

Surging Warriors clinch Valley title

Written by Ryan Suchomel

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Cedar Rapids Washington did 6-3 the hard way, winning its sixth straight in Week 9 after starting the season 0-3.

The Warriors beat Dubuque Wahlert, 31-13, Thursday at Kingston Stadium to clinch at least a share of the Valley Division crown in the Mississippi Valley Conference and a home playoff game on Wednesday.

Their opponent will be decided after Friday night's games.

"I couldn't see this at 0-3," junior linebacker Connor Vincent said. "Unbelievable. We just put the work in. Everyone started doing their job."

"You don't think of a 6-3 season quite the way this one played out," Washington Coach Paul James said. "Believe it or not, when I took this job, I asked some of the assistants what they thought this group was capable of. They said 6-3."

James, who coached the Warriors for 11 years before stepping down in 2005, returned this fall to help lead the program - coming off a 3-6 season - to the 19th conference title in school history.

The Warriors finished 5-1 in the Valley Division. Xavier can finish 5-1 in the Valley with a victory

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at Linn-Mar Friday night, but Washington beat Xavier and has the tiebreaker in its favor.

"Winning the conference championship . . . I think it's a really big deal for these kids," James said. "All the great plays . . . the performances the kids showed throughout these last six games, a lot of memories there."

Thursday night the memories came from a multi-faceted offense that featured four players rushing for more 40 yards, but none more than 60 - Johnny Dobbs 58, Caleb Smothers 57, Mason Taylor 43 and Reid Snitker 41. Snitker was also 10-for-13 passing for 134 yards.



"We did what we had to do," senior lineman Masen Akers said. "It feels good to get everyone some yards, some playing time."

The 57 yards on five carries for Smothers were an eye-opener, as the fullback had carried the ball only nine times for 34 yards coming into Thursday.

"We run a lot of different formations, and finally got our 2-back, 2-tight end offense going a little bit," James said. "We didn't run as much of our spread stuff as we have. Reid didn't have to carry us as much tonight with his running ability."

James also praised the O-line, made up of Julian Good-Jones, Austin Schuttloffel, Akers, Kaine Cooks, Wes Ennis and Noah Fox. "I was pleased with how the offensive line was coming off the ball and opened holes," he said.

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The Washington defense showed its teeth, giving up only nine first downs, including just three in the first half. Washington also forced Wahlert (2-7, 0-6) into five turnovers.

"That was awesome," Vincent said. "We played pretty well. We stitched things up at halftime and played better in the second half."

Vincent had several tackles for loss. Clayton Bjornsen had two interceptions, Landen Akers had an interception and also blocked a field goal. Isaiah Nimmers had an interception and Arthur Garrett recovered a fumble.



Because of a stingy defense, Washington didn't need any of the fourth-quarter heroics on Thursday that it has shown during much of its winning streak. The Warriors built a 21-7 lead at halftime and were never in serious danger.

Snitker had two TD runs, and Dobbs and Smothers each had one. Gunnar Lenzen capped the scoring for Washington with a 23-yard field goal in the fourth quarter.

"This team has grown a lot from beginning to end, and I'm just so proud of them," James said. "We had our back to the wall when we were 0-3. We said after that game, that 6-3 . . . was a possibility, but we had to break through and get that win."

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"This is such a great feeling coming off last year," Vincent said.

"It's a good feeling," Akers said. "We'll take on whoever or whatever comes our way, and play the best football we can play."

Coming into the final week, Washington was the seventh seed on the Eastern side of the state in Class 4A. The win clinches a home game in the first round on Wednesday.

If Cedar Rapids Kennedy ends up with a top-eight seed (the Cougars are ninth going into Friday's games) there could be two games at Kingston Stadium on Wednesday.

Washington will enter the playoffs without left tackle Good-Jones, who had a personal foul and was ejected from the game early in the third quarter for some extra action after the whistle. Under state rule, he has to sit out the next game.

Fox, who had played offense last season, came in to play on the O-line.

"We'll just play with the people we have," James said. "Hopefully, everyone learns from it."

WASHINGTON 31, DUBUQUE WAHLERT 13

DW	CRW		
First downs	9	22	
Rushes-yards	25-101	53-225	
Passing yards	74	134	
Comp-Att-Int	8-22-4	10-13-1	
Fumbles-lost	1-1	3-3	
Punts-avg.	3-32.7	2-21.0	
Penalties-yards	6-35	4-40	

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Dubuque Wahlert	0	7	0	6	-	13
Washington	7	14	0	10	-	31

CRW - Johnny Dobbs 1 run (Gunnar Lenzen kick).

CRW - Caleb Smothers 5 run (Lenzen kick).

CRW - Reid Snitker 1 run (Lenzen kick).

DW - Colin Smith 27 run (Mitchell Gaul kick).

CRW - Snitker 7 run (Lenzen kick).

CRW - FG Lenzen 23.

DW - Smith 7 pass from Daniel Broderick (kick failed).

Individual Statistics

Rushing

Wahlert - Colin Smith 14-92, Riley Hasken 10-10, Daniel Broderick 1-minus 1.

Washington - Johnny Dobbs 13-58, Caleb Smothers 5-57, Mason Taylor 10-43, Reid Snitker 12-41, Jake Vial 8-18, Connor Vincent 3-15, Sami Scheetz 1-minus 2, Landen Akers 1-minus 5.

Passing

Wahlert - Broderick 8-22-74-4.

Washington - Snitker 10-13-134-1.

Receiving

Wahlert - Weslee Haynes 3-31, Jared Walker 2-13, Nathan Kroeger 1-18, Colin Smith 1-7, Riley Hasken 1-5.

Washington - Isaiah Nimmers 2-53, Connor Vincent 2-25, Landen Akers 2-20, Caleb Smothers 1-17, Lars Bjornsen 1-14, Jacob Bjornsen 1-7, Mason Taylor 1-minus.