

Mira Costa Honored with National ESPN Award



Mustang quarterback Kyle Demarco talks about what it means to play sports at Mira Costa.

By Gregg McMullin

Mira Costa High School's Athletic Department was recently recognized at the national level for its excellence in its sports department. The entire Mustang family of sports, that encompassed 14 of their 25 teams, was awarded the ESPN Fab50 award as the number 11 ranked athletic department in the nation based on a point system for the 2009/09 school year.

The ESPN Fab50, in accordance with *Rise Magazine*, is a program designed to follow the accomplishments of high school athletes and their programs in the nation. ESPN and *Rise* joined forces a few years back to honor these athletes for accomplishments both on the field and in the classroom.

The Mustangs earned points for 14 of their teams that were evaluated on how they finished their year in that sport. The sports included in the point system are football, boys' and girls' volleyball, boys' and girls' basketball, boys' and girls' soccer, baseball, softball, boys' and girls' cross country, boys' and girls' track, and boys' lacrosse.

Points were awarded for a final number one ranking, top 10 finish, top 25 finish, top 40 finish and top 50 finish. Any school that had more than one team in the final Fab 50 was awarded additional points.

The Mustangs earned an incredible 10.5 points along with a number of other schools across the nation. Based on the tiebreaker, Mira Costa placed 11th in the nation. "It's really a credit to our coaches, student athletes, teachers and administrators to place 11th out of all of the high schools in the nation," said Mira Costa vice-principal and athletic director Paula Spence.

The 2008/2009 school year was another successful one on and off the playing fields for the Mustangs. Consider that the football team reached the CIF finals; both boys and girls basketball teams went deep into the playoffs; both volleyball teams had great years; cross country teams were champions; the golf, tennis, baseball, lacrosse and both water polo teams did well in the CIF playoffs; and the surf team was crowned national champion. So it's easy to see why the Mira Costa Athletic Department was recognized for its successful year.

When you stop to consider that Mira Costa was the only public school from California in the top 25 schools, it really is an accomplishment. Santa Ana Mater Dei was third overall and was the highest school honored in California, while the Mustangs were the next from the West Coast to be honored.

Mira Costa's coaching staff has long been admired by other South Bay and CIF Southern Section schools for their knowledge, time commitment and success. Legendary football coach Don Morrow says that the coaches and faculty members work together to ensure the student athlete excels in the classroom as

well as on the playing field. "The lessons you learn on the field are in many ways the same lessons you learn in the classroom and throughout your life," he said. "We teach perseverance and to overcome obstacles, and not to give up on yourself or others...and to work as a team or a family."

The girls' cross country coach, Renee Williams-Smith, added, "It's vital that student athletes learn to overcome adversity in their sport because it helps teach them to stay focused in the classroom."

For some athletes, doing well in their sport is just a portion of what it takes to be successful. Take girls' cross country standout Savannah Pio, who noted that sports has taught her to be ambitious and sets goals for herself. "I need to do well in the classroom and when I'm running because I want to compete in college while getting an education at the same time," she said.

Mustangs' quarterback Kyle Demarco said that high school sports will bring athletes together and working for one common goal. He added that when you bring good athletes together and get good coaching and play at a high level of intensity, you're bound to be successful.

Mira Costa was awarded plaques and banners that will be displayed in the gym and in the trophy cases. Right now, one of the banners is hanging in the Athletic Director's office to make sure there aren't any wrinkles on it when it finally is displayed on the wall. It will hang alongside a number of other banners proclaiming Mira Costa's dominance in a variety of sports over the years at the national, state, regional and league levels.

