

What if Wash and Dowling played again?

Written by Jim Ecker

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I honestly thought the Washington Warriors would give Dowling a good game in the Class 4A finals Friday night in the UNI.

Maybe they would if given another chance, but you only get one chance at something like this and you have to face reality. Dowling was simply too good.

More specifically, Dowling's linemen were too good. And Dowling's defense was too good. And Dowling quarterback Ryan Boyle was sensational.

This make two straight years that the Maroons destroyed a strong team from the Metro in the state finals. They did the same thing to Xavier last year, 44-13, and this time they easily handled Washington in a 49-14 mismatch.

The Warriors hurt their chances when they fumbled the snap on their first punt of the game, giving Dowling excellent field position and an easy touchdown.

It quickly became 14-0 in the first quarter when Boyle raced 44 yards to the 2-yard line and Dowling scored again. It was a nightmare start for Washington, which was hoping to capture the first state football title in school history.

To their credit the Warriors responded with an 83-yard drive to pull within 14-7, thanks to a terrific pair of long scrambles by quarterback Reid Snither. For a brief moment, it looked liked Washington had licked its wounds and was ready for battle.

That ended quickly when Dowling scored two more touchdowns in the second quarter for a 28-7 lead at halftime, then tacked on two more TDs for a 42-7 bulge midway through the third period.

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It took Dowling only 2 1/2 quarters of football to prove its superiority and erase all doubt.

It was a little shocking, quite frankly. Washington had a strong team this year with big linemen, excellent speed and tough kids, yet Dowling made the Warriors look ordinary in the state finals.

Boyle played another great game in the finals. He was simply too quick and too clever on his belly-option keepers and quarterback draws, consistently slicing through the Warriors for big gains. And when he wasn't running for first downs, he calmly stood in the pocked and rifled accurate passes to open receivers.

The Washington defense eventually adjusted and slowed him down, but not enough. Meanwhile, Washington had trouble moving the ball.

The Warriors completed only two passes for six yards all night. And the running game, which was one of the top-ranked ensembles in the state, basically went nowhere except for Snitker's scrambles when he had to run away from trouble.

All of this was unsettling to Washington fans and to anyone else who honestly thought the Warriors had a legitimate chance to win the game.

Would the outcome be different if they played again this week? We'll never know, of course, but I'd like to think the Warriors would come a lot closer, now that they've seen Boyle and the Maroons in person.

But maybe the IHSA did Washington a favor by sticking with the East vs West policy all the way through the playoffs. I was one of the people who suggested that Washington and Bettendorf, both undefeated, should not have to meet until the state finals, in light of the fact that Dowling and Waukeesean - the other semifinalists - both had one loss.

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I thought it should have been Washington vs Waukee and Bettendorf vs Dowling in the semifinals, with the winners meeting in the UNI-Dome for the title. As it turned out, Waukee gave Dowling a much tougher time in the semifinals than Washington did in the finals.

In retrospect, we might have had Dowling playing Waukee in the finals instead of the way it turned out.

If you had to rank the four semifinalists right now, you'd have to list Dowling No. 1, of course, followed by Waukee, Washington and Bettendorf.

None of that matters. Dowling plastered Washington in the state finals, and that's that. It's over and done with.

Washington had a terrific season and set a school record with 13 victories, but Dowling was better. Much better, in fact, when it counted.