

Warriors host pivotal playoff game

November 21, 2019



Ray Rook came razor close in 2013. Lewis Nova had a couple of close calls, too. Other Del Norte High School coaches have had their shots as well.

On Saturday night, first-year head football coach Nick White and his Warrior football team will make their bid for a place in the Division 5 North Coast Section championship game, when they take on Moreau Catholic at Mike Whalen Field.

Game time will be 7 o'clock. The game will be broadcast live on KPOD 97.9 FM, with the Warrior Pregame show starting at 6:30 p.m.

Since 1982, Del Norte has reached the N-C-S semifinals seven times, but has never made the championship game. In 1998, the Warriors lost 13-10 to Marin Catholic. The 2007 Del Norte team came into the semifinals undefeated, but fell to Novato 18-14. The 2013 team came within an extra point of shocking Fortuna, 21-20.

That's all ancient history to White. He is not even thinking about it. But the recent past? Oh, yes.

These two teams -- the Warriors and the Mariners of Hayward -- played each other to start the season. Del Norte won that game, on the road, 20-19 on Aug. 23.

White has been looking at the video of that game, but knows the team the Warriors defeated on that hot summer night is far different from the one that will take the field on this chilly Saturday evening.

Expected to be in the lineup for Moreau Catholic is Devin Arnold, the running back who in seven regular-season games has averaged more than 17 yards a carry. Also ready to take the field is senior running back Fresh Ison, who last year rushed for more than 2,000 yards.

“They are both really good kids,” White said. “That makes them really difficult to defend. They are a really talented team.”

However, the Warrior who played on the artificial turf field in the East Bay to start the season also are a lot different from the ones who will jog onto the highly crowned, natural grass of Mike Whalen Field.

“We have progressed,” White said, pointing out that Del Norte in August was still learning the new offensive system installed by the head coach and his brother, offensive coordinator Chris White. Now, that offense and its various wrinkles and twists are second nature.

Del Norte’s defense is different, too. In the lineup will be Kai Baugh, the 245-pound defensive end who teams must game plan against. He missed the first half of the season because of an injury.

Combined with Luke King, Connor Long, Anthony Slayton and Tanner Forkner, the Warriors have limited opponents to less than two scores a game for the season.

In that first game, the Mariners were unable to stop the Del Norte rushing attack in crunch time. The Warriors protected their one-point lead with a late drive, methodically moving down the field behind Kobe Mitchell and Levi Cox-Cooley, plus Del Norte’s big, experienced offensive line.

Without its two best backs at the time, Moreau Catholic relied on the effective passing of quarterback Bowen Dickstein, who was 12-of-18 for 205 yards and three touchdowns, all going to Nikko Reed.

Dickstein’s regular-season numbers were good: 67% passing, 147 yards per game, 21 touchdowns, just five interceptions. Reed had 32 catches in 10 games, for 11 touchdowns.

Del Norte will counter with Mitchell and Cox-Cooley on the ground, as well as Chase Blackburn, who has run wild the past two games, averaging 225 yards in that span.

Quarterback O.J. Calleja has been efficient, completing 57.5% of his passes for nine touchdowns and just three picks. His favorite target is Kaleb Price, who has 14 catches, six for touchdowns.

The winner of Saturday’s game will play either top-seeded Encinal or No. 4 De Anza. Those two teams play Friday night.

The championship game will be next weekend. Generations of Del Norte fans are hoping their Warriors will be there.

Nick White and his staff want to make their hopes a reality. So, what would that be like for White?

“Ask me then,” he said.

