

Defense dominates as Warriors dismiss Fortuna

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Sometimes, being selfish is a good thing.

Del Norte High's football team secured at least a share of the Big Four Conference championship Friday, but the Warriors want the whole crown to themselves.

Led by a bruising defense, Del Norte defeated Fortuna 20-7 on the Huskies' home field, boosting the Warriors' record to 2-0 in conference, 8-1 overall, and setting up next week's showdown with arch-rival Eureka at Crescent City's Mike Whalen Field.

With a win next week, the Warriors will not only be undisputed conference champions for the first time since 2016, they will also be poised to play host to both first round and semifinal playoff games. Del Norte is currently second in the North Coast Section Division 5 rankings.

Del Norte's defense was nothing short of dominant in the first half. Fortuna ran just six plays in the opening quarter, losing 19 yards in the process. Overall, the Huskies could manage just 129 yards in total offense. That compares to the 323 yards Fortuna earned in its 22-14 victory over Eureka.

The effort was even more impressive considering the changes Del Norte was forced to make in personnel because of injuries. Connor Long and Kenji Adams-Lee stepped into starting spots, and Chase Blackburn moved from linebacker to cornerback. The Warriors never seemed to miss a beat.

On the offensive side of the ball, Trevor Freeman and Noah Yang stepped into starting roles. And while Del Norte's offense wasn't great, it never turned the ball over, and when it needed to run the ball and take time off the clock, it did exactly that.

The Warriors got on the scoreboard first, midway through the first quarter, when Levi Cox-Cooley scored from 22 yards out. The junior would finish with 102 yards, pushing him over the 1,000-yard mark this season.

On the first play of the second quarter, Chase Blackburn bulled his way into the end zone from 21 yards out. It was 14-0 at halftime. Neither team could score in the third quarter, but at the start of the fourth quarter, quarterback O.J. Calleja -- running behind Luke King and guards Anthony Slayton and Tanner Forker -- plowed in from two yards out, giving Del Norte a 20-0 lead.

And that lead seemed safe, until the Huskies scored with eight minutes to play, thanks in large part to a number of penalties that kept the Fortuna drive alive.

The Huskies, trying to rally on their Senior Night, got the ball back, looking to cut the margin to one score. Del Norte's defense did not allow that to happen. Time expired, and the Warriors moved a win away from an undefeated conference season. Del Norte beat St. Bernard's last week 27-20.

Eureka plays at St. Bernard's Saturday afternoon. Regardless of the outcome of that game, the Loggers will need to beat Del Norte to advance to the postseason.

Also at stake will be family bragging rights. Eureka is coached by Jason White. Del Norte is led by Jason White's little brother Nick White, and assisted by Chris White.

"Eureka is good," said Nick White of the two-time defending conference champion. "But in this conference, every team is good."