

Photos: Seniors lead the way on resilient Del Norte baseball team

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It's been an up-and-down season on the baseball field for the Del Norte Warriors, with the wet spring playing havoc with the schedule and affecting the team's preparation.

A couple of team-bonding road trips and a run of much-needed games, however, has Del Norte well in contention for the North Coast Section playoffs and looking forward to the business end of the season.

The Warriors began the season in impressive fashion, putting together an early four-game winning streak and taking six of their opening eight games.

However, they followed that with a five-game losing streak and dropped some close battles, with four of those losses coming by a combined six runs, including two one-run defeats.

But under the guidance of first-year head coach Brandon Coborn and his staff, the players never lost belief in themselves and continued to persevere, rediscovering their winning ways with an impressive 10-1 win over Hidden Valley on April 14.

"What I like about this team is that we really haven't gotten into a negative mindset," Coborn said after the Hidden Valley win. "We had a five-game losing streak and we lost some close games, and getting this big win before we return to league play was big. I really can't say enough about how the guys are coming together."

This year's roster features a core group of athletic seniors who are multi-sport athletes, including Ethan Thomas, Cole Blackburn, Willie Bommelyn, Brody Mattz and Cooper Maxwell.

Thomas has been a leader in just about every aspect of the game, batting .359 with team-highs in RBIs (12) and doubles (six), as well as impressing on the mound.

Mattz, meanwhile, leads the team with a .362 average and has 11 RBIs and three doubles, while Bommelyn has been the "prototypical lead-off hitter," according to his coach, and leads the team with 18 runs and 20 stolen bases, twice as many as any of his teammates.

Blackburn also has 11 RBIs and five doubles, and leads the team on the mound with a 3-1 record and the only team save in six appearances, while posting an impressive ERA of 1.91.

Behind the plate, Maxwell has been one of the team's most improved and consistent players this season.

"Maxwell's doing a great job for us behind the dish," Coborn said earlier this spring. "He's come so far. He was the quarterback of the football team and he's becoming our quarterback on the baseball field. It's just exciting to see."

The Warriors came out of spring break with a record of 7-7-1, and Coborn knows there is plenty of room for improvement down the stretch of the season.

"We need to cut down on our strikeouts offensively, and on defense we need to take care of the baseball, because errors have come back to haunt us," the head coach said.

The pitching, however, has been pretty good with a team ERA of 3.50.

"Our pitching staff just need to keep competing for us," Coborn said. "I'm really liking what we're getting on the mound."

A couple of team-bonding trips to Chico and Redding also has helped with the team's development and Coborn says that would not have been possible without the support of the community.

"I want to give a shout-out to the Del Norte community, parents, fans, friends, sponsors, boosters," he said. "They have really helped us with fundraising this year that has allowed us to go to Chico and the tournament in Redding."

The Warriors will close out league play with back-to-back three-game series against Arcata in late April and Eureka in early May, and the Big 5 is shaping up to be a battle of heavyweights with all four of Del Norte's opponents posting winning records through the first half of the season.