

Warriors get set for the Big 4, key stretch run

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It's back to work for the Del Norte Warriors this weekend as they get set to open the Big 4 in football after a three-week mid season break.

The Warriors, who kick off league play at Eureka High on Saturday night, are 5-1 on the season and have dominated in all of their wins, outscoring their opponents by an average of more than 47 points.

Nevertheless, head coach Nick White is expecting a battle and believes every team will come into league play refocused and ready to go.

"I think it'll be competitive like every year," White said. "When you play league, everybody gets a chance to reset. You could say it's the beginning of the season. All hope is alive and everybody's going for that championship."

With just three games for each team in the Big 4, there is little room for error and a defeat can end a team's challenge quickly.

"Every game is the biggest game of the year," the head coach added. "Everybody's 0-0 right now."

Del Norte, however, will be viewed as the team to beat.

For comparison sake, the Warriors are ranked No. 15 overall in the North Coast Section, according to MaxPreps, while Eureka is next best at No. 42, followed by No. 48 St. Bernard's and No. 68 Fortuna.

The league champion also receives a guaranteed home game in the opening round of the North Coast Section playoffs, which could be particularly beneficial for Del Norte.

Most teams in the Bay Area are not used to traveling that far for games, and they're generally not used to playing in front of crowds as large as those that show up for Del Norte games.

Because of their recent success in the playoffs, however, the Warriors have been moved up to Division 4 this year, which will make their bid for a section championship more challenging.

Del Norte is currently ranked No. 4 in the bracket, behind Marin Catholic (7-0), Acalanes (6-1) and Cardinal Newman (5-2), and winning the league and hosting a first-round playoff game could be crucial to their postseason hopes.

The good news for the Warriors is that they have had three weeks without interruption to prepare for the Big 4, and they also have dominated Eureka in recent times, beating the Loggers 45-0 in their last game, after also shutting them out 42-0 late last season.

White, however, is taking nothing for granted.

"They're physical, they've got some really good players, and it's their Homecoming game," he said of the Loggers. "They're going to be excited to play and we have to match their intensity."

The coach and his players used their midseason break to work on some basics and to refocus ahead of the key stretch run.

"It went well in practice," White said. "We worked on a lot of fundamentals and just trying to stay crisp as far as the little things go. I think we had a really good two weeks of practice. And we got a chance to reflect on what we need to work on."

The team also used the midseason break to get healthy and White is hoping to have a full roster for the trip to Eureka, with Jacob Dane (OL/DL), Gavin Skerik (FB/MLB) and Aden Mintonye (RB/OLB) all expected to be available after missing some recent games.

A lack of depth, however, has not been a problem for Del Norte, and seeing so many players step up has impressed the coach.

"I think every kid being able to step up when they were asked to step up is a huge part of (our success)," he said.

"We've had some injuries and we haven't missed a beat, so I've been really impressed with our whole team. Everybody wants to play. Everybody wants to learn and compete."

Saturday night's game is scheduled for 7:30 p.m., with the JVs playing at 5 p.m.