SoCal HS Semifinals, Finals This Weekend

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The Southern California boys high school playoffs are under way, and they'll be wrapped up Sunday. Four teams compete Friday in the semifinals, after having won in the quarters earlier this week.

Palos Verdes, who edged past the Dead Rabbits 18-17 via a late kick in their quarterfinal, will play in one semifinal at Wilson, the Long Beach team which downed Trabuco Hills 37-19 Wednesday. The other semifinal features Cathedral, 49-17 winner over Point Loma, and Torrey Pines, 34-17 victors over St. Augustine.

SoCal is split into four divisions, and the top two teams of each advanced to the quarterfinals. All of the division champions advanced.

Notable is the lack of Fallbrook in the playoffs. The Warriors have been the gold standard for SoCal high school teams, but finished third in the North Two division. Two semifinalists, Wilson and Palos Verdes, are new teams. The Long Beach program, which falls under the Belmont Shore umbrella, is in its first year, and Palos Verdes is in its second.

"We have a very young team. We've really the bones of an U16 team playing varsity, so we're out-muscled at times," said Wilson coach Gavin Hickie.

"I've been fortunate. A lot of the guys on this team have been playing for four or five years, right through Belmont U10s, U12s and U14s, and they've got some good rugby under their belts. Still I've got some guys who are new to the game, direct converts from football and all the rest of it, and it's mixed in well."

Palos Verdes is coached by South African Jeremy Wilkinson, whose son plays fly half and has a threatening boot.

"They're one of the few teams at this level that can play a kicking game, and that's dangerous," said Hickie of Palos Verdes. "They're very physical, very direct, so we'll certainly have our work cut out for us."

The other semifinal will be a match up between a team that's virtually blown everyone out, Torrey Pines, and a team which has won some close games, Cathedral. Torrey Pines conceded just two tries the entire regular season, outscoring opponents 253-13. Against their one meaningful common opponent, St. Augustine, Cathedral won 26-5 and Torrey Pines won 34-17.