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SPORTS

NASELLE OVERCOMES NEMESIS, HEADS FOR CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

Comets tally 10 touchdowns, but tackle count is key to win

By **PATRICK WEBB**
For The Astorian

TUMWATER, Wash. — To inspire the Warriors in battle, a shield, sword and ax form their emblem. But head coach Jeff Eaton calls his Comets squad an “Army of 8.”

And Saturday, in the WIAA state semifinal, Naselle defeated its nemesis, Almira-Coulee-Hartline, 70-44 after twice being behind.

They achieved the victory with their own weapons.

- Jimmy Strange proved to be the shield, with a team-high 17 tackles and a touchdown.

- Ethan Lindstrom provided the sword, directing operations, kicking cleverly and thrusting three touchdowns into the opposition’s end zone.

- And Fa’aoso Tutu’u was the ax, scoring one conversion run which put Naselle 32-30 ahead at halftime, then four second-half touchdowns that secured the win.

“I am the happiest I have ever been as a coach,” said Eaton after choking up in tears as he thanked his players.

The win ended a jinx. ACH had eliminated Naselle in last year’s semifinal, the prior year’s quarters and again February at state basketball. “This was huge for this group of kids to get up and beat them,” Eaton said.

The win advanced the Comets to the 1B championship game Saturday to face defending champions Odessa. The Tigers beat Entiat 84-20 in the other semifinal and have won every game this season by 54 points or more.

Saturday’s matchup began with senior quarterback Lindstrom shaping to kick long then booting the ball into the ground to catch it on the bounce.

A couple of short runs led to a fumble and Brayton Schafer, the Warriors’ 6-2, 185-pound running back gained valuable yards before his quarterback Dane Isaak ran in from 16 yards. The two would prove the Comets’ biggest foes all afternoon, each scoring three touchdowns including one by Schafer on an interception.

Lindstrom found his rhythm with two close-in darts before junior Jimmy Strange savored a 30-yard scoring run. Successful conversions run in by Strange and his sophomore brother, Joey, created a 24-8 first quarter lead.

The Warriors were 1B champions in 2017 and fought back, seeking to advance to their third consecutive title game.

Schafer crossed the line three times, putting his eastern Washington team ahead. Once he stole the ball from an opponent’s hands and raced to gain



Photos by Patrick Webb

Elusive Naselle quarterback Ethan Lindstrom (9) demonstrates a side-stepping move to evade Warrior opponents Reese Isaak and Dane Isaak in the WIAA semifinal.

WIAA 1B CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

Who: Naselle vs. Odessa

When: Noon, Saturday

Where: Mt. Tahoma High School, Tacoma, Washington



Comet celebrations don’t tend to be too exuberant, but junior Warren Wirkkala signals ‘No. 1’ as he races to join his teammates on the sidelines when the 1B semifinal ended in a Naselle victory.

yards. Naselle responded. Lindstrom recovered his own high-bouncing onside kick then gave the ball to Joey Strange. The second smallest player on the roster raced 48 yards through a huge gap to score, allowing himself a discreet double pump of the raised ball in celebration.

Eaton had begun the game worried about Tutu’u’s prior ankle injury. In the first two quarters, the 5-11 senior had been brought down in the backfield. But as the half ended he added the two-point conversion that gave his team a lead it would not relinquish.

The second half saw Lindstrom send Warren Wirkkala into the end zone on a 24-yard play. The score had Naselle fans cheering — then roaring even louder moments later when freshman Kolten Lindstrom grabbed a loose ball one yard from the line to set up his brother’s final touchdown dash.

Offensively, the rest of the half

He amassed 184 yards on 15 carries. But the tackle count was a critical stat, too. Jimmy Strange excelled with 17, but brother Joey, freshman Kolten Lindstrom and senior Gabe Gilbert had eight each, and Ethan Lindstrom seven.

Gilbert was especially effective sacking Isaak with relish then combining with Kolten Lindstrom to bring down Schafer at a key moment.

Isaak sought to match Lindstrom with deceptive plays at quarterback, and he was a sprinter, too. His final TD featured an 80-yard run.

With time waning, the Warriors recovered a fumble at the kickoff and the sophomore reached the end zone again after a lengthy run. But the score was disallowed because of a pushing penalty.

Vocal assistant coaches Matt Scrabeck and Pete Riley kept the pressure on their Comets, even with the margin at 20 points. “Keep it simple!” Scrabeck yelled. “Finish strong.”

They didn’t break into smiles or start any sideline handshakes until Tutu’u’s final TD when the clock showed three minutes — not long enough for any realistic comeback.

As the players knelt in a semicircle before lining up for a team photo, their head coach just couldn’t get the words out. “I am so proud to be a Comet,” was all Eaton could manage before the tears came.

SCOREBOARD

PREP SPORTS SCHEDULE

WEDNESDAY

Girls Basketball — Seaside at Cascade, 5:30 p.m.; Eddyville at Jewell, 4 p.m.
Boys Basketball — Seaside at Cascade, 7 p.m.; Eddyville at Jewell, 5:30 p.m.
Wrestling — Knappa Invitational, TBA

THURSDAY

Girls Basketball — St. Stephen’s at Jewell, 6 p.m.
Boys Basketball — St. Stephen’s at Jewell, 7 p.m.
Swimming — Valley Catholic at Astoria, 4 p.m.

FRIDAY

Girls Basketball — Astoria at White Buffalo Classic, Madras, TBA; Stayton at Seaside, 6 p.m.; Warrenton at Sutherlin Tournament, TBA; Rainier at Knappa, 7 p.m.
Boys Basketball — Knappa Tip-Off Classic, TBA; Rainier at Knappa, 8:30 p.m.; Stayton at Seaside, 7 p.m.; Warrenton at Vernonia Tournament, TBA

FOOTBALL

OSAA STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS

4A: La Grande 21, Banks 0
3A: Santiam Christian 41, Hidden Valley 34
2A: Heppner 12, Kennedy 7

WIAA STATE PLAYOFFS

Naselle 70, Almira-Coulee-Hartline 44
Naselle 24 8 20 18—70
ACH 8 22 0 14—44
First quarter
ACH Dane Isaak 16 run (Isaak run)
NHS Ethan Lindstrom 7 run (Jimmy Strange run)
NHS Ethan Lindstrom 7 run (Joey Strange run)
NHS Jimmy Strange 30 run (Joey Strange run)
Second quarter
ACH Brayton Schafer 41 pass (Isaak run)
ACH Schafer 52 run (run failed)
ACH Schafer 56 pass from Isaak (Isaak run)
NHS Joey Strange 48 run (Fa’aoso Tutu’u run)
Third quarter
NHS Warren Wirkkala 24 pass from Lindstrom (Lindstrom run)
NHS Lindstrom 1 run (run failed)
NHS Tutu’u 56 run (run failed)
Fourth quarter
NHS Tutu’u 23 run (pass fail)
ACH Isaak 13 run (Schafer pass)
NHS Tutu’u 49 run (pass fail)
ACH Isaak 80 run (pass fail)
NHS Tutu’u 36 run (pass fail)



TURKEY TIME

Warrenton football coach Ian O'Brien, left, tries to get away from Mark Warren in the annual Thanksgiving Day flag football game, known as the ‘Turkey Bowl.’

Gary Henley/The Astorian