

## Warriors are playing for all of northern California

December 5, 2019



Del Norte High School's football team has won a conference championship - and for the first time in school history, a North Coast Section title.

But for coach Nick White and his Warriors, that's not enough.

On Friday night, Del Norte will play for the California Interscholastic Federation Division 5-AA Northern California championship, traveling to Sunnyvale for a 7:30 p.m. battle with King's Academy High.

"Honestly, we're not satisfied," said White, who in his first season as head coach has taken Del Norte to unprecedented heights. "Now, we're going to go after something bigger than a North Coast Section championship. Now, we are playing for all of northern California."

Both teams earned invitations to the Nor-Cal Championships by winning section titles. Del Norte blocked a last-second field goal attempt to capture a 14-13 victory over top-seeded Encinal High School in a game played Saturday in Hayward.

King's Academy also won in dramatic, last-minute fashion. The Knights stopped Terra Nova High School's two-point conversion try with 30 seconds to play for a 14-13 win. It's the second year in a row the Knights have claimed a Central Coast Section title.

Del Norte comes into the game with a 12-1 record, having won eight games in a row. King's Academy is 10-3 this season. Those three losses came at the end of the regular season, including a 19-point defeat by the same Terra Nova team it beat Saturday.

"We had some injuries, and those were really good teams," said Pete Lavorato, coach of the Knights, about the losing skid. "All three of those teams made the playoffs."

King's Academy is similar to Encinal in that it features a balanced offense. It has averaged 127 yards a game rushing, another 188 passing.

The Knights are led by junior Noah Short, a 6-0, 180-pounder who has been, at times, unstoppable on both sides of the ball. He was slowed at midseason by an ankle injury, but he scored both of King's Academy's touchdowns Saturday plus made the game-saving tackle.

"What sets him apart is that he's a football player's football player," Lavorato said. "He's not a great practice player, but in games he gives 100% all the time. He wants to win everything, every battle on the field."

His running mate, Jayden Frazier, is also a junior at 205 pounds, who has scored 23 rushing touchdowns this season.

Quarterback Antonio Gonzalez has completed 65% of his passes, with 15 touchdowns although nine interceptions. His favorite targets are 6-foot-5 tight end Kevin Sielski and senior Zach Paszkeicz. The pair have combined for 62 catches, 843 yards and eight scores. Short has 15 catches and four receiving touchdowns.

"We have watched a lot of film as a staff," White said. "They have two really good players on offense we have to contain."

Short handles both kickoffs and punt returns for the Knights. Kicker Nico Sage has made 90% of his extra points, and is five-of-five on field goals, with a long of 37 yards. Del Norte kicker Kenji Adams-Lee has nailed 96% of his PATs and is one-for-one on field goals.

Del Norte's defense has been outstanding this season and more than solid against Encinal. The Jets were held to 17 points below their season average. That proved to be crucial, given that Del Norte's rushing offense was stymied after halftime.

"We struggled on offense in the second half," White acknowledged. "Our defense picked up our offense."

Size-wise, the Warriors and the Knights are pretty equal. Numbers-wise, Del Norte will suit up about two dozen players, including a pair of freshmen and two others up from the junior varsity. The Knights' roster features 39.

That doesn't matter to White or the Warriors. It hasn't all season. "There is a belief," White said about his team. "We just play our hardest."

"We are not the fastest, nor the biggest, but we are going to give 100% every play."

If Del Norte wins, it will vie for the Division 5-AA state championship Dec. 13 against the Southern California titlist, either El Monte or Serra of San Diego. The Warriors are hopeful that game would be played in the North State.

The Del Norte-King's Academy game will be broadcast live on KPOD 97.9 FM, with the Warrior Pregame Show starting at 7 p.m. Tickets can be purchased online at [gofan.co/ app/school/CIF](http://gofan.co/app/school/CIF).

White said he would love to see the same spectator numbers as last week, when Del Norte fans outnumbered Encinal supporters despite the seven-hour trip from Crescent City.

"That was unbelievable," he said. "This community has been great. We are definitely blessed to be in Del Norte County."