacrosse team has won numerous national championships. "I felt getting to play for such a legendary team with a history of winning national championships would be fun and exciting," Bohlig said.

Besides the national championship this year, Northwestern made it to the NCAA semifinals Bohlig's freshman year. Adjusting to college is hard enough but playing on a highly-ranked team is another story. "In high school, some players would not go hard all the time whereas in college, there's no letup and you have to get used to that," Bohlig said. "The pace of the game was so much faster and there is never a point where I could just relax, and I had to get used to that. I thought that my team and coaches did a really good job of preparing us for that in the fall."

Bohlig's high school coach at Miramonte, Jackie Pelletier, a former Division I player at California, knew from experience the challenges that Bohlig was going to face her first year at Northwestern: "I told her to believe in herself. It's so easy when you're a top player and coaches tell you that you're great but when you're younger and you lack some confidence, it's hard to believe in yourself. She was the type of player that woke up and wanted to play and wanted to shoot."

Pelletier was able to watch the championship game on ESPN. "It was very satisfying to watch her play in that game, score a goal and also to see how Emerson has continued to grow and improve as a player," Pelletier said. "Some of my fondest memories about Emerson were to witness her competitive drive to win, not just for herself, for her team. She had limited playing time as a freshman and then put in the work and the time to where she was part of the starting 16 this season for Northwestern."

Pelletier's advice was not lost on Bohlig. "I went in feeling a little nervous and intimidated when I showed up at Northwestern with so many great players on the team," Bohlig said. "At that point, I was trying to be helpful and not get in the way of the players, trying to adjust well to the team and that affected the way I played my freshman year."

As a freshman, Bohlig played in 15 games and in all 22 this season. "I did not play with a lot of confidence my freshman year and that affected how I played on the field and this past year I made it a point to play with a lot more confidence which is what I heard from my coaches," Bohlig said. "Once I took that approach, I became a better player and played more effectively and helped my teammates at the same time."

Bohlig, a communications studies major with a minor in entrepreneurship and the integrated marketing certificate through Medill (the school of journalism), is studying and traveling this summer in Granada, Spain.

Northwestern made it to the semifinal round Bohlig's freshman year and she saw the difference in the team that made them the winner this year. "It was really special to win the championship in front of my parents and sister, Sawyer, (a sophomore at Miramonte)," Bohlig said. "It had to do with how well we worked and

At the end of the spring semester, three of the teams that won a NCAA Division I National Championship, the Northwestern women's lacrosse team, the Stanford women's water polo team and the California men's water polo team, all had at one thing in common - they all had at least one player on their roster from Lamorinda.

Northwestern (Emerson Bohlig - Miramonte) defeated Boston College, Stanford (Jewel Roemer and Lexi Rowell - Acalanes, Katie Lyons - Miramonte, Maggie Hawkins - Acalanes) defeated USC and California (Jake Stone - Acalanes, Garrett Dunn - Campolindo, Brady and Blake Hoover - Miramonte) also defeated USC in their championship games.

The USC men's and women's team also had Lamorindans on their teams: USC Women - Christine Crum (Campolindo) and Grace Tehaney (Miramonte) and the USC men's team - Marcus Longton and Thomas McGuire

communicated with each other. I had the opportunity as a midfielder to work really well with my teammate, Sam Smith (the only other Californian on the Northwestern roster), who I played with on my club team, and we were able to communicate on both ends of the field. Overall, as the team clicked together, and everyone played to the best of their ability to make the team play better."

Bohlig has seen the growth of lacrosse in Lamorinda from when she started playing. "I began playing in the third grade and there was only one club team to try out for and now there are now a lot more club teams that have sprung up and it's become a real growth sport. I loved high school lacrosse at Miramonte because I had great teammates and coaches. Jackie was awesome. Even though I was starting as a freshman, I was lacking some confidence and Jackie was the first person that told me that if I improved my stick skills, I could play for a top Division I school. After that, I put a ton of time into that and I got better all over the field."

Bohlig is looking to be a starter this next season: "Next year, I am going to make sure that I am going to be in the best shape that I can so that I can play the hardest all over the field and play with the confidence that I had in high school and club. In terms of improving my game, I want to take more chances on the offensive and defensive end and initiating more drives and not being hesitant about it."

There were eight men and women on the Stanford and California water polo championship teams from Lamorinda which bespeaks to how the aquatics community has become so imbued in Lamorinda.

