

Warriors brace for showdown with Bettendorf

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Washington Warriors had two big questions to answer after Tony Lombardi was forced to resign as their head football coach following the 2012 season and later moved with his family to West Des Moines.

First of all, who would become the new head coach? And secondly, who would become the new quarterback?

Lombardi's son, Rocky, had been groomed to play quarterback for the Warriors, but suddenly he was taken out of the picture when the family left town on the eve of the 2013 campaign.

The Warriors never missed a beat.

Paul James, Washington's athletic director and former head football coach, happily agreed to return to the sidelines and has enjoyed the time of his life the past two seasons, recovering the fountain of youth.

Reid Snitker, who was ticketed to play somewhere else on offense last year, was quickly switched to quarterback and acquitted himself quite well last season when the Warriors went 6-4 and made the playoffs after a slow start.

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Now comes the big game for both of them Friday afternoon.

The top-ranked Warriors, with James running the club from the pressbox and Snitker running the club on the field, will face the second-ranked Bettendorf Bulldogs in a collision of 12-0 clubs in the semifinals of the Class 4A playoffs at the UNI-Dome in Cedar Falls.

The kickoff is scheduled for 4:06 p.m., with the winner earning a date in the state finals next Friday against Dowling or Waukee.

The Washington-Bettendorf game will be broadcast on KGYM's FM stations (107.5 and 106.3).

Rocky Lombardi, by the way, became the starting quarterback at West Des Moines Valley this season as a sophomore and had a productive year. He completed 57.8 percent of his passes for 2,097 yards and 21 touchdowns.

For awhile, it looked like Washington and West Des Moines Valley might meet in the state finals, but Valley lost to Waukee in the quarterfinals last week.

Washington and Bettendorf are similar ballclubs in several respects, in addition to their spotless 12-0 records. Both teams emphasize the running game more than the passing game and both clubs have strong defensive units.

There is a major difference in philosophy, however. Many of Washington's top guys play both ways on offense and defense, while Bettendorf sticks mostly to two-platoon football. Both systems have worked, especially since the Warriors give their players the rest they need by sending in substitutes.

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Washington has rushed for 3,420 yards and 45 touchdowns. Bettendorf has rushed for 2,643 yards and 46 TDs.

Bettendorf has passed for 1,592 yards and 11 touchdowns. Washington has passed for 1,155 yards and 15 TDs.

Snitker does not have gaudy stats as a passer, but he's made a series of clutch throws during his career and has 12 TD passes and only three interceptions this season. More than anything, Snitker has been a winner with an 18-4 record as Washington's quarterback the last two years.

The Warriors have a deep stable of runners with Tavian Patrick (1,137 yards), Johnny Dobbs (773), Snitker (408), Connor Vincent (303) and Caleb Smothers (291). Bettendorf counters with Justice O'Conner (1,069 yards), quarterback Cyle Cox (797) and Xavier La Doucer (465).

Cox has passed for 1,344 yards, with nine touchdowns and five interceptions.

Vincent has enjoyed a remarkable season at linebacker for the Warriors with 109.5 tackles and 25 tackles for loss. O'Rien Vance has 70.5 tackles and 15 tackles for loss. Royal Silver had 12 tackles for loss and Julian Good-Jones has eight.

Washington whipped Iowa City West, 44-19, in the quarterfinals. Bettendorf struggled to nip Iowa City West, 28-27, earlier in the season, so that head-to-head comparison strongly favors the Warriors.