THE TRENCH REPORT
BIG RICK DELGADO · RANCHO CUCAMONGA

THE RULING · WEEK 5
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2026

THE RULING · THREE GAMES · AND THE MAIL

THEY'D WIN DIVISION 4. THEY'RE NOT IN DIVISION 4.

I went 1–2 and the computer went 2–0. You've all been very kind about it. Here's the L, here's the part of Orange I actually rate — it's the offensive line, and it's why this column exists — and here's the one number that still has me out on them in November.

BY BIG RICK DELGADO · MONDAY, SEPT. 21, 2026

GAME 1 · FRED KELLY

ORANGE 35
ETIWANDA 28

Computer: Orange −7.3 ✓
Rick: Etiwanda 49–21 ✗

GAME 2 · CHATSWORTH

SIERRA CANYON 28
ORANGE LUTHERAN 10

Computer: SC −16.8 ✓
Rick: SC 34–21 ✓

GAME 3 · SANTA ANA

BISHOP GORMAN 25
MATER DEI 8

Computer: no line issued
Rick: Mater Dei 24–16 ✗

I ATE IT.

Orange 35, Etiwanda 28. I had Etiwanda 49–21 and I should have posted this Saturday morning. I missed the score by 35 points and I also missed which team wins, which are the only two things a pick contains. The computer had Orange by 7.3. Orange won by seven. The thing I insult every week beat me by a quarter of a point.

Bishop Gorman 25, Mater Dei 8. No model line on that one, so that L has nobody's name on it but mine.

I want to talk about Orange's offensive line, because it is the actual story of Friday night and because nobody who yelled at me this weekend brought it up once.

THE LINE IS THE REASON

Star Thomas III threw it 20 times, completed 13, and went for 273 yards and three touchdowns. Then he carried it 13 times for 107 and two more. Five touchdowns. Orange scored 35 points, which is five touchdowns and five extra points, so the arithmetic isn't complicated: he produced every point his team scored, and 380 yards of offense by himself.

Now think about what has to be true for that to happen. Twenty dropbacks against a Baseline League front and the kid is standing up in all of them. Thirteen carries where he's choosing when to run instead of running because the pocket collapsed on him. You don't put up that line behind five guys getting walked backwards. Somebody was blocking.

I judge football from the line of scrimmage. I say it every week until people are sick of it. So let me be consistent about it when it goes against my own take: **Orange's front is the best thing about that team, and it is why the quarterback looks the way he looks.** That is my eye test, not a stat — nobody publishes offensive line numbers at this level and I'm not going to invent one. But you can read it backwards off 380 yards the same way I did.

FIVE TOUCHDOWNS DOESN'T HAPPEN BEHIND A BAD FRONT.

And the quarterback is a problem. Not a problem I'm talking around — a problem for every defensive coordinator in that league between now and November. He was the most dangerous player on the field Friday against a team that had already played Norco, and he was the most dangerous player on the field by a distance.

SO HERE'S WHERE I ACTUALLY AM

I called them frauds on Thursday. That was wrong, it was loud, and I'm not laundering it into "half right." Orange is 5–0, the committee's scale moved them from 20.2 to 25.5 on Sunday night, and three teams in their division are undefeated and Orange is rated highest of the three. Real team. Earned it.

They would win Division 4. Not "could." Would. Put that roster in that bracket and I'd pick them over every team in it, and I'd do it out loud and let you hold me to it in December.

ORANGE (25.5) IN THE DIVISION 4 FIELD	OPP. RATING	PROJECTED MARGIN	RICK'S READ
Valencia — the 1-seed	22.9	+5.1	Orange
Downey — 2-seed	21.6	+6.4	Orange
Poly — 3-seed	21.4	+6.6	Orange
Crespi — 4-seed	21.1	+6.9	Orange
Bonita — 5–0, 10-seed	18.8	+9.2	Orange

Orange sits 2.6 points clear of the best team in that band.

Ratings from hsratings.com, signed-in full sweep of all 67 Southern Section 11-man leagues, 371 teams, pulled Sept. 21. Projected margin is the model on the method page — home rating plus 2.5 minus away rating — with Orange at home as the higher-rated side. Seeds are position within the band, not a CIF-SS publication; divisions are not set until the regular season ends and only qualifiers get divisioned.

