

Warriors prove their Mettle

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Eureka Times Standard

ARCATA — Max Perez capped off an arduous comeback with a breakaway lay-up as the final seconds ticked off, and as the Eureka Loggers stood absolutely stunned, chants of “just like football” reverberated all the way to Crescent City — the Del Norte Warriors had just claimed the Dick Niclai championship at HSU by a score of 54-48 on Friday.

“I am so proud of our guys,” said Del Norte head coach Blaine Lopez. “It shows that character and hard work go a long way.”

It took 30 minutes, 20 seconds for the Warriors to grab their first lead, but once they got their hands on it, they never relinquished it.

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Trailing 46-44, Del Norte's Chris Prokupek, who had a monster game, went to the line with an opportunity to get the Warriors back to even. After sinking the first, the second was off the mark, but Cody Lesley, who played brilliantly, came in unaccounted for to grab the rebound, and the subsequent put-back sent the Warrior faithful through the roof.

On the ensuing possession, Del Norte's relentless pressure finally put its stamp on the game, as the Warriors forced a turnover that lead to a Perez lay-up, giving Del Norte a 49-46 advantage with 1:20 remaining.

But Eureka refused to give up. Dave Norton, who was a man with 17 points and countless tough rebounds, successfully followed Scott Mell's errant 3-point attempt to cut Del Norte's lead to 49-48 with 61 seconds left.

Timeout Eureka.

Wipe the slate clean; it all came down to this — Del Norte up one, with possession, needing one more bucket to ice the game.

But Eureka's Josh Hash had other ideas. The senior stripped the ball on the perimeter, and suddenly the tide had turned. However, all Eureka got on its ensuing possession was an ill-advised Jordan Barnhart 3-pointer that was blocked.

After being fouled, Prokupek hit his first free throw before missing the second. In pursuit of the loose ball Hash was fouled, sending the kid to the line that every Logger fan wanted in that situation — with a chance to tie the game.

As Hash stepped up, the East Gym could have registered on a Richter scale, and his first attempt fell short. Del Norte's Kyle Newton sealed the victory with a pair of free throws.

“Down the stretch, I don't know if we could have played any better,” said Lopez.

The story of the night was Del Norte's resiliency. Eureka stormed out of the gates to a 10-1 lead before the

Warriors knew what hit them. But by the end of the first quarter Del Norte had cut it to 14-10,

"When we executed what we wanted to we were successful," said Peterson. "When we tried to do things individually, that's where we had some breakdowns."

Eureka was the aggressor all night, but Del Norte's relentless defense, in spite of an energy gauge that had to be approaching empty, allowed it to remain within striking distance, until the offense finally emerged.

"We take pride in (our defense," said Lopez. "I don't know if people believe it, but we work that hard every day in practice."

And again, with under six minutes remaining in the game, Eureka held what looked to be a commanding eight-point lead with Del Norte's offense struggling. But when it mattered most, Del Norte outscored Eureka 18-6 in the fourth quarter.

"There were three times in that game that we could have quit and we didn't," said Lopez. "Cody Lesley was awesome, he played as well as he has played all year. Everybody contributed, it was a total team effort."

That's how championships are won.

Tim Pratt finished the game with 14 points including a pair of 3-pointers while Hash scored nine. Lesley led Del Norte with 13 while Perez added 11 and Prokupek scored 12.