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THURSDAY, SEPT. 19, 2024

Willowbrook wins the District 88 Bowl



CHRIS FOX PHOTO VILLA PARK REVIEW

The Willowbrook football team retained possession of the District 88 Bowl Trophy following its 39-28 victory over Addison Trail on Friday night in Villa Park. The Warriors improved their 2024 season record to 1-2 with their win over their District 88 rival. The Blazers dropped to 2-1 with the loss. Willowbrook's players and cheerleaders are pictured after Friday's game. Willowbrook's football program has now won nine straight meetings in its annual clash against Addison Trail. The Blazers last beat the Warriors in 2015, when they claimed a 28-26 victory in Villa Park. Willowbrook will play its homecoming game this Friday. The Warriors will battle Downers Grove South.

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Warriors earn their first win of the season by beating the Blazers in the District 88 Bowl

Kuehl and Leo lead a potent running attack in Willowbrook's ninth straight triumph over Addison Trail; Warriors will play their homecoming game against DG South this Friday

The Willowbrook football team secured its first victory of the season when it defeated Addison Trail 39-28 in Friday's renewal of the District 88 Bowl in Villa Park. The Warriors improved to 1-2 overall and 1-0 in West Suburban Gold Conference action with Friday's win. The Blazers slid to 2-1 overall and 0-1 in conference play. Willowbrook has now won nine straight District 88 Bowl battles

against Addison Trail. The Blazers haven't beaten the Warriors since they posted a narrow 28-26 win in Villa Park on Sept. 11, 2015. Addison Trail provided an explosive start to Friday's contest by scoring on the first play from scrimmage—an 80-yard touchdown pass from junior quarterback Nico Dill to senior Raja Corhn. Junior Noah Cruz made the extra-point kick to give the Blazers a 7-0 lead just 14

seconds into the game. Willowbrook, which utilized an effective hurry-up offense against Addison Trail, responded with a 65-yard touchdown drive that ended with a 1-yard run across the goal line by senior Aidan Kuehl. The Warriors initially planned to try an extra-point kick after the touchdown, but a penalty on the Blazers enticed Willowbrook to try a two-point conversion run. Kuehl raced into the end zone on the run to give the Warriors an 8-7 lead with about six minutes left in the first quarter. The Blazers regained the lead on Dill's 4-yard touchdown run on a fourth-and-goal play early in the second quarter. The extra-point kick raised Addison Trail's lead to 14-8. Kuehl's 8-yard touchdown run tied the score at 14-14. Senior Dean Romano converted the extra-point kick to give the Warriors a 15-14 lead with less than eight minutes to play in the first half. An interception by Willowbrook senior KJ Rhodes set up the Warriors' next touchdown. Rhodes intercepted the ball at his own 45-yard line and made a 24-yard return to the Blazers' 31-yard line. Willowbrook's offense needed only two plays to convert the turnover into points. Junior Anthony Leo of the Warriors ran for a 6-yard gain on the first play of the drive. On the next play, Leo delivered a 25-yard touchdown run. Romano's kick raised Willowbrook's lead to 22-14 with about six minutes left in the opening half. Leo, who is playing in his first varsity season, had only a few carries in the Warriors' first two games of the season—losses to Glenbard

East and Glenbard North. Leo noted after Friday's victory that he has been working extremely hard in practice. That effort likely led to more carries against Addison Trail. "It feels good to have the hard work pay off," said Leo, who teamed with Kuehl and the Warriors' offensive line to batter the Blazers with a punishing ground attack. Willowbrook gained about 300 rushing yards during Friday's win. The Blazers' next drive ended when senior Micah Lewis of the Warriors intercepted a tipped pass near the line of scrimmage. The Willowbrook offense began its ensuing drive at Addison Trail's 21-yard line. The short drive ended with Kuehl's third touchdown run of the night—a 3-yard burst. Romano tacked on the extra-point kick to hike the Warriors' lead to 29-14 with 2:35 remaining in the first half. Kuehl supplied his fourth touchdown run of the evening on a 1-yard plunge with about four minutes to play in the third quarter. Romano's extra-point kick pushed the Warriors' lead to 36-14. Dill and Corhn connected on a 35-yard touchdown pass with a little more than one minute left in the third quarter. The Blazers failed to complete a conversion pass, leaving Willowbrook's lead at 36-20. Romano closed out the Warriors' scoring for the night when he kicked a 23-yard field goal with 7:03 left in the game. Addison Trail junior Giovanni Ortiz scored the game's final touchdown on a 1-yard run with less than four minutes to play. Dill completed a two-point conversion pass to Ortiz to reduce

the Warriors' advantage to 39-28. Willowbrook's offense ran the clock on the following drive. The Warriors then gathered around the District 88 Bowl Trophy, which will remain in their possession for at least one more year. No team wants to start its season with two straight losses, but a 0-2 start doesn't necessarily ruin a team's season. The Warriors' 2024 team began its season with two straight losses, but won six of the next seven games to close the regular season with a 6-3 record. The Warriors then won two playoff games to advance to the quarterfinal round of the IHSA Class 1A playoffs. Willowbrook's 2021 season ended with a loss to Wheat North (the eventual 2021 Class 1A state champion) in the quarterfinal round. "The record doesn't define who we are; 0-2 doesn't define us," said Leo. "We're going to be sharp coming up."

"We didn't play terribly," stated Willowbrook coach Nick Hildebrand while talking about the start of the team's 2024 season. "We did execute and finish, and we had real rhythm in those first couple weeks."

Willowbrook will play its homecoming game against conference rival Downers Grove South (1-2) on Friday in Villa Park. The Mustangs will open their conference season when they face the Warriors. After beginning its season with a 33-win over Metea Valley, Downers Grove South suffered a 42-0 loss to Downers Grove North. The Mustangs slipped to 1-2 after Friday's 54-21 loss at York.



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CHRIS FOX PHOTOS Rock Valley Publishing

Warriors defeat Blazers

Willowbrook's football team prevailed in the annual District 88 Bowl on Friday night, beating Addison Trail 39-28 in a West Suburban Gold Conference game in Villa Park. The Warriors' football program has now won nine straight meetings in the battle with its District 88 rival. Addison Trail hasn't beaten Willowbrook on the football field since 2015. Senior Aidan Kuehl (No. 7) scored four rushing touchdowns for the Warriors during Friday's victory. Willowbrook junior Anthony Leo (No. 22) joined Kuehl to form a potent rushing tandem against the Blazers. Leo contributed a 25-yard touchdown run during the second quarter. The Warriors, who led Addison Trail 29-14 at halftime, improved to 1-2 with their win over the Blazers. Willowbrook will play its homecoming game this Friday, when it will face Downers Grove South in a conference contest.