



Del Norte Championship Preview

**Special
Keepsake
Edition**

Playing for title, fans

**By John Pritchett
For The Triplicate**

It's the classic conundrum – what happens when an irresistible force meets an unmovable object?

We will learn Saturday at the California Interscholastic Federation Division 5-AA football championship game between Del Norte High and El Monte High. The game – much to the delight and relief of Del Norte fans – will be played at Crescent City's Mike Whalen Field.

Kickoff is slated for 6 p.m.

The Warriors are the Northern California 5-AA champion. The Lions are the 5-AA Southern California title winner. Del Norte is 14-1 this season, riding a nine-game winning streak. El Monte is undefeated this year, 15-0.

The irresistible force, in this case, is El Monte, a team that runs the ball, runs it again, and then runs some more. The Lions are gaining better than 10 yards per carry, and are averaging 46 points a game.

Del Norte has been the unmovable object all season. No team has scored more than 21 points against the Warriors. Over the past seven games – six against playoff teams and one game against Eureka opponents have averaged less than three yards per rush against Del Norte.

"Their (the Lions') offense hasn't been stopped all year," said Del Norte Coach Nick White. "Our defense hasn't been stopped, either."

So El Monte's offense and Del Norte's defense have been great; the Lions' defense and the Warriors' offense have been pretty darn good, too. Del Norte is averaging 33 points a game, while the Lions are giving up just 14 a contest.

Like El Monte, Del Norte runs the ball

early and often, with both teams treating the forward pass like some sort of sin against man and nature.

In its Northern California championship game Friday at King's Academy High, Del Norte threw the ball just four

last week. For the season, Booth has more than 2,700 yards. He topped 2,000 yards rushing as a junior.

"He's just, gosh, fast, strong, some explosiveness, agile, can catch the ball," said El Monte head coach Jessie Ce-



times. That's about average for the Warriors over the second half of the season.

In the Southern California title tilt Friday against Serra High of San Diego, El Monte passed the ball a grand total of ... well, zero. For the season, the Lions have thrown just 44 passes.

"This might be the quickest game in football history," White said.

The Warriors will turn to its three-headed monster of running backs: junior tailback Levi Cox-Cooley, senior fullback Kobe Mitchell, and senior slotback Chase Blackburn. All three have gained more than 1,000 yards this season.

Cox-Cooley is the team's workhorse. He rushed for 163 yards in Del Norte's win over King's Academy, giving him 1,546 yards for the season.

El Monte has a pair of standout running backs. Senior Davon Booth is the most productive rusher Del Norte has faced in years, maybe ever. The 180 pounder rushed 34 times for 315 yards

niceros about his running back. "When he steps on the field, he's going to take over that game, either on offense or defense."

His sidekick is Abel Cueva, another senior, slightly smaller at 165 pounds. He's rushed for better than 1,400 yards in 2019.

Coach Cenicerros learned his offensive style from former Bandon, Ore., High coach Don Markham, who moved to Southern California and hired Cenicerros at the start of his coaching career. Cenicerros even spent time at the old Gold Beach summer football camp in the 1990s.

"Don was the godfather of the double-wing (offense), and that's what I learned," Cenicerros said. "He was willing to share it with me. I'm a lucky guy."

Del Norte's offensive line is big, physical ... and a bit beat-up. Eli Larson left Friday's game with a knee injury, forcing the Warriors to turn to freshman Jacob Dane at right tackle during a critical

fourth-quarter drive. The result was a game-winning touchdown for Del Norte.

Larson's status for Saturday is unknown. The same is true for Kaleb Price, the team's starting safety, who was hurt at the end of the North Coast Section championship game.

"Next man up," said White.

Cenicerros said he has been watching film of Del Norte, and came away respectful, especially considering the team's lack of numbers.

"They get after it," Cenicerros said of the Warriors. "I told our kids, 'Hey, there's not a lot to do up there but go to the weight room and lift weights. I appreciate that.'"