AND THAT IS EXACTLY THE PROBLEM

Orange isn't in Division 4 anymore.

Friday's win moved them from section rank 43 to rank 36. Division 3 runs from 25 to 40. They didn't climb the Division 4 ladder on Friday. They fell off the top of it into a different building, as the 12-seed, with eleven teams in front of them — four of which have worse records than Orange and are still rated higher, because they played people.

The team at the top of that bracket is San Juan Hills at 33.7. Orange is 8.2 points behind them and would be on the road. The model gives Orange 22 percent in that game. One game. A section title is four of them in a row.

> THE WHOLE COLUMN IN FOUR LINES
>
> Orange has a real offensive line and a quarterback who can beat anybody in their weight class.
>
> They are 2.6 points clear of the best team in Division 4 and I'd pick them to win it.
>
> They are 8.2 points behind the best team in Division 3, which is where they now sit.
>
> They beat the best opponent on their schedule and the reward was a bracket they can't win. That is not a knock on the kids. That is the machine doing the thing the method page has described since the day this site went up, and it just happened to a real team in real time.

THE MAIL

Big weekend in the replies. Genuinely, thank you, some of you were very creative.

THE GREATEST HITS

"you were off by 35 points shut up forever" · "who even are you" · "hater" · and one gentleman who informed me, and I want to get the phrasing right here, that I had hurt his feelings

Sir. It's September. Your team is 5–0. You have the feelings.

I'm the one who posted a scoreboard on myself and lost on it in public, in writing, with the number I got wrong printed next to the number the machine got right. You're a grown man typing in all caps about a teenager's spread offense at 11:40 on a Friday night. Between the two of us I think my week was harder.

And look — I get it. Somebody said something about your school and you didn't like it. But if the response to "this schedule is soft" is four paragraphs about my mother instead of one paragraph about the schedule, we both know which one of us is arguing about football.

THE FAIR ONE, AND IT WAS THE ONLY ONE

"They're 5–0. At what point does 5–0 just mean you're good?"

It's the right question and here's the honest answer: it already does. I said the wrong thing Thursday. They're good.

What 5–0 still doesn't tell you is which bracket you can win, and that's the entire column above. Being good and being seeded to win are two different things in this section, and Orange just found out the hard way.

THE OTHER TWO GAMES, QUICKLY

SIERRA CANYON 28, ORANGE LUTHERAN 10

Rick: W · margin short

Twenty-one points in the first quarter and nothing after halftime. They won by 18 while playing about 24 minutes of serious football, against the sixth-rated team in the section.

I had 34–21 and I had the Lancers covering. They scored 10. Computer said 16.8, real number was 18, so even in the row I won the machine was closer.

On the record in September so nobody says I got on late: that's the team that wins the CIF-SS Division 1 title and then the state Open Division title. 79.8 on the committee's scale, second in the section, and the Trinity League is about to spend October eating itself alive while Sierra Canyon plays the Mission.

BISHOP GORMAN 25, MATER DEI 8

Rick: L · no line to blame

Thirty-six total yards in the first half against 55 yards in penalties and one first down. When your flags outgain your offense by 19 that's not a slow start, that's a different sport being played in the same stadium. Second straight week under 200 total yards.

I said too much up front and took the Monarchs 24–16. Gorman isn't on the committee's scale, so there was no model line and I told you Friday the pick was all mine. I didn't realize I was signing a confession.

27–0 against out-of-state opponents going back to 1991. It's 27–1 now, and that's the number that follows the program to November, not the eight points.

WHERE THIS GOES

Wednesday I spotlight three more games, and two of them are in the 909, because I've spent a week in Orange County and that isn't what this column is.

Thursday somebody else goes on the stand. Saturday I eat whatever I have to eat, and this week I ate it in front of everybody, which is the only reason any of the rest of it counts.

Ledger says 1–2. Come back in November.

WEEK 5 LEDGER

COMPUTER 2–0 RICK 1–2

A pick is right if it named the winner. Margin gets argued about; margin doesn't win the row.

THE VERDICT, REVISED

Thursday I stamped Orange FRAUD ALERT. Wrong, and I'm not dressing it up.

