

Key MVAL game right off the bat

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IF YOU'VE BEEN watching the prep football video on <http://www.insidebayarea.com>, you would have seen The Mustard pumping up the Mission Valley Athletic League last week.

The Mustard bragged about how strong the top three teams — James Logan High, Newark Memorial and Washington — have been.

A night after the Week 3 video premiered last Thursday, Logan went on to claim a 27-0 win over Berkeley. Newark cleaned up Fremont of Oakland to the tune of 42-6. And the most impressive game wasn't even a win. Then-unranked Washington tied then-No.3 San Ramon Valley 35-35.

In three weeks of non-league play, Logan, Washington and Newark are a combined 9-0. Talk about the cream of the crop having a good season thus far.

But now it's time to get down to business — MVAL style. League play begins this week with the exception of Logan, which has the league's first bye and will play at Pittsburg on Friday.

And the first week of league play won't disappoint as Washington plays at Newark on Friday night. Keep in mind, both teams are North Coast Section 3-A schools, which means possible NCS playoff berths could be on the line.

For old-school coaches such as Newark's Rich Swift, this is just another game in this, his 30th year as the coach of the Cougars.

"It's one of six league games," Swift said. "You want to win as many as you can. We have 10 games (overall), and we want to win as many of those as we can. We want to put ourselves in position to win games. But we don't overemphasize one over the other."

Newark hasn't had the toughest non-league schedule with wins over Sequoia (46-0) and Fremont. But in Week 2, the Cougars a beat Milpitas team (33-27) that was the defending Central Coast Section Large Schools Division winner.

It's hard to imagine that just two years ago, the Cougars went 0-10. Last year Newark went 7-3 and barely missed out on the playoffs.

"I think (the attitude) goes back to last year," Swift said. "We had a good group of hard workers. Those guys set a standard, and these guys are learning it and trying to emulate that. Nothing is going to happen easy. If you want to be a good algebra student, you have to practice theorems."

Washington itself hasn't had all that strong of a non-league schedule with wins over Arroyo (47-17) and Tennyson (31-0). But that tie to SRV, in The Mustard's eyes, is about as close to a win as they come. Consider that Washington trailed by 14 points with under four minutes left.

"Our season doesn't ride on this game, but it has great implications at the end of the year for NCS," Washington coach Ken Wittmer said. "We're not playing as good as we're totally capable of, but our goal isn't to peak in Week 1, 2, 3 or 4. Game 5 is where we want to peak."

Washington played last week without one of its top wide receivers in Tommy Ross, who had a paperwork snafu with his transfer from John F. Kennedy to Washington this year.

The paperwork issue has been cleared, and Ross will be on the field Friday night. The Huskies have one of the league's top quarterbacks in Logan Mozzetti. The senior is coming off a three-touchdown performance against SRV, two passing and a 1-yard scamper into the end zone that tied the game 35-35 with 43 seconds left.

The thrill of that game was gone by Saturday for Washington. The Huskies quickly got back to work Saturday morning with player evaluations.

"Washington hasn't been ranked in a long time, and we expect to hit the top 20 when the poll comes out," Wittmer said. "I want to play that down. It's not where we are now, it's about where we are in November. Take a look at McClymonds. It was ranked

before the season, pretty high, and now it's 0-3."

Newark is paced by a running game that Swift said is, "about a 9 to 1 ratio compared to Washington, which is probably a 2 to 1."

Quarterback Michael Gates is mobile and moves outside the pocket with tremendous confidence. His twin brother, Myles Gates, is a dangerous breakout threat.

But the running game is solidified by the workhorse Eric Stewart, who is coming off a 12-rush, 124-yard performance against Fremont. Offsetting the power running of Stewart is the speedster Robert Hawkins.

"We first played in 1981," Swift said. "We have a long tradition of competitive games. I think this should be along the lines of those very hard-fought games."

For those who aren't aware, 1981 was the first year of Newark Memorial High. Prior to that there was a Newark and a Memorial. Newark Memorial won that 1981 game, 20-7.

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