Both programs have been climbing toward this moment. Del Norte was just 1-7 on the field two years ago, bounced back in 2018 with a 9-3 record, reaching the N-C-S semifinals. This year, the Warriors won the Big Four Conference, their first N-C-S crown, and their first Nor-Cal championship.

This is Cenicerros' 13th year as a head coach. He took over his team in 2017. The Lions were 5-5 that year. Last season, they were 11-2, reaching the Southern Section semifinals. Like Del Norte, this season is the Lions' first trip to the state championship.

On Saturday, either Del Norte or El Monte will be on top of the mountain. Both teams feel as if they are playing for their communities.

"Let me tell you, it is something beautiful," Cenicerros said. "This is a working class town, our families are hard working, not making a whole lot of money. This means a lot."

Coach White's sentiments were similar.

"I think we have taken the hearts of everybody," he said. "Everybody feels like they are part of the team, that the team represents the community."

CONGRATULATIONS DEL NORTE WARRIORS!



NOR CAL CHAMPIONS



A look back on the Warriors' historic season

Del Norte 20, Moreau Catholic 19

The Warriors travel to Hayward on Aug. 23 and surprise the Mariners, who reached the North Coast Section championship game last season. Kobe Mitchell and Levi Cox-Cooley both rush for more than 100 yards, and the Warriors' offense grinds out the final six minutes while protecting the one-point lead.

Del Norte 62, Yreka 0

Playing at home for the first time on Aug. 30, Del Norte dominates from the beginning. The Warriors score 27 first-quarter points, and led 55-0 at halftime. Del Norte quarterback O.J. Calleja completes eight of nine passes for 144 yards and two touchdowns. The Warrior defense force five Yreka turnovers.

Del Norte 42, La Salle Prep 7

After a 7-7 first quarter, Del Norte rushes for four second-quarter touchdowns at Mike Whalen Field on Sept. 6. Chase Blackburn scores on runs of 15 and 41 yards.

Del Norte 49, Petaluma 7

On a warm Sept. 13 night on the road, the Warriors pound Petaluma for 369 yards on 38 carries. Del Norte out gains its opponents 457 to 80. Geo Gonzalez turns his three carries into 77 yards.

Mazama 21, Del Norte 14

A lackluster performance against a good, well-coach team produces Del Norte's only loss this season, on Sept. 20 in Klamath Falls, Ore. The Warriors are limited to less than 200 yards rushing, one of just two times that will happen. Del Norte has a chance to tie the game in the final minute, but is unable to get into the end zone on four tries from inside the Vikings' 10. No team scores more points against Del Norte's defense this season.

Del Norte 29, Fortuna 13

Cox-Cooley goes off for 250 yards rushing and two touchdowns as Del Norte defeats the defending North Coast Section champion at home on Sept. 27 in a non-conference contest.

Del Norte 52, Trinity 0

Sophomore Trevor Freeman picks off pair of Trinity passes on a chilly Oct. 4 night in Weaverville. Calleja spoils the Mustangs' homecoming by hitting 10 of 12 passes for four touchdowns, two to Kaleb Price. Kicker Kenji Adams-Lee continues his amazing season, nailing his only field goal attempt this season.

Del Norte 27, St. Bernard's 20

The Warriors open the Big Four Conference season at home with an impressive victory over the Crusaders on Oct. 18. St.

Bernard's score a pair of fourth-quarter touchdowns to make the game closer than it really was. After missing several games with an injury, Mitchell pounds his way to 153 yards rushing. Del Norte's defense contains St. Bernard's high-powered offense to 275 yards.

Del Norte 20, Fortuna 7

In the conference battle on the road between the two rivals on Oct. 25, the Warriors' defense limits Fortuna to just 129 yards in offense, with Kaleb Price and Chase Blackburn both halting Fortuna drives with interceptions.

