

# 11AA Gameday: Unbeaten Warriors, Lynx Face Off In Final Contest Of Championship Weekend

## Washington Playing In Title Game In Sixth Straight Season

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VERMILLION — In one of the most anticipated big-school showdowns in recent memory, Sioux Falls Washington and Brandon Valley will put their perfect records on the line tonight (Saturday) at the DakotaDome for the Class 11AA crown.

The Warriors and Lynx, each 11-0 and ranked first and second respectively since early in September, have been the class of the 11AA field all season long, dominating opposition by sometimes outrageous margins.

Washington has outscored its opposition 514-61 (46.7-5.5 points per game) this fall, including the playoffs, as the Warriors make an unprecedented sixth consecutive 11AA title game appearance, having won in 2009 and 2010.

"It's always fun to play for a title - it never gets old," Washington coach Brian Hermanson said. "We have been very fortunate here at Washington and we are excited about another chance to play for a state championship.

The Lynx return to Vermillion for the first time since their 1998 victory over Brookings.

Brandon Valley also becomes just the third ESD School — joining Aberdeen Central in 2009 and Yankton in 2005 — to play for a title in the last decade.

"We are definitely excited to be making a trip to the dome but we do just not want to be there but also take home the prize," Lynx coach Chad Garrow said. "I am excited for the players, the student body and the community, as they have waited a long time for this to happen again."

The Lynx opened their campaign with a 15-13 win over O'Gorman back on August 24 and have not let an opponent come closer than 14 points since then, outscoring opposition this season by an average of 41-11 including the playoffs.

"Our senior class is a huge reason why we have been successful this season," Garrow added. "Many of them have gathered playing time for three years now, making them very experienced and game ready. The leadership they have shown is a big factor in where we are at today."

No seniors have contributed more for the Lynx than the quarterback/receiver combo of Chase Marso and Matt Vandenberg. Marso, who passed for over 2,500 yards and 34 touchdowns in 2011 added nearly 2,700 yards and 31 scores through the air this season while completing 65 percent of his throws and averaging 245 passing yards per contest. Vandenberg has been on the receiving end of 58 of those passes for 964 yards and 17 receiving touchdowns, a year after he posted

1,081 receiving yards and 16 touchdowns.

Vandenberg is a threat from all over the field as the 6-1 Iowa recruit is averaging 16.9 yards on punt returns, 32.5 yards on kickoff returns and has intercepted seven passes, bringing three of those back for touchdowns.

Hermanson knows that the Warriors must stop Marso and Vandenberg, along with senior running back Tony Tripp (138 carries, 816 yards, 15 rushing touchdowns), in order to come out of the DakotaDome with a victory.

"We will need to control the football and the tempo of the game," Hermanson said. "They have great team speed and athletes on both sides of the ball and Chad and his staff have done a great job of putting their athletes in place to make big plays."

Washington has its own multi-position threat of their own in senior Nate Gerry. The Nebraska recruit has scored on 12 of his 22 receptions, averaging 26.6 yards per catch. Gerry has also returned a kickoff for a score and brought back all four of his interceptions from the safety position for touchdowns.

Starting under center for the Warriors will be senior John Hander (1752 yards, 21 touchdowns, 3 interceptions) while fellow senior Sam Cooke (1029 rushing yards, 6.6 yards per carry, 15 rushing touchdowns) will get the nod at running back.

The Warriors have allowed only one opponent this season to get within 24 points, that being a 27-20 win over Pierre back in late Sep-

11AA | PAGE 9

## Gazelles

From Page 7

Starting out tight with a 5-5 tie, the Arrows took another lead 13-7. Yankton closed the gap 21-21, and the two would tie again at 24, Yankton coming out on top to win 26-24.

Watertown would take another early in set four, 5-0 over Yankton, and stay ahead to take set four 15-5 against Yankton, qualifying for the state championship.

Watertown head coach Kim Rohde said she was nervous heading into the match because Watertown had faced Yankton two other times this season and lost both times, but was happy with the team at the end of the night.

