

Del Norte boys end long championship drought in baseball

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The Del Norte Warriors ended a long wait for a Big 5 baseball championship this season, securing the conference title outright with a recent 6-2 win at Eureka (May 7).

The championship was the first for the program since 2014 and was even remarkable considering the team has not placed higher than fourth in the conference since 2015.

But this year's team answered the call in style, exceeding most people's expectations and losing just twice in 12 conference games after winning just two games a year ago.

And they did it with some stellar pitching from senior Preston Daniels and some timely hitting from his teammates.

"I feel like last year we had guys on (base) the whole time and couldn't hit them in," head coach Jeff Cook said. "And this year, we're getting those hits."

They had to battle on the final day, with the Loggers hoping to play spoiler and still battling for second place in conference.

With Daniels in control once again on the mound, the Warriors came out fired up and took an early three-run lead.

Eureka, however, would score twice in the bottom of the third inning to put some pressure on the visitors.

But the Warriors would not be denied and they added to their lead when Daniels scored in the top of the fifth to make it 4-2.

Daniels continued to impress an inning later when he and teammate Ben Shrewsberry each had RBI hits to add two more insurance runs and that would prove to be more than enough for the conference champs.

"They worked the counts pretty good," Cook said of his players. "Our guys have been doing that well this year."

Four Del Norte players had multiple hits in the championship-clinching win, including Daniels and Aidan Rice, the latter of whom opened the scoring in the top of the first to help set the tone.

Anthony Cardenas and Greyson Franklin each also had two hits in the win, with Franklin also driving in a pair of runs.

Saxon Taylor, who leads the team in average this spring (.431), and Landon Williams each added a base hit, with the latter also walking four times and scoring a pair of runs.

Williams, a sophomore, also had a good game on defense, making some key plays at shortstop.

The entire Del Norte defense rose to the occasion and impressed in the team's biggest game of the year.

"Our defense was solid behind (Daniels) today," the head coach said. "They made the plays. We just grinded it out."

Going into the final day of the regular season the Warriors had clinched at least a co-championship after splitting a doubleheader against McKinleyville four days earlier in front of their own fans on senior day.

They won game one 5-2 before dropping game two 13-0, leaving them with everything still to play for on the final day of the regular season.

But after waiting 11 years to win the conference title, the players and coaches were in no mood to share it and they took care of business in their conference finale.

After opening the season with four losses in their first five games, the Warriors have lost just twice in their 18 games since then.