
Warriors run over Moreau Catholic in season opener

August 23, 2019

HAYWARD -- After Del Norte High's football team defeated Moreau Catholic Friday night 20-19, the entire squad came together in a giant group hug.

That was appropriate, since the victory was a total team effort.

All three aspects of football -- offense, defense, and special teams -- played critical roles in the road victory over the highly regarded Mariners, last year's North Coast Section Division 4 runner-up.

It was also a special win for Nick White, Del Norte's first-year head coach, who praised his players' hard work leading to the victory.

"They deserved this," White said.

There were plenty of heroes to go around. Defensively, senior Timmy Thompson was often dominate from his defensive end position. Offensively, it was Kobe Mitchell and Levi Cox-Cooley who both broke the 100-yard-rushing barrier behind Del Norte's big, experienced front line.

But what turned out to be the key play of the game was turned in by an unsung hero, somebody rarely mentioned in the list of returning stars and starters for the Warriors -- senior Conner Long.

Del Norte took its first drive of the game and scored on a Mitchell 4-yard run, only to have Moreau Catholic tie the game at 7 with a 32-yard touchdown pass in the second quarter.

The Warriors took the lead in the third quarter on a 7-yard Cox-Cooley run, but a botched extra point attempt gave Del Norte just a six-point cushion. A scant 61 seconds later, the Mariners' tied the score on the second touchdown pass of the game from quarterback Bowen Dickstein to Nikko Reed.

That's when Long stepped up. Or more accurately, leaped up.

The 6-foot-4 Long found a crack in the Moreau Catholic line on the extra-point attempt and blocked the kick, keeping the game tied at 13. It turned out to be critical moment in the battle.

Early in the fourth quarter, the Mariners took their only lead -- on another Dickstein-to-Reed connection, but their bid for a two-point conversion was denied. Moreau Catholic led by six.

That's when Mitchell took over. The 215-pound fullback found ample running room between the tackles, strongly assisted by Cox-Cooley, and quarterback O.J. Calleja, who played a consistent, error-free game.

With just less than seven minutes to play, Mitchell scored from 2 yards out. Kenji Adams-Lee then booted the extra point, and the Warriors were up 20-19.

Del Norte's defense rose the moment. Dickstein, who had been precise throwing the ball in the first three quarters, struggled as Del Norte's defense worked to contain him in the pocket. After going 11-for-15 passing in the first three quarters, the returning starter was just 1-3 in the final 12 minutes.

The Warriors took possession with about six minutes remaining, and they ground out the victory, running out the clock on their way to a win that will open some eyes in the North Coast Section.

Mitchell finished with 130 yards on 16 carries, 124 in the second half. Cox-Cooley, making his first varsity start, added 123 more on 23 attempts. Calleja was 4 of 6 passing, just successful enough to keep Moreau Catholic's defense honest.

White called the victory a special moment, one he got to share with his brother, Del Norte offensive coordinator Chris White. But the head coach said the celebration won't last too long.

"The coaches will start thinking about our next game on the way home tonight," Nick White said.

That next game will be Friday, at home on Mike Whalen Field, when the Warriors play host to Yreka. Varsity game time will be 7:30 p.m. Prior to that, the latest inductees into the Del Norte High Athletic Hall of Fame will be introduced.

In junior varsity action:

R.J. Loftin scored three touchdowns in the fourth quarter, as the Warriors captured a 37-28 victory over Moreau Catholic.

Del Norte never trailed in the contest, jumping to a 15-0 halftime lead, only to have the Mariners cut the lead to as little as two points midway through the fourth quarter.

Loftin then scored his second T.D. of the stanza on a 12-yard run to expand Del Norte's lead, only to have Moreau Catholic score a touchdown and complete a two-point conversion with just less than four minutes to play, trimming the lead back to two.

But Loftin's final score in the final minute sealed the deal for Del Norte.

Caleb Dodson also scored a pair of first-half touchdowns for the Warriors.