"I couldn't be more enthused about how our girls played tonight offensively and defensively," she said. "They played very well. When we were down a few points they kept in there and kept their focus — I couldn't have asked for anything better."

Watertown senior Hannah Whitlock said her team played their best, and she was excited to come out on top.

"It's a really exciting moment," she said. "We played our best tonight, and we got the win. We blocked and played awesome defense, we had a lot of confidence and we knew we could do it. We're excited and we hope we come out on top."

Watertown's Ashton McClellan recorded 17 kills and three blocks for the night, and Whitlock made 21 out of 23 serves with one ace. Emily Pengilly also contributed 34 assists 18 digs and four blocks

For Yankton, Mikala Hora had 24 kills, 16 digs and one ace, while Kelsey Fitzgerald put up 19 kills, 18 digs and four blocks. Maria Binder made 19 digs and one ace, and Brooke Wuebben had 31 digs and two kills.

Yankton will graduate six seniors, Binder, Fitzgerald, Hora, Olivia Christopher, Kelsey Butler and Abbie Mitchell.

Woodward said although the team improved throughout the entire season, they struggled with the expectations of the match.

"I thought our team has improved tremendously," she said. "If you look at us from August and now, we're a completely different team. We've been playing good volleyball, and unfortunately we just picked a bad night to not be as aggressive as we could be."

"It's hard for high school kids to handle this type of a situation when they're expected to do something," she added. "That's not a situation we've been in a lot this year. We've always gotten to play the underdog. In this one, being at home and beating them twice, we were expected to do something, and we played like that. We played not to lose instead of playing to win."

Looking ahead to the state tournament, Rohde said she hopes her team continues to play as well as they have lately.

"They really have stepped up and played really well," she said. "I just hope the girls can continue playing like they have in the district games, and I hope they continue that in the state tournament."

You can follow Emily Niebrugge on Twitter at [twitter.com/ENiebrugge](https://twitter.com/ENiebrugge)



JAMES D. CIMBUREK/P&D

Winner's Tanner Fritz, 7, pitches the ball back to teammate Trace Meyer, 11, during the Class 11B football championship on Friday at the DakotaDome. Winner claimed a 13-7 victory over Tri-Valley.

## Winner

From Page 7

the Mustangs an important point. Winner dodged another bullet when Tri-Valley failed to convert on a Warrior fumble, and went into the half with the six-point deficit.

"What we talked about at half-time was that we weren't out of it," said Winner head coach Dan Aaker. "I thought the first drive of the second half would be huge."

The Warriors took advantage of a botched onside kick attempt by Tri-Valley to take the momentum in the second half, marching down the field and capping the drive with Ben Connot diving inside the pylon for an 11-yard scoring run. The made PAT kick gave the Warriors a 7-6 lead.

"I was trying to run a sweep

to the outside," said Connot, who rushed for 94 yards to . "I got a good block from Scott Assman and got to the corner."

On the ensuing drive, Old Lodge got the fumble recovery and return that gave the Warriors the seven-point margin. It was the second straight week that Old Lodge had made a big play down the stretch, as he caught the go-ahead touchdown pass from Fritz in the Warriors' semifinal victory over Flandreau.

Tri-Valley had scoring chances stopped at the Winner 31- and 5-yard lines before the interception in the endzone ended the Mustangs' hopes.

"We couldn't push it in," said Tri-Valley head coach Steve Bazata. "We were down there how many times. That was the difference."

Beside's Connot's 94 yards rushing, Winner had 44 yards from Kyle Bertram. Fritz was 5-8

passing for 61 yards, with Old Lodge making two catches for 32 yards and Bertram logging a 21-yard catch.

Sam Mader had 78 yards and Logan Otto had 75 yards rushing to lead the Tri-Valley offense. Page was 3-7 passing for 39 yards, all to Burggraf.

