

Warriors capture Northern California championship

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SUNNYVALE -- The greatest season in Del Norte High football history isn't over yet.

The Warriors did Friday what they have done all season -- run the football and play dominating defense -- to defeat The King's Academy 21-14 on a rainy, windy night on the road.

In the process, Del Norte did something no Warrior team has done before -- capture a California Interscholastic Federation 5-AA Northern California championship.

Del Norte will now play for the 5-AA State of California championship, Saturday at 6 p.m., against El Monte High School, the Southern California champion.

On Friday morning, Del Norte High athletic director Bob Hadfield was informed by CIF officials that if the Warriors defeated the Knights, the game would be played at Mike Whalen Field in Crescent City.

"We're going to keep playing as long as they let us," said Nick White, the first-year Warrior head coach who has led Del Norte to never-even-considered heights.

After winning the Big Four Conference crown this season, Del Norte claimed its first-ever North Coast Section championship last week with its 14-13 victory over Enicinal. Friday's victory was the first time the

Warriors have won the Nor-Cal title.

Frankly, the game was much closer than it should have been. Del Norte's defense shut down the Knights all night long. King's Academy scored its two touchdowns after the Warriors' offense lost fumbles inside their own 10-yard line.

Del Norte scored its first touchdown after King's Academy shockingly went for it on fourth-and-three inside its own 10. The Warriors' defense held, and a couple of plays later, quarterback O.J. Calleja scored from one yard out.

Early in the second quarter, it was Del Norte that went for it on fourth down, but from midfield. Levi Cox-Cooley not only got the first down, he blasted 42 yards to the Knights' 10-yard line. Moments later, Cox-Cooley scored from 10 yards out, and Del Norte led 14-7 at halftime.

King's Academy gather momentum in the third quarter, and when the Warriors' lost its second fumble, the Knights were able to tie the score at 14 on quarterback Antonio Gonzalez's second touchdown pass of the night.

But the fourth quarter was all Del Norte. Defensively, the Warriors limited King's Academy to just one yards of offense. Gonzalez, who was effective throwing the ball in the third quarter, was just 3 of 7 for 11 yards.

Del Norte's offense, on the other hand, turned to Cox-Cooley and Kobe Mitchell, whose bone-crushing 21-yard run set up Calleja's game-winning 1-yard TD plunge midway through the fourth quarter.

The Knights' were determined to stop the Warriors' misdirection running game, which it did. Chase Blackburn, who has been brilliant running the ball the second half of the season, was held to just 11 yards.

But that left room for Cox-Cooley, and Coach White -- along with his brother, offensive coordinator Chris White -- gave the rock to the junior. He finished with 29 carries for 157 yards.

The Warriors improved to 13-1 this season. King's Academy finished with a 10-4 record.

Del Norte's opponent Saturday, El Monte High, comes into the game with a unbeaten record. But it is doubtful the Lions have played this season on a grass field, with a large crowd, in front of the crowd like that expected Saturday at Mike Whalen Field.

"We want to see the stands packed," White said, who sincerely thanked the community for the support it has shown during the playoff run. "That means to much to these kids."