

Hopefully, no bad luck for Warriors on Friday

September 11, 2019



After back-to-back lopsided victories in front of its home fans, the Del Norte High School varsity football team faces a long road trip ... and on Friday the 13th, no less.

The 3-0 Warriors will be in Petaluma for a spooky 7 p.m. battle with the Trojans. The junior varsity squads will meet at 4:30 p.m.

Del Norte was expecting a tough test from La Salle Prep of Milwaukie, Oregon last Friday. Instead, the Warriors manhandled the Falcons, rushing for more than 300 yards and five touchdowns in a 42-7 victory.

At the same time, Petaluma was being pounded by Foothill High. The final was 59-0, leaving the Trojans' record at 1-2. Petaluma was unable to sustain any sort of running attack against Foothill, gaining less than two yards a carry.

However, while on paper the Trojans don't sound scary, there are several reasons the Warriors should be a tad fearful. First, the Warriors' opponent again will have about twice as many players available. Del Norte has been suiting up just 20 or so varsity athletes.

Second, Petaluma Coach Rick Krist is in his 10th year at the helm there. After a slow start, he has posted winning seasons against tough competition each of the past five years.

Third, the Trojans are coming off an embarrassing loss and will want to erase that memory; Del Norte is coming off an easy win and facing a stout non-conference rival next week. That's the textbook description of a trap game.

The Trojans were 6-5 in 2018, after going 8-2 the year before. However, of the 13 Petaluma players who were named to some level of last season's all-Vine Valley Athletic League team, just one returns for this campaign -- first-team offensive lineman Matt Salyers.

Junior Jack Hartman is quarterbacking the Trojans. He's completing 56% of his passes through three games, averaging 68.5 yards per contest.

Joey Alioto, a 5-8 senior, is the squad's leading rusher. He gained more than 100 yards on the ground in Petaluma's season opener, a loss to Tamalpais.

Del Norte's attack is based on its running game, mixing equal parts power football with misdirection, which has produced six rushers averaging better than 6 yards per carry.

Junior Levi Cox-Cooley tops the team with 311 yards in three games. Kobe Mitchell has added 253 more. And Chase Blackburn is coming off the best game of his career, a 117-yard effort that produced a pair of scores.

Del Norte quarterback O.J. Calleja completed fewer than 50% of his passes last season. So far in 2019, he's hitting 73%, for three touchdowns and zero interceptions. Cox-Cooley is leading the team in receptions with five, while Kaleb Price has produced two touchdowns out of his four catches.

Defensively, Del Norte has been a brick wall against opponents' rushers. The Warriors have given up, on average through its first three games, just 28 yards per contest on the ground. Teams have had a bit better luck throwing the ball, although the Warriors have come away with four interceptions in its past two games.

After this weekend, Del Norte will have three more non-conference games before the start of the Big Four Conference season.

Next week, Del Norte will be in Klamath Falls, Oregon for a battle with Mazama High. The Warriors return for homecoming Sept. 27 to take on Fortuna, then hit the road again, this time to Weaverville, for an Oct. 4 game with Trinity Valley.