

Warriors building momentum ahead of league play

December 17, 2022



It's been a mostly positive start to the new basketball season for the Del Norte Warriors, who have been busy for the past couple of weeks playing at a variety of tournaments.

The girls varsity team reached the championship game at the Mt. Shasta tournament on Saturday, despite missing two key starters through sickness, but lost to St. Bernard's by a score of 39-31.

"We played tough," said head coach Justin Clifton, whose team dropped to 5-2 with the loss.

Jacalyn Gorbet scored a team-high 10 points for Del Norte, while Brooklyn Carter finished with nine points, Anyessa Bettga eight and Koy-Poh McQuillen five.

This year's team is junior heavy, but Clifton believes the Warriors have the talent and depth to challenge anyone in the Big 5, most notably multi-sport junior Lili Nunez.

"I think she's the best player in the league," the head coach said of the standout guard. "She led the league in scoring last year."

Also back and expected to play key roles are four-year varsity seniors Lily Wilson and Gianna Taylor.

Wilson plays center and Taylor is a guard and both players, according to their coach, have improved from last year.

“Defensively, we’re going to be pretty strong this year,” Clifton said. “Offensively, we’re there. As a team, we’ve just got to play a little less selfishly.”

Clifton has nine players back from last season, when the Warriors finished 2-6 in league and 7-15 overall.

The Del Norte boys varsity team has also battled sickness and injuries early in the new season, but the Warriors appear to be getting healthy.

They also traveled to play at the Mt. Shasta tournament and they ended a five-game losing streak with back-to-back wins on Friday and Saturday, defeating St. Bernard’s 72-62 and Lassen 61-52 and improving to 4-5.

Senior Ethan Thomas has been outstanding through the early going and finished with 19 points in each of the weekend wins, while fellow senior Wyatt Robson returned to the lineup on Friday after a long injury layoff and had an immediate impact.

Robson scored 13 points on his return, including three 3-pointers, and added 16 points against Lassen, including four 3s.

“Proud of our entire group,” head coach Cris Rice said after the Lassen game. “Our defense has been up to standard and we’re finally clicking on offense.”

Kai Russell, who had 11 points against Lassen, also has impressed early in the season, as has fellow junior Merrick Crabb.

Sophomore Lyan Rigden, meanwhile, has been a pleasant addition to the varsity team, getting the call up last week after a sensational start to the season with the JVs.

Rigden chipped in 17 points over the two wins at Mt. Shasta, just one week after leading the Del Norte JVs to a thrilling tournament championship at the Grants Pass tournament.

Rigden hit a last-second shot for the game-winning basket in a 53-52 victory in the championship game and finished with 23 points.

The young Warriors also won the Etna tournament this past weekend and improved to 8-1 on the season.

The Del Norte varsity teams will continue a busy December this weekend, with the boys traveling to play at the Anderson tournament and the girls playing at the Central Valley tournament in Redding.