

Warriors go down battling in double-OT playoff loss

November 22, 2023



The Del Norte Warriors lost an exciting North Coast Section playoff opener in football on Friday night (Nov. 10), falling 28-22 at Vallejo in double overtime.

The Warriors battled back to force overtime when they scored a touchdown and added a two-point conversion with just seven seconds remaining in the game.

But they were unable to find the end zone again and ultimately lost when the home team scored a TD in the second OT to advance to the section semifinals.

Del Norte was seeded No. 6 in the Division-4 playoff bracket, while Vallejo was seeded No. 3, and, according to head coach Darren LaFazio, the players gave it their all in a tough road environment.

“I think we overcame adversity,” he said of his players. “They could have quit but they never did. I’m proud of them.”

The end of the game was marred by a shooting incident outside Vallejo High School, and the fans and players could hear the gunshots right as the game concluded.

According to police reports, a juvenile suffered a serious but non-life threatening gunshot wound.

The game itself went down to the wire.

“We had a battle,” LaFazio said. “It was a good one.

“I was proud of our kids. We had our ups and down, but for the most part we played well.”

Ben Borges had a big game in the loss and scored a pair of touchdowns, as well as adding the crucial two-point conversion in the dying seconds.

Aidan Rice scored the late TD to set up the game-tying two-point conversion.

Senior quarterback Kyle Dixon also was instrumental in the late comeback, completing several key passes on the final drive to help set up Rice’s touchdown.

Dixon was one of 12 seniors on this year’s squad, a class that LaFazio paid tribute to after the season-ending showdown.

“I’m proud of our kids and I’m very happy with our season,” the first-year head coach said. “(The seniors) made my first season incredibly awesome. They tried their hardest.”

Another senior, Kai Russell, also closed out his high school football career with a big night after coming away with an interception on Vallejo’s first possession in overtime.

LaFazio believes Russell was one of the most under-rated linemen in the H-DNL this fall.

“Nobody talks about him, but he’s one of the best linemen in our league,” the coach said.

The loss ended another successful campaign for the Warriors, who stretched their unbeaten run in the Big 4 to 15 straight before dropping their regular-season and conference finale at Fortuna on Nov. 3.

The Big 4 championship ended in a three-way tie and the Warriors shared the title with both Fortuna and St. Bernard’s after all three schools finished with identical 2-1 records.

For the season, the Warriors finished 6-4, including a five-game winning streak.

The Del Norte JVs also enjoyed a successful season and finished 6-2, including placing second in the Big 4 with a record of 2-1.