"You see this great athletic tradition in our area and that's a testament to all of these kids winning championships and being a part of championship cultures beyond high school and that's a pretty cool and unique thing," said James Lathrop, former Miramonte boys' water polo coach. "For a long time, we've had a tradition of aquatic excellence. When I grew up, I was coached by Olympians like Kirk Everist and Rick McNair. Our proximity to the universities and the people that come back to the area and want to give back to the community, is really a great thing."

Joe Roemer, the Miramonte girls head coach and his daughter Jewel Roemer, have been on dual hot streaks this past two years. Miramonte was undefeated the past two seasons (56-0) with two NCS Champions and Jewel's Stanford team had a combined record of 49-3 and two national championships.

Roemer gives much of credit for the success of the area teams and individuals to the club teams. "We have the Diablo Water Polo Club, Lamorinda Club, 680 Club and CC United making us the heartbeat of Contra Costa County," Roemer said. "Kids are playing from a young age, and they are following through, getting solid coaching from the clubs and the high schools."

A sense of unity can develop among the players that also contributes to their success. "It's a matter of developing team chemistry and avoiding 'drama' on the team," Roemer said. "We have good leaders that were able to squash any of that drama. The girls are able to bond and it's what they do together away from the pool, and it's been the same at Stanford, according to Jewel."

Acalanes girls' head coach Misha Buchel took great pride in Stanford's victory in watching Jewel and Lexi Rowell compete for the Cardinal and saw a reason for their success. "It was immensely satisfying to watch them continue to excel," Buchel said. "It's the marriage of physical and athletic talent with that willingness to commit to work hard and be better. The Japanese have a term - Kaizen - which means continuous improvement. You'll get some athletes that don't have that work ethic component to always want to push and improve themselves, even if they have the superior ability. It's having the ability but also knowing that you have to work hard and make yourself better on a daily basis. Jewel and Lexi and the other girls fit into that category 100%. When your best players demonstrate that, you have the opportunity to have a special team."

Kim Everist, the Campolindo girls water polo coach also gloried in the success of the Lamorinda girls on the Stanford team. "Watching the championship shows how spoiled we are in Lamorinda," Everist said. "Prior to this year, we've had a number of water polo players that have won NCAA championships."

With Maggie Hawkins on the championship team, it played up how the traditions of the sport are constantly being passed down. "I've known Maggie Hawkins for a long time as she came up through the ranks," Everist said. "She had a big year with the women's national team, going to Peru and then to go to Stanford and have a great year, despite having had a concussion during the season and then played well when she returned. I coached her sisters Katherine, who just finished up at Indiana, and Kelly and it was epic to have three sisters come through the program."

There are very talented athletes but the ones that step out from the crowd have one consistent quality, according to Everist: "They are mentally tough and gritty - they're grinders. They set their sights on goals and no matter what the obstacle, they're going to find a way through. They make the most of failure and they hang in there battling through. They're just innately fighters and that is what separates them from everybody else. They're smart kids with top grades, and what they've learned from me, or their club coaches is learning decision making and awareness. They've become students of the game and they apply what they've been taught very quickly."

Intangibles are also a key factor, according to Lathrop: "The other piece to it is that these kids are really hard working, high achieving individuals. My experience with Brady and Blake Hoover is that besides their being individually high achieving, they just fit into a championship culture so well along with Garrett Dunn

and Jake Stone. They're all great kids that are really about winning and that comes with, not just contributing on the field, but being great teammates and students."

It's a tradition that shows no signs of stopping, according to Lathrop. "My daughter just attended a clinic which Olympian swimmer, Natalie Coughlin (Carondelet) put on for the local swim teams. It's just a really cool thing that just doesn't exist everywhere. The connection with the current athletes that are competing for the Olympics like Drew Holland (Campolindo) and Maggie Steffens (Monte Vista) that come back and give back to the sports that they love is special. It affects this community where the kids get to see the idols in their sport and have been role models for them. So many of the local graduates have been inspired by others and when they're back in the community showing their gratitude for the opportunities they've been given to play in high school and ultimately move on top college programs and have the chance to compete for a national championship, that gets passed on to younger athletes."



California men's water polo team. Photo California Athletics



Emerson Bohlig Photo Northwestern Athletics



Jewel Roemer scores the first goal in championship game. Photo Stanford Athletics

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