

Warriors win a close one at Eureka, keep Big 4 hopes alive

October 27, 2022



The Del Norte Warriors were pushed all the way in their league opener at Eureka High on Saturday night, but pulled out a hard-fought 21-14 win to remain on track for a third consecutive Big 4 championship.

Just three weeks after crushing the Loggers 45-0 in Crescent City, the second matchup of the season between these two rivals was much more competitive, with the outcome not decided until the final seconds when Del Norte senior Giancarlo Desolenni recovered an onside kick.

It was one of the few times this season that the Del Norte players faced some adversity and they answered the call with a clutch second half.

“I thought we made plays when we had to,” Del Norte head coach Nick White said. “It was just one of those grind out games, but I was proud of my players.”

The Warriors scored on their opening two possessions of the night, including a 47-yard touchdown pass from Cooper Maxwell to Aden Mintonye on their first offensive play of the game.

But after a couple of early blown coverages, the Eureka defense settled into the game and held the Warriors without another score until the final minutes.

The Eureka linebackers, in particular, matched up physically with the Del Norte players, who were unable to get much going on offense after their early success.

“Eureka has some of the best kids in league as far as physicality goes, and they were able to match our physicality,” White said.

Both teams were coming off an unusual three-week midseason break after each had a scheduled game canceled, but the time off didn’t appear to affect the visitors, who looked fired up for the big showdown.

They added a second touchdown on a 48-yard Desolenni TD catch from Maxwell late in the first quarter and led 14-0 after Daniel Gonzalez’s second PAT.

The Loggers, who were celebrating homecoming and playing their final game at iconic Albee Stadium before it undergoes construction, then settled down and began to frustrate the visiting offense.

They answered the early Del Norte touchdowns when outstanding senior quarterback Rogan Bode scored on a 35-yard run midway through the second quarter and the Warriors carried a 14-6 lead into halftime.

But while the Warriors offense struggled to find much of a rhythm against the physical Eureka defense for much of the night, their defense was effective.

“I thought our defense played well,” White said. “It was kind of bend-don’t-break and we made plays when we had to.”

In particular, Brody Mattz had a crucial interception just as the Loggers were driving late in the game to give the Warriors possession at the Eureka 25-yard line.

That set up a game-sealing three-yard RJ Loftin TD run, and the Warriors led 21-6 after the reliable Gonzalez added the PAT.

The game, however, wasn't over just yet and the Loggers set up an exciting finish when Daniel Hall-Garcia scored a touchdown on a 20-yard run with just 24 seconds remaining.

Desolenni recovered the ensuing onside kick to seal the win.

The long break between games worked to Eureka's advantage, with head coach Mike Marcelli installing a new-look offense to try and catch the Del Norte defense off guard.

"They ran a spread offense," White said. "And they haven't done that all year, so they definitely took advantage of the bye week."

The Warriors got the win, however, and improved to 6-1 on the season as they keep their league championship hopes alive.

The impressive Maxwell completed 6 of 13 passes for 135 yards and the two TDs, while Loftin had 58 yards rushing on 17 carries and Desolenni had 46 yards rushing.

Ethan Thomas also had two key receptions.

The Warriors finished with 299 yards offense, while Eureka had 293 yards, with Bode completing 14 of 27 passes for 192 yards and rushing for 69 more on 12 carries.

The Warriors will now turn their attention toward another big league showdown at St. Bernard's on Saturday, before they close out the regular season at home to Fortuna next week.

Del Norte is the two-time defending league champion after taking the pennant in both 2019 and 2021.

There was no league pennant awarded in the COVID-shortened season in the spring of 2021.

Saturday's win also stretches Del Norte's league winning streak to 11 straight, dating back to a loss at Eureka on Oct. 19, 2018.