New stamp: REAL — AND IN THE WRONG BRACKET. Good enough to win Division 4. Not in Division 4.

ORANGE · MONDAY

Record	5–0
Committee scale	25.5
Was (9/13)	20.2
Section rank	36 of 371
Projects to	D3, 12-seed
Was	D4, 3-seed
PF / PA	215 / 72
LA Times	No. 25 (new)

THE LINE THAT BEAT ME

Thomas, passing	13/20, 273, 3 TD
Thomas, rushing	13 car, 107, 2 TD
Total offense	380 yards
Orange points	35
Woodbury	5 rec, 180, 2 TD

Five touchdowns, five extra points, 35 points. One player produced the whole scoreboard — and somebody blocked for him.

TWO BRACKETS

vs D4 1-seed	**+5.1 · 64%**
vs D3 1-seed	**−10.7 · 22%**

Model output, one game, not bracket odds. Formula on the method page. A title is four in a row.

WEEK 5 MOVERS

Orange	**20.2 → 25.5**
Sierra Canyon	**76.8 → 79.8**
Orange Lutheran	**62.5 → 63.3**
Etiwanda	15.4 → 15.6
Mater Dei	**78.3 → 75.5**

Orange Lutheran's rating went *up* after a loss. The model already expected it. That's the whole idea.

NEXT

Wednesday: The Three. Two of them in the Inland Empire.

Thursday: somebody goes on the stand.

Saturday: I eat whatever I have to eat.

SOURCES — EVERY NUMBER ABOVE, AND WHERE IT CAME FROM

FINAL SCORES

Orange County Register, “Orange County scores and player stats for Friday, Sept. 18” (published 6:31 p.m., updated 10:26 p.m. PDT), read Sept. 18. MaxPreps team schedule pages for Orange (updated Sept. 19, 4:16 p.m. GMT), Sierra Canyon (3:35 p.m. GMT) and Mater Dei (6:03 a.m. GMT). Sports Illustrated / SI High School, “California High School Football Final Scores — September 18,” by Sam Brown, published Sept. 19. All three agree on all three finals.

GAME DETAIL

Thomas and Woodbury lines: MaxPreps Etiwanda-at-Orange game page, Top Performers, read Sept. 19. The Stats tab of that page reported no team statistics entered, so team totals, first downs, sacks and defensive figures for that game do not exist publicly and are not printed here. Sierra Canyon quarters: MaxPreps game page, box score credited “Final score provided by T. Morner.” Mater Dei first-half yardage, penalties, total yards and the out-of-state streak: MaxPreps, “Highlights, recap: No. 8 Bishop Gorman solves No. 13 Mater Dei…,” by Mitch Stephens, published Sept. 18, 10:00 p.m.

RATINGS, RANKS AND DIVISION BANDS

hsratings.com, signed-in full sweep of all 67 CIF Southern Section 11-man leagues, 371 teams, pulled Sept. 21, every team on the same post-Week-5 value. Prior values (Orange 20.2, Etiwanda 15.4, Sierra Canyon 76.8, Orange Lutheran 62.5, Mater Dei 78.3) from the Sept. 13 and Sept. 17 pulls quoted in the pregame reports. Division bands and seeds are the method page’s arithmetic applied to that ordering — D1 is ranks 1–8, then sixteen per division — and are not a CIF-SS publication.

RECORDS AND PF/PA

MaxPreps team schedule pages, updated Sept. 19.

POLL

Los Angeles Times Top 25 (Eric Sondheimer), published Sept. 20. Orange enters at No. 25, previously unranked.

WHAT IS OPINION, AND LABELED AS SUCH ON THE PAGE

The read on Orange’s offensive line is Rick’s eye test. No offensive line statistics are published at this level and none are claimed here; the inference is drawn from the quarterback’s production, which

is sourced above. The Division 4 call, the CIF-SS Division 1 and state Open Division title calls, and every judgment about what a team is or is not are Rick’s opinion. The model projects a margin and a win probability for a single game between two rated teams. It does not project brackets, seeds, or titles, and nothing here claims it does.

The Trench Report · Big Rick Delgado is a pen name; the arithmetic is not. Every figure carries a source and a date.
the-trench-report.netlify.app · @BigRickTrench · Picks and results on the ledger, win or lose.