

## The Warriors' football run to state starts Friday at home

November 12, 2019



The Del Norte High School football team got exactly what it wanted from North Coast Section officials on Sunday.

After waiting for a week, the Warriors learned they will host Alhambra in the first round of the North Coast Section Division 5 playoffs, thanks to the Warriors' No. 2 seeding in the eight-team bracket.

Game time will be 7 p.m. at Mike Whalen Field.

If Del Norte wins, it will get a second home game - in the semifinals - on Nov. 22 or 23, against the winner of this weekend's Moreau Catholic-Miramonte game.

Del Norte coach Nick White knew a matchup with the Bulldogs was a strong possibility. He and his staff have been studying film of Alhambra since last week. "It's going to be a good test," said White, in his first season as head coach. "They are a spread (offense) team, big up front."

On paper, Del Norte would appear to have a big edge.

The Warriors posted a 9-1 regular season record, winning their final five games and capturing the Big Four Conference championship with a 3-0 record. Del Norte closed its regular season with a 48-19 victory over

Eureka.

Alhambra comes into the playoffs as the seventh seed, with a 5-5 record, losing four of its final five contests. The Bulldogs finished 0-4 in the Diablo-Foothill Conference and dropped its last game 56-7 to Acalanes. Alhambra's road record this year was 1-4.

White says that what happened in the regular season is essentially ancient history. "It's the playoffs," White said. "Teams are going to play as hard as they can possibly play. If we don't come ready to play, we go home."

Alhambra started the season winning four of its first five. But in the second half of the year, the Bulldogs struggled, losing four games by lopsided scores. Only a 49-7 victory over 3-7 Concord broke the skid.

While Del Norte's defense must deal with Alhambra's spread offense - a style it saw in two of its final three games - the Bulldogs must face the Warriors' rushing attack, which has been potent all season long.

Del Norte is averaging 7.5 yards per carry, led by junior Levi Cox-Cooley, who finished the regular season with 1,065 yards. Fullback Kobe Mitchell has battled some nagging injuries, but in his six full games, the senior has averaged 126 yards per contest.

The team's No. 3 rusher, Chase Blackburn, is coming off a monster 255-yard performance against Eureka.

Quarterback O.J. Calleja has been efficient. The senior has connected on 60% of his passes, with eight touchdowns and just two interceptions.

Defensively, Del Norte's front eight has been fierce, holding teams to just 11 points per game. The Warriors' defensive backfield has bent at times, but rarely broken, coming up with a total of 11 interceptions.

The playoffs were delayed by one week after power outages and fires in the Santa Rosa region forced teams to miss games. That postponement came as good news for the shorthanded Warriors, who were banged up at the end of the season.

Mitchell, Cox-Cooley and another two-way starter, Geo Gonzalez, were nicked a bit, but should be able to play Friday.

Speaking of getting healthy, 220-pound senior lineman Eli Larson is expected to be in the lineup against Alhambra after missing the entire season with a knee injury suffered last spring. That's important, as Del Norte is somewhat shorthanded up front, with two starters out for the season.

"He's looking good, on the D-line especially," White said of Larson, an all-league selection as a junior. "He is like a kid in a candy store, just super excited to go."

The game can be heard live on KPOD 97.9, with the Warrior Pregame show starting at 6:30 p.m.

Catch the post-game recap after the game at [www.triplicate.com](http://www.triplicate.com).

