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Miramonte has sights on seventh straight title

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Article Launched: 01/04/2008 03:08:07 AM PST

In a strange way, it seemed Miramonte High School's Katie Batlin would never graduate.

At least, some of the coaches around the Diablo Foothill Athletic League thought as much.

Batlin enters her fourth and final season on the varsity level and, along with senior guard Ashlee Burns, is expected to lead the talented Matadors to their seventh straight Diablo Foothill Athletic League title.

But that is only one of the goals for Miramonte.

The Matadors hope to repeat as North Coast Section Division III champions and make a push for the state championship.

Before they do that, they'll have to deal with Dublin and Northgate, schools hoping to knock off the reigning champion.

Dublin, led by the sharp-shooting **Nikki Beckman**, brings back a bunch of young returnees that surprised the league with a second-place finish last season. Meanwhile, the Broncos return Kelly Peterson, a do-it-all guard who as a junior has orally committed to Lehigh University.

Acalanes

COACH: Scott Murphy, third season

2006-07 RECORD: 16-12, 8-6 DFAL

KEY RETURNEES: SG Katie Bruzzone, Jr.; PF K.J. Kroetch, Jr.;

G Ellie Cohen, Jr.; F Grace Appert, Sr.; F Shannon German, Jr.; G Molly Kastner, Sr.; G Ashlie Neff, Jr.

KEY NEWCOMERS: F Kiara Harewood, Fr.; G **Emani Harrison**, Fr.

KEY LOSSES: PG Abby Cohen; C Jillian Smith; G Claire Jacober; F Laura Lazzarini

OUTLOOK: The Dons return Bruzzone, their top player, but went 1-2 at both the Walnut Creek Classic Tournament and the Phoenix Nike Tournament of Champions before winning two games at the West Coast Jamboree. Acalanes' tough nonleague schedule should prepare the team for league play.

Alhambra

COACH: Mike Aboussie, 13th season

2006-07 RECORD: 20-8, 9-5

KEY RETURNEES: F Aly Conway, Sr.; G Sabrina Domingo, Sr.; F Katie Gricius, Sr.; G/F Katie Samuelson, Jr.; F Stephanie Kruta, Jr.; G Rachel Santos, Jr.; G Leah Broadhurst, Sr.; F Gina Contreras, Sr.

KEY NEWCOMERS: C Melissa Tolerton Jr.; G Sam Domingo, Sr.; G Justin Woerner, Jr.

KEY LOSS: F Taneya Sawangwan

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OUTLOOK: After a bumpy start to the season, the Bulldogs look back on track. The turnaround has coincided with the Conway's return from a calf injury. Winning the Fort Bragg Tournament shows that with last season's core group intact, Alhambra can compete in the top half of the league.

Campolindo

COACH: Clay Kallam, first season

2006-07 RECORD: 11-14, 4-10

KEY RETURNNEES: G Stephanie Triggas, Jr.; Michelle Gibson Sr.; F Julie Phayer, Sr.; F Becka Watson, Sr.; G Alyssa Belluomini, Sr.; F/C Leslie Lauck So.; F/C Megan Ringer, So.

KEY NEWCOMERS: G Janelle Travis, So.; G Rose Fruci, So.; G Katie Shulenberger, So.

KEY LOSS: G Elisa Miller

OUTLOOK: Triggas should provide leadership as the only returning starter. Travis, a Miramonte transfer, is proving to be a legitimate shooter. The Cougars will try to overcome their inexperience by playing an up-tempo style and shooting their share of 3-pointers.

College Park

COACH: Ron Pangilinan, seventh season

2006-07 RECORD: 9-16, 4-10

KEY RETURNNEES: F Kelly Kennedy, Sr.; PG Stephanie Daily, Jr.; G Jessie Ponte, Jr.

KEY NEWCOMERS: N/A

KEY LOSSES: G Sara Phillips; C Dani Vidulich; C/F

Paige Montalbo; G/F Sarah Hinse

OUTLOOK: The Falcons are leaning on the 6-foot Kennedy, who has carried much of the scoring load thus far. College Park's two victories at the Surf N' Slam tournament in San Diego should give the team some confidence.

Concord

COACH: Brianne Whiteside, second season

2006-07 RECORD: 4-20, 3-10

KEY RETURNNEES: G Afton Chase, Sr.; G Karina Dekker, So.; G Kelly Muere, Jr.; C Sarah Harris, Sr.; F Tia Dooley, Sr.; G Rebecca Lostia Sr.; C Julie Mraovich, Sr.

