

Defense does it again for Big 5 champs

Erik Fraser/The Times-Standard

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OK, I'll just come right out and say it: I was wrong.

On the Times-Standard's blog prior to Friday's Dick Niclai Championship game, I made my predictions about who would win the titles, and for the boys I picked Arcata.

I foolishly projected that, despite losing 35-33 two weeks ago, the Tigers would overpower Del Norte on offense, drop 54 points on the Warriors and win its first Niclai title by five points.

Uh, no.

By the end of the first quarter, it was clear that no one was going to reach 50 in this game. In an absolutely complete team effort -- the hallmark of this year's Del Norte squad -- the Warriors put the clamps down on Jordan Bianco and Co., holding them to even fewer points than they had managed on Jan. 31.

The Warriors don't have a Bianco or a Greg Allen. Nope, all they have is Ben Vess, Cody Hoffman, Evan O'Brien, Taylor Duncan, Chad Freeman, Andrew Fallman, Cole Lesley, Brock Coulston, Cliff Van Hook, Trevor Rook, Saxon Schultz and David Mendoza. Together, they make up the most complete team in the Humboldt-Del Norte Conference.

And no matter which five of those 12 guys are on the floor, they make life miserable for other

teams' offenses.

"We play hard, everybody helps out, and we try to contain the dribble," said Van Hook.

And they can all make plays on offense, too, generating just enough points to get the job done.

While Hoffman led them with 15 points on Friday. The two points that each Taylor Duncan and Andrew Fallman had were just as important.

Fallman's may have been simultaneously the biggest and easiest points anybody had all night.

Early in the fourth with Del Norte trailing 25-24, Lesley spotted Fallman alone underneath out of the corner of his eye. He whipped the ball in and Fallman had an uncontested layup, giving the Warriors the lead. They didn't trail again, and Del Norte had its second Niclai title in three years, while Arcata is still looking for its first.

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