

New era of Del Norte High football

August 21, 2019



A new era of Del Norte High football begins Aug. 23, when the Warriors head to Hayward to open the season against non-conference foe Moreau Catholic. Kickoff is scheduled for 7 p.m.

First-year head coach Nick White takes over for the revered Lewis Nova, who closed his third stint running the Del Norte High program by leading his team to a 9-3 record and the semifinals of the North Coast Section Division 4 playoffs. Two of its three losses were to NCS champion Fortuna.

White, a Warrior assistant coach for six seasons, did not find the cupboard bare. Del Norte returns four starters from a stout offensive line, as well as both starting receivers, plus a senior quarterback who made a dramatic improvement between his sophomore and junior campaigns.

Now a senior, quarterback O.J. Calleja threw for 10 touchdowns last season and ran for seven more. Coaches expect his completion percentage to be much higher than last season's 42.9%.

White said he's been especially pleased with Calleja's attitude during pre-season practices. "He's taken a real leadership role," the coach said.

Kaleb Price and Geo Gonzalez both return at wide receiver, with a combined 27 catches in 2018. At 6-4, Price is a tough matchup for most defensive backs. Gonzalez brings speed and elusiveness to the position.

Up front, Del Norte is big, talented and experienced. Luke King, Timothy Thompson, Anthony Slayton and Tanner Forkner all are returning. Sophomore Sam Schauerma, who saw some time on varsity last season, joins the offensive line.

“Their communication is really good,” White said. “They know each other’s jobs.”

The only place Del Norte is inexperienced is at running back. Missing are Ethan Price and Sebastian Puente, who each rushed for more than 1,100 yards during their senior seasons. Price also led the team in receptions and touchdowns.

However, White does have some options. Kai Baugh has been a bulldozer during fall camp. Junior Levi Cox-Cooley sparkled last year in limited varsity action, averaging seven yards a carry. And Chase Blackburn was effective in 2018, scoring three touchdowns on 26 carries and gaining just shy of six yards per carry.

Offensive coordinator Chris White -- Nick White’s brother -- has installed a different-looking offense designed to confuse defenses via multiple looks out of various formations.

White calls it a “hybrid-wing T with some veer,” but the general philosophy remains the same as in the past - run the ball, win in the trenches, grind other teams down in the second half.

Del Norte’s biggest weakness probably is its lack of depth, which means that defensively, most players will be going both ways.

Replacing Ethan Price will be difficult, because of his defensive versatility. Also unavailable is Eli Larson, who was expected to start on both the offensive and defensive lines but injured his knee during the spring.

Back at the helm, however, is defensive coordinator Darrin LaFazio. His aggressive approach to defense paid dividends in 2018, when the Warriors posted three shutouts and generally dominated the final two quarters in most games.

But the defense will be tested Friday. Moreau Catholic finished as runner-up in the NCS Division 4 playoffs, falling in the final to Fortuna. It was the Mariners’ only loss of the season.

Back for his senior year will be quarterback Bowen Dickstein, who completed 64% of his throws for 1,800-plus yards last season, with 24 touchdowns.

Possibly not taking the field against Del Norte will be senior running back Fresh Ison, a Division 1 college prospect who averaged more than 15 yards per carry last season, scoring 34 touchdowns. His status is unknown because of an injury.

Like Del Norte, Moreau Catholic has limited numbers, although Del Norte may have a slight size advantage upfront.

But what White might like best about his team is that during fall camp, it has become more than just a collection of players. “The kids are buying in and working super hard,” the coach said. “Every day, we are coming together as a family.”

Friday’s game will be broadcast live on KPOD FM, 97.9. Following the game, visit [www. Triplicate.com](http://www.Triplicate.com) for a complete account of the on-field action. The Warrior Pregame Show will begin at about 6:30 p.m.