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Richland quarterback Adam Oakes (29) leads the Bombers into the Class 4A state championship game against Kentwook on Saturday at the Tacoma Dome.

Richland's Oakes weathers early storm

By Jeff Morrow

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There came a moment this season when Richland's Adam Oakes was willing to hand off the quarterbacking duties to someone else.

It occurred after Richland's 42-21 loss to Walla Walla in the fourth week of the season.

"I asked them if they wanted me to go play receiver," Oakes said.

The 5-foot-10, 168-pound senior had played well at quarterback in his final three games as a junior, so the Bombers expected him to play well this season.

But he was admittedly inconsistent, as was the entire Richland offense at that point.

"Our hope was at midseason he'd be hitting on all cylinders," said Richland coach Lonnie Pierson, whose team plays Kentwood in the Tacoma at 7:30 p.m. Saturday for the state 4A championship.

"We did not have the luxury of changing quarterbacks. Adam just wanted to be helpful. He was trying to be a team player as

best he could. We rather quickly and firmly told him he'd get better."

The following week, against Wenatchee, he went 0-for-8 in the first half.

"They put Landon (Kafentzis) in, and he didn't do bad," Oakes said. "The following week, Landon was practicing at quarterback. That made me more motivated to do well."

Oakes said practice was part of his problem. "I started focusing harder in practice,"

Oakes said. "Before, I'd go through the motions in practice. I didn't think I was practicing as well as I could have been."

It began to carry over into the games. Soon, Richland assistant coach Nate Holdren — who was a quarterback for the Bombers before playing linebacker at the University of Michigan — tweaked the practice schedule to get Oakes some more passing in.

"After four or five games, it wasn't all Adam's fault," Holdren said. "There were some dropped passes."

But Holdren knew Oakes' strengths and weaknesses, and together they worked on them.

Opposing coaches have described Oakes' passing as unorthodox. But he is effective. "I have reiterated to Adam all year to make the pass catchable," Holdren said. "I don't care how he gets it there. If the ball's flipping end over end, that's OK. Just get it near the receivers. People critique the quarterback too much. They'll say if it's not a perfect spiral, than it's not a good pass. Who cares?"

And Oakes' statistics are impressive. He's completed 101 of 212 attempts for 1,918 yards with 25 touchdown passes and just eight interceptions.

And while those numbers often are used to rate a quarterback, it doesn't tell of what kind of leader he is. He passed that test in the district playoffs against Mount Spokane. "We had huddle problems at Southridge," Oakes said. "There was cussing in the

huddle, and too many people talking."

It's safe to say Richland has a lot of players who know what they're doing, and they like to be vocal about it.

"Sometimes I dreaded going into the huddle just because of what might happen next," Oakes said. "The next Monday we were called into the weight room and the coaches talked to us."

Oakes began to take charge after that. "I have to get in there and tell people to shut up," Oakes said. "After the Southridge game things settled down, and I felt I stepped up as a leader."

Kafentzis, the starting full back, agrees. "Ever since then the team has pulled together," Kafentzis said. "I wouldn't say there's just one leader on this team. But when we're in the huddle, Adam is definitely the leader."

And Oakes has guided them to the Tacoma Dome.

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