Del Norte 48, Eureka 18

Blackburn rushes for more than 200 yards ... in just the second half, as the Warriors close the regular season by denying Eureka a playoff berth at Mike Whalen Field on Nov. 1. Mitchell would rush for four touchdowns, Blackburn for a pair more, as Del Norte clinches its third conference championship in six seasons.

Del Norte 41, Alhambra 6 (NCS first round)

The Warriors open the North Coast Section Division 5 playoffs by dismantling a frustrated Bay Area team at Mike Whalen Field on Nov. 15. Blackburn continues his torrid pace, gaining 194 yards and scoring four touchdowns. Alhambra musters just 74

yards in offense.

Del Norte 28, Moreau Catholic 7 (NCS semifinals)

In a rematch of the season's first game, Del Norte downs the Mariners on Nov. 23 at Mike Whalen Field in the NCS semifinals. The Warriors seal the win in the fourth quarter when Kai Baugh blocks a Moreau Catholic punt which is recovered by Mitchell in the end zone.

Del Norte 14, Encinal 13 (NCS championship game)

In probably the most dramatic moment in Del Norte football history, Blackburn comes off the edge and blocks a 25-yard Encinal field goal attempt with less than 20 seconds to play to give the Warriors their first NCS football championship on a rainy night in Hayward on Dec. 1. For the first time all season, an opponent out gains Del Norte offensively, 294 yards to 235.

Del Norte 21, King's Academy 14 (Nor-Cal championship)

With the score tied at 14, Del Norte marches down the field in the fourth quarter. Mitchell's key 21-yard first-down conversion sets up Calleja's second short touchdown run of the game. The Warriors' defense limits the Knights' formidable rushing game to just 29 yards on 19 carries on Dec. 6 on a rainy, windy night in Sunnyvale.



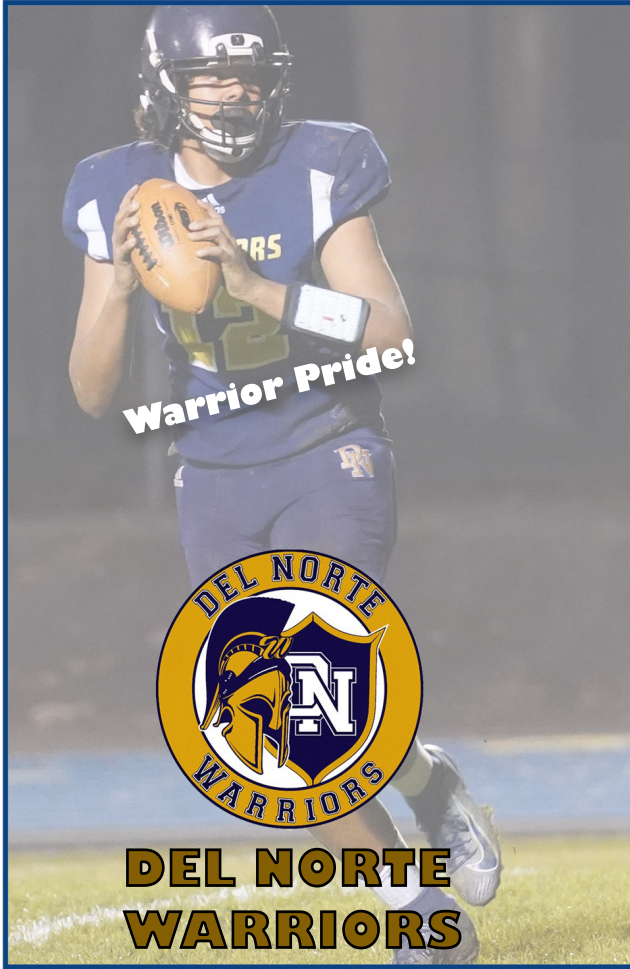
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VS






"History in the Making"




**EL MONTE
LIONS**



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Warriors!*

from the
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Board Members, Teachers & Staff.



"This game has to be
played at home"



"I want to see you all
at the game for the
Crescent City
SUPERBOWL"

-Nick White
Head Coach