Mustang News and Notes

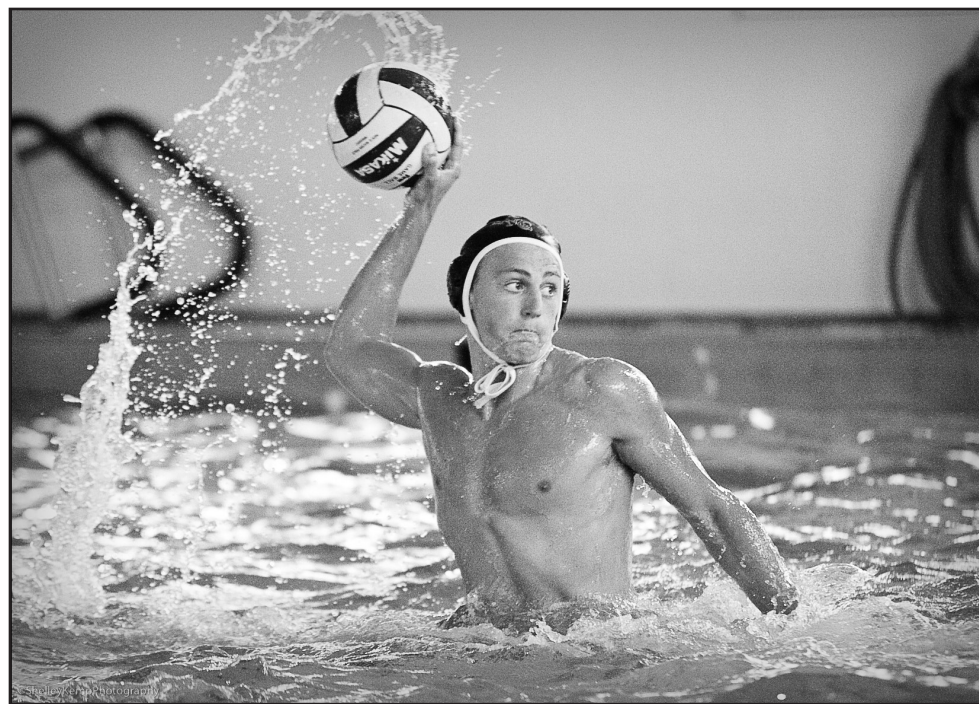
Speaking of dominance, the boys' water polo team won the prestigious South Bay Tournament by defeating highly-touted Santa Monica in the semifinals and Crescenta Valley in the finals. In the game against Santa Monica, Jake Miller led the scoring along with Conner Davidge and Alec Gasperian in the 9-4 win. In the finale, Bryce Miller led the Mustang scoring attack with five goals, while Evan Bronner, Britton Cole, Trevor Tate, Jason Veris and Spencer Neste added goals of their own in the 10-6 championship game win.

Schedules

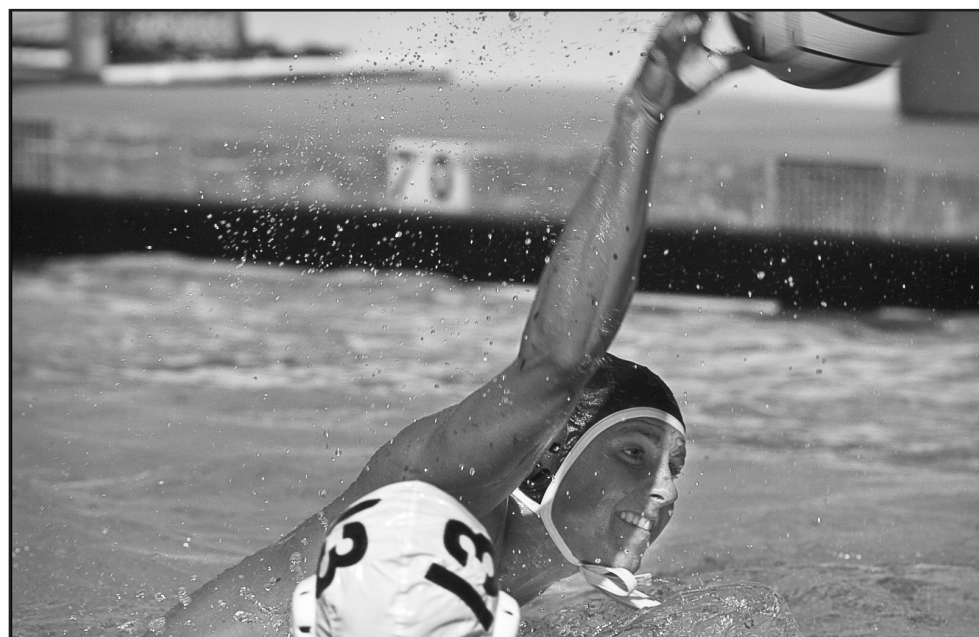
The football team comes off its bye week and travels to Newport Harbor (4-0) for a game Friday night at 7 p.m. The Sailors are currently ranked 10th in the CIF Southern Section Pac-5 Division, while the Mustangs are ranked fourth in the Western Division.

