

Warriors, Saints look to keep rolling

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Cedar Rapids Washington football team is loaded with lots of good players.

Everywhere you look - offense, defense, special teams - there's a talented player is a little bigger, stronger and faster than the other guy on the other team.

It's one of the reasons the top-ranked Warriors are 11-0 and favored to defeat Iowa City West (7-4) in the quarterfinals of the Class 4A playoffs Friday night at Kingston Stadium (7 p.m., KGYM).

The Xavier Saints (8-3) are not quite as loaded with talented athletes this year as they were the last two seasons when they reached the championship game of the Class 4A playoffs, but they've enjoyed another good year and will try to keep advancing when they host sixth-ranked West Delaware (10-1) in the Class 3A quarterfinals at Saints Field (7 p.m., KMRY).

Washington and Xavier are the only two Metro teams still kicking as we move toward the final stages of the 2014 playoffs.

Remarkably, 14 different players have scored touchdowns for the Warriors this season. They do not have a 1,000-yard rusher (yet) or a 1,000-yard passer, but they have plenty of weapons, a powerful running attack and a stout defense.

Washington blanked Iowa City West, 28-0, in Game 3 of the season Sept. 12, holding the Trojans to 101 yards through the air and 99 on the ground. The trick Friday night will be keeping Iowa City West quarterback Aaron Bleil under wraps.

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Bleil has passed for 2,254 yards and 17 touchdowns. His favorite target is Oliver Martin, who has 59 catches for 747 yards and five touchdowns. The Warriors have a strong pass rush and talented defensive backs, so it will be interesting to see how that battle turns out.

Fullbacks Caleb Smothers and Connor Vincent helped Washington hold off Cedar Falls, 25-14, in the second round of the playoffs Monday night when they combined for 110 yards on the ground. The Warriors have good depth in the offensive backfield with Tavian Patrick (960 yards), Johnny Dobbs (652), Reid Snitker (376), Smothers (274) and Vincent (262).

Washington can keep throwing fresh runners at the defense, especially with a big and talented offensive line paving the way. Snitker has thrown for only 782 yards this season, but he has the knack for making big plays and has 12 TD passes.

The Warriors feature a bunch of two-way players who perform on offense and defense, but Coach Paul James rotates them to keep them fresh. If the Warriors defeat Iowa City West, they could draw second-ranked Bettendorf (11-0) in the semifinals next Friday in the UNI-Dome.

Bettendorf plays North Scott this Friday night.

WEST DELAWARE at XAVIER **Saints Field, 7 p.m., KMRY**

The Saints are trying to make a little history this year by reaching the state finals for three straight years, twice as a Class 4A outfit and now in Class 3A.

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Jay Kortemeyer and Nic Ekland, two of Xavier's top players, apparently suffered injuries last week in a 33-20 victory over Waverly-Shell Rock, but Coach Duane Schulte declined comment Wednesday when asked about their status for Friday night.

Kortemeyer has rushed for 1,174 yards and seven touchdowns. He gained 109 yards against Waverly-Shell Rock before departing, but Sean Murphy stepped into his place and rushed for 102 more.

Xavier quarterback Bryce Schulte, just a sophomore, has developed as a passer this season and has thrown for 13 touchdowns with only three interceptions.

West Delaware boasts one of the most impressive running attacks in the state, averaging a robust 304 yards per game. Quarterback Brent Lammers has rushed for 1,289 yards and 15 touchdowns, Coy Roussell has gained 1,075 yards with 16 TDs, and Austin Bishop has 664 yards with nine touchdowns. The three of them have combined for 3,028 yards on the ground.

Waverly-Shell Rock also featured a strong running game, but the Saints held the Go-Hawks to just 78 yards on the ground Monday night.

Lammers also has passed for 1,396 yards and 11 touchdowns, making him a dual threat.

If the Saints win Friday night, they'll advance to the Class 3A semifinals next Thursday in the UNI-Dome.

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