

Del Norte Notebook ... Oct. 23

October 23, 2019



Conference opener -- Del Norte jumped to a 27-6 lead and then ran out the clock Friday, as the Warriors defeated St. Bernard's High 27-20 in the first game of the Big Four Conference season. Both teams came into the game with 6-1 non-conference records.

Over when -- After the Crusaders scored with five seconds remaining to cut the Del Norte lead to seven, St. Bernard's attempted an onside kick. But Warrior Tanner Forker jumped on the ball, effectively ending the game.

Key moments -- There were a number of vital points in the game for Del Norte: Chase Blackburn's 50-yard gallop on third-and-long on the opening drive set the theme for the game ... Kaleb Price's critical interception in the second half denied St. Bernard's momentum ... but perhaps the most exciting moment was in the closing minute of the first half, when Blackburn took the pitch and headed left, pitched it to Price heading right, who in turn tossed a perfect pass to quarterback O.J. Calleja at the goal line to give Del Norte a 20-6 halftime lead.

Streak at two -- After losing five consecutive games to St. Bernard's dating back to 2010, Del Norte has now won two in a row over the private Eureka school. The Warriors won last year at Crusaders' Field, 42-31.

Welcome back -- Kobe Mitchell was injured in Del Norte's only loss this season (to Mazama in Klamath Falls). He returned with a vengeance Friday, rushing for a career-high 153 yards on 23 carries. His

earthshaking 40-yard explosion through the heart of the Crusader defense turned out to be the winning score. As a team, Del Norte averaged six yards-per-carry in slippery conditions.

Closing in -- Del Norte's leading rusher this year, Levi Cox-Cooley, was held to his lowest total of the season, 55 yards on 12 carries. But he is now within 94 yards of going over the 1,000-yard mark for the season. If successful, he would join just three other Warriors -- Colin Taylor (2011), Ethan Price (2018) and Sebastian Puente (2018) -- who have crossed the barrier this decade.

The Lost Crusade -- Del Norte's defense knew it would not shut down St. Bernard's dynamic quarterback, Will Oney. But the Warriors certainly contained him. The Crusaders were held to half their season's scoring average, and Del Norte's defense limited St. Bernard's leading receiver - Lane Thrap - to just two catches and six yards. He was averaging five catches and 150 yards a contest.

"Pick"ing it up -- Del Norte came up with its ninth interception of the season, when safety Kaleb Price got his first. It was the only turnover of the game, surprising considering the wet, muddy conditions at Mike Whalen Field.

Ratings -- Del Norte moved back into the No. 2 spot in MaxPrep's North Coast Section Division 5 rankings, just behind Encinal. Del Norte's first opponent this season, Moreau Catholic, is now No. 4, with Eureka 5, and Fortuna 8th in the 17-team division. Despite its loss Friday, St. Bernard's remains atop the Division 6 rankings.

Up next -- Del Norte heads south Friday for the Big Four Conference battle with Fortuna. Game time has been moved up to 7 p.m. since no junior varsity game will be played. The Warriors won earlier this year, 29-13, at Mike Whalen Field in a non-conference contest.

Typical Huskies -- Just when it looked as if this year's Fortuna team was going to fade away with its 2-5 record, the Huskies knocked off Eureka on Saturday, 21-14, spoiling the Loggers' homecoming festivities. Last year, Fortuna lost its final four regular-season games and entered the postseason with a 5-5 record. It then won four playoff games in a row to claim its second North Coast Section division championship in as many years.

Old friends -- Over the past 16 seasons, Del Norte and Fortuna have met an astonishing 34 times, with the Huskies holding an 18-16 margin. The two teams have split their last four games.

No JV again -- Del Norte's junior varsity did not play against St. Bernard's, which does not field a JV program. This week, the Warriors are forced to forfeit its game against Fortuna following a skirmish during its Oct. 10 game with McKinleyville that led to numerous suspensions for players who left the bench.