The boys' water polo team (9-2) hosts La Canada on Saturday at 4 p.m. The girls' tennis team hosts Brentwood at 3 p.m. on Monday, October 12, while the cross country teams are at Palos Verdes on Saturday for the P.V. Invitational and again on Thursday, October 15 at 2:30 p.m. for a Bay League meet. •

Mira Costa Wins Gold!



Jake Miller shot and scored the first goal of the semi-final game against Santa Monica. He scored twice in that game. Photos by Shelley Kemp. For more photos go to www.Kemp.Photoreffect.com



Mira Costa Driver, Bryce Miller shoots against first round game against Torrance. He led Mira Costa in scoring in the Championship game against Crescenta Valley to help the Mustangs bring home gold.

By Kelly Kemp, USA Water Polo Hall of Fame Coach

Two top South Bay teams earned medalist status this past weekend in the 40th Annual Henry Stuart South Bay Boys High School Water Polo Tournament—Mira Costa of the Bay League and El Segundo of the Ocean League—and each enjoyed a four-goal victory in their medal games. El Segundo put away Santa Monica 11-7 in the first final, and Mira Costa dispatched Crescenta Valley in the nightcap 10-6.

Entering the weekend, Mira Costa found itself with a strong 5-2 record, having recently played at the "America's Finest City" Tournament in San Diego, California, emerging with a winning 3-2 record at Coronado High School.

In the tournament, Mira Costa's first round games Friday were against West Torrance and South Pasadena, both lopsided wins, but setting the stage for a super Saturday and the finals! The third opponent, Santa Monica, proved to be the toughest of the tournament, and according to head coach Jon Reichardt, "our boys started strong, worked hard and played hard for the win with a well-balanced attack and defense." On offense, six Mustangs scored. Three--Alec Gasperian, Conner Davidge and Jake Miller--had two goals each. Another three--Evan Bronner, Britton Cole and Bryce Miller--had one apiece for the 9-4 victory. Deven Ram with seven saves and Dana Tuttle with five saves split time in the goal anchoring the defense, one working the shallow end and the other the deep end of the pool, to take advantages of strengths and keep opponents off guard.

So the stage was set, as Green and Gold spirits were up to entertain perennial favorite Crescenta Valley High School, which won the tournament three times in the '90s. The first period was a 1-1 deadlock. The game then remained close at 3-2 and 4-3, with

Bryce Miller earning inside water, faking the keeper and lobbing a shot for a goal and the lead. Immediately after, Cole stuffed the Crescenta center-forward's shot with a field block. Then on the counterattack, Mira Costa drew an ejection. With the game clock winding down, clean passes from Bronner to Jake Miller to Spencer Neste resulted in a goal and 5-3 halftime lead.

At the start of the third period, Bryce Miller won the sprint, and after several turnovers by both teams, Mira Costa was fortunate to draw an advantage when the opponent was ejected for a major foul. The quick set-up and wing-to-wing passing from right forward Cole to left forward Bryce Miller resulted in a goal. After another set shot blocked by Mira Costa came another counter and another kickoff. During the extra man passing, this time it was Alec Gasperian passing to Cole and back to Miller for a repeat performance and goal.

With the Mustangs back on defense, the next highlight was field block time with Ryan Koverman making a clean save. Everyone on Mira Costa was alert, taking off down the pool on a quick counterattack. Bronner passed to the lefthander Cole, who lured in the defense, wisely assisted back to an unmarked Bronner, and the game was out of reach after three quarters.

In this game, Bryce Miller led all scorers with five goals and Tuttle led goalies with 10 saves. Both Tuttle and Ram alternated in goal for the Mustangs this game as well, but overall for the two-day tournament, Ram was the pillar of consistency, earning Most Valuable Player honors. "It was a great tournament, a great experience and really fun for our team to win at this level of competition," according to Reichardt. Now the Mustangs can look forward to their Bay League rivalries after finishing the tournament 4-0 and ranked second in CIF-Southern Section Division IV. •