KEY NEWCOMERS: G Paloma Woods, So.; G Symore Pillors, So.

KEY LOSSES: G Megan Souza; G Jessica Rhoe; G Janelle Hammon

OUTLOOK: The Minutemen tasted their first success of the season with a couple wins at the West Coast Jamboree and hope to ride the momentum into league play. Concord's offense is balanced; any of the core returners is able to pick up scoring responsibilities.

Dublin

COACH: Mark Wainwright, fourth season

2006-07 RECORD: 21-5, 12-2

KEY RETURNNEES: G Nikki Beckman, So.; G Chereese Thomas, So.; Jasmine Smith, Jr.; G Jayme Goodwin, Jr.; G Liz Johnson, Jr.; C Kim Kroske, Sr.; F Nicole Castillo, Sr.; F Brittany Castilla, Sr.


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KEY NEWCOMERS: G Symon Jackson, So.; C **Alexous Robinson**, So.; G Emmerly Stimson, So.

KEY LOSS: C Jill Winkler

OUTLOOK: The Gaels shattered expectations last season but now must live up to them. Led by Beckman, Thomas, Smith and Goodwin, Dublin is considered one of the league's top teams. The Gaels are off to a 9-2 start. In those nine wins they have beaten their opponents by an average of 27.8 points.

Las Lomas

COACH: Jeff Craine, first season

2006-07 RECORD: 12-14, 5-9

KEY RETURNNEES: G Paige McIntyre, Jr.; G Kristi Choy, Jr.; G **Cameron Dage**, So.

KEY NEWCOMERS: F Erica Johnson-Shaw, Sr.; F Whitney Berch, Fr.; F Monica Field, Sr.; G Morgan Beard, Jr.

KEY LOSSES: F Lauren Desino; C Claire Hause; PG Jessica Felix; G Jen Thomas

OUTLOOK: Craine was the junior varsity coach the past three seasons and is glad he has three-year varsity players McIntyre and Choy to help lead the team. Dage also will help carry the offensive load as the Knights hope to bounce back from a 1-5 start to the season.

Miramonte

COACH: Darrell Hirashima, 11th season

2006-07 RECORD: 24-7, 14-0

KEY RETURNNEES: F/C Katie Batlin, Sr.; G Ashlee Burns, Sr.; G Katie Evans, Jr.; C Stephanie Golden, So.; F/C Chelsey Christensen Jr.; F Katie Reid, Jr.

KEY NEWCOMERS: N/A

KEY LOSSES: G Courtney Fearon; G Jenny Sperling

OUTLOOK: With Batlin, Burns and Evans, the Matadors have one of the best backcourts in the East Bay. The emergence of Golden and Christensen provide an inside presence that makes Miramonte an elite team and a virtual lock to win its seventh straight DFAL title.

Mt. Diablo

COACH: Dom Debellis, first season

2005-06 RECORD: 0-26, 0-14

KEY RETURNNEES: F Cherella Walston Jr.; PG Charlene Martinez, Jr.; PG/SG Janelle Bicomong, Jr.

KEY NEWCOMERS: N/A

KEY LOSSES: SG Kelly Bartlett; G Kayla Neal

OUTLOOK: The Red Devils are winless in nine tries this season and will struggle in league play. But the return of Walston, Martinez and Bicomong provides some consistency.

Northgate

COACH: Kelly Sopak, second season

2006-07 RECORD: 23-4, 11-3

KEY RETURNNEES: G Kelly Peterson, Jr.; PG Courtney Hamilton, So.; G Kaley Blodgett, Jr.; C Cassandra Lewandowski, So.

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KEY NEWCOMERS: G/F Kendra Hessel, So.; G Tess Soper, Fr.

KEY LOSSES: G Haley Dahlgard; F/C Jessica Trautner; F Kelsey Farabee; G Lisa Espinoza; F Valerie Middleton

OUTLOOK: The Broncos have improved their defense and have the versatile Peterson to make up for Dahlgard's and Trautner's offense lost. Sopak thinks Northgate has become more physical with the addition of Amador Valley transfer Hessel and Hamilton's improvement. The Broncos' tough win over Hercules in the Walnut Creek Classic is a confidence booster.

Predicted finish

1. Miramonte
2. Dublin
3. Northgate
4. Alhambra
5. Acalanes
6. College Park
7. Las Lomas
8. Campolindo
9. Concord
10. Mt. Diablo

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