Trace Meyer led the Winner defense with 14 tackles. Forest Cerv had 10 stops, with Bertram and Adam Farner recording nine stops each. Logan O'Hara had seven tackles for Tri-Valley.

Winner finished with a 12-0 record, the culmination of a dream for a senior group that was on the Warrior sidelines as freshmen in 2009.

"When we were freshmen the team did the same thing, and we got a taste of what it was like," Fritz said. "From then we wanted to do it ourselves. I can't believe that it happened."

Tri-Valley finished with a 10-2

record, failing to defend their 2011 crown.

"I'm a little disappointed for our seniors," Bazata said. "They've done so much for the program."

You can follow James D. Cimburek on Twitter at [twitter.com/aceman904](https://twitter.com/aceman904)

WINNER 13, TRI-VALLEY 6  
TRI-VALLEY 0 0 0 0 — 6  
First Quarter  
TRI—Burggraf 4 pass from Page (kick failed), 7:07.

Third Quarter  
WIN—Connot 11 run (Gronlund kick), 9:10  
WIN—Old Lodge 64 fumble return (kick failed), 6:42.

	Winner	Tri-Valley
First downs	18	11
Rushes-yards	60-235	36-130
Passing yards	39	61
Return yards	5-63	3-82
Passes	3-8-1	5-8-0
Punts-yards	2-30	0-0
Penalties-yards	0-0	4-17
Time of possession	28:10	18:34

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS  
RUSHING—WIN, Connot 14-94, Bertram 10-44, Meyer 6-9, Fritz 5-(minus 5), TRI, Mader 16-78, Otto 15-75, Kooptan 18-39, Page 7-28, Van Asselt 3-12, Brown 1-3.  
PASSING—WIN, Fritz 5-8-0-61, TRI, Page 3-7-1-39, Otto 0-1-0-0.  
RECEIVING—WIN, Old Lodge 2-32, Bertram 1-21, Connot 1-5, Meyer 1-3, TRI, Burggraf 3-39.

## Top Back In FCS Leading Jacks Against NDSU

FARGO, N.D. (AP) — Somewhere between the end of the 2011 season and his second carry in this season's opener against Kansas, South Dakota State's Zach Zenner went from ordinary to extraordinary. He's become another in a long line of SDSU running backs cut from a similar mold.

They won't set 40-yard dash records, but they can run past a secondary. They run straight ahead, not out and around defensive players. That best explains his 99-yard carry against the Jayhawks that set the table for the sophomore being the leading rusher in the NCAA Division I Football Championship Subdivision.

"I would have never predicted this," Zenner said. "You envision yourself being successful, but I'm just playing my best and so far it's working out."

It's worked out so well that his Jackrabbits play North Dakota State on Saturday afternoon in Fargo with the winner clinching at least a share of the Missouri Valley Football Conference title. An SDSU victory would also most likely shore up a berth in the FCS playoffs.

The Jackrabbits are ranked in the Top 20 in both FCS polls. The defending national champion Bison are atop both polls.

It's been three years since the Jacks have been in this position, something Zenner attributes to a better team atmosphere.

"It's a different feeling in the locker room," he said. "We're a close team. And also on offense, things are simpler, and that's allowed us to play faster."

Zenner wasn't highly recruited out of Eagan, Minn., despite rushing for 1,181 yards, averaging 8.9 yards a carry, and being a finalist for the state's Mr. Football. He said NDSU looked at him as a preferred walk-on with a bunch of Division II and Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference schools after him.

SDSU offered him a full ride. It's worked out so well that the Jackrabbits moved last year's starting running back, Tyrel Kool, to wide receiver because of him.

"Those two guys are two of our best 11," said SDSU head coach John Stiegelmeier. "We decided our top skill guys couldn't share a position."

Kool leads the team in receptions with 29. Zenner started the year with 183 yards against Kansas, 278 against Southeastern Louisiana and 237 against Indiana State. He's averaging 166.2 yards a game, which puts him slightly ahead of Miguel Maysonet of Stony Brook.

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