

Del Norte football could face a real challenge

September 20, 2019



Following three consecutive blowout victories, Del Norte High's varsity football team faces a foe Friday with the same championship dreams as the Warriors.

Mazama High hosts Del Norte, with both teams undefeated, both ranked, and both familiar with the other.

Game time is 7 p.m. in Klamath Falls.

The Warriors are 4-0, having outscored the past three opponents 153-14. Del Norte has combined a smothering defense with a ground-and-pound offense, not to mention the special teams, which have been special.

But that was against foes with a combined record of 4-9 this season. No. 5-ranked Mazama comes in with a 2-0 record, having whipped Ontario of Eastern Oregon 40-0, and Cascade 15-13 last Friday.

"Mazama is tough," said Del Norte football coach Nick White. "It's going to be a challenge. But we like a challenge."

Under coach Vic Leash, the Vikings have been one of the most successful Class 4-A teams in Oregon. Mazama has won six consecutive Skyline League titles, including 43 of 53 games during that span, and has been a fixture in the state playoffs.

The only vacant spot on the Vikings' resume is a state championship. Winning that title is the openly stated goal this year for Mazama.

Leash has said this team is the most athletic he has had during his tenure, with potentially the best defense.

Back running the offense is quarterback Nate Beck, who was an all-league first-team selection last year. He is being asked to throw the ball a bit more in 2019, thanks to a pair of tall, capable receivers in Cole Brosterhous and Tristan Lee.

But Mazama's bread-and-butter is going to be running the ball, sometimes relying on power, sometimes on misdirection.

That sounds a lot like Del Norte, which has four running backs averaging better than 7.4 yards per carry. Junior Levi Cox-Cooley is averaging 100 yards-plus a game, while senior fullback Kobe Mitchell has seven touchdowns on the ground. Chase Blackburn has turned into Del Norte's homerun hitter, with 41-yard rushing touchdowns in back-to-back games.

Quarterback O.J. Calleja has been consistent, hitting 66% of his passes. He has four touchdown throws -- three to junior wide receiver Kaleb Price -- and zero interceptions.

In fact, Del Norte has yet to commit a turnover, while forcing seven by its opponents. "Causing turnovers gives you a great chance to win," White said.

When not taking the ball away, Del Norte's defense has been drowning its foes' offensive lines. Last week against Petaluma, Del Norte's defense allowed a meager 81 yards rushing ... which is the most any team has gained against the Warriors. In its four wins, Del Norte's foes have averaged just two yards a carry.

Del Norte's front lines on offense and defense are bigger than Mazama's, with the Warriors' O-line averaging 236 pounds. The Vikings have more depth, as has been the case all season for Del Norte's opponents. The Warriors suited up just 21 players against Petaluma. Their hopeful of getting back injured Noah Yang and Kai Baugh in the near future.

Another big edge for Del Norte could be the kicking game. Kenji Adams-Lee is now 17-of-17 on extra points this season. He's also been solid punting, although those services were not needed against Petaluma.

Del Norte will be at home Sept. 27 for a homecoming-night battle against Fortuna, a non-conference contest.

The Warrior Pregame Show is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. on KPOD 97.9 FM.

The Triplicate's Del Norte-Mazama post-game story can be found Friday night on www.triplicate.com.