

Sports

PREP FOOTBALL PREVIEW | WEEK 8

Lions face Suns hoping to keep playoff hopes alive

■ **Richland and Chiawana battle for MCC crown.**

BY DUSTIN BRENNAN
dbrennan@tricityherald.com

Regardless of this week's outcomes, Kamiakin and Southridge will play for the Mid-Columbia Conference Class 3A football crown next week. But Kennewick has a shot to keep its slim playoff hopes alive on Friday against the Suns.

The Lions (2-5, 1-4) are holding on to an outside chance of overtaking the Suns (4-3, 3-2) in their final two games. They need to win both — they play at

Pasco in the regular-season finale — and have Southridge lose to Kamiakin. That would allow Kennewick to sneak into the No. 2 MCC 3A spot and play a meaningful football game after Week 9.

Kennewick running back Isaac Ruiz said the pressure of a must-win game, coupled with the rivalry matchup, has made for an electric week of practice.

"It goes through our minds the whole week at practice," Ruiz said. "That's kind of given us a purpose for playing."

Southridge's offense exploded for 543 yards in its 56-28 win over Hanford last

week, with quarterback Mason Martin and running back Zayid Al-Ghani combining for 314 rushing yards. Kennewick coach Bill Templeton said the whole defense will have to step up to avoid getting run over by the Suns' option-heavy offense.

"First of all, they have some really good players, and their scheme is really good," Templeton said. "They kind of look the same way Kennewick did back in the '80s with a lot of option game. They do what they do, and their kids do a good job of running it."

Regardless of schemes and skill position talent, Templeton said the game's

deciding factor is no mystery.

"Anytime the offensive and defensive line is taken care of, you have a much better shot," Templeton said. "So we're going to put that on our kids to take care of that."

Kickoff is scheduled for 7 p.m. at Lampson Stadium.

AROUND THE MCC RICHLAND AT CHIAWANA:

This one is for all the marbles in the MCC Class 4A division.

The No. 2 Bombers and No. 4 Riverhawks both roll into this game at Edgar Brown Stadium undefeated through seven weeks.

Chiawana has steamrolled everyone in its path, winning each of its games by at least 22 points, while Richland has been in some tight contests in conference play. The Bombers beat Southridge 26-10 in Week 4 and outlasted Kamiakin 21-20 in overtime in Week 6.

The Riverhawks' defense has given up seven points and allowed an average of 52.7 yards per game over the past three weeks. They lead the conference in both of those totals on the season. **PASCO AT HANFORD:** Hanford quarterback Garrett Horner's four interceptions are the fewest in the conference among passers with more than 100 attempts, a stat that fits along nicely with the sophomore's 19 touchdown passes and 61.5 completion percentage.

He and his favorite target Joe Gauthier — who leads the league in receiving yards with 632 — will look to keep their dynamic offense flying high when the Falcons (3-4,

1-4) take on the Bulldogs (0-7, 0-5) at Fran Rish Stadium.

SMALL SCHOOLS DAYTON-WAITSBURG AT KITTITAS:

If D-W (6-1, 5-0) wins this matchup of teams on top of the EWAC, it will clinch the league championship. A victory for the Coyotes (6-0, 5-0) will make their game against Tri-Cities Prep next week be for the conference title, assuming the Jaguars win at home against Mabton on Friday.

Other local matchups include Ephrata at Grandview, Wapato at Prosser, Quincy at Othello, River View at Warden, Connell at College Place, Kiona-Benton at Wahluke, Columbia-Burbank at Royal, Garfield-Palouse at Touchet, Lyle-Wishram at DeSales, Liberty Christian at White Swan and Hermiston at Redmond.

Walla Walla traveled to play Kamiakin on Thursday in MCC action.

PREP FOOTBALL

Chiawana's O-line ready for Richland

With the starting line averaging 255 pounds per player, the Riverhawks have pushed around every team in their path this season. They will put that track record to the test Friday against the Bombers' talented defense.

BY DUSTIN BRENNAN
dbrennan@tricityherald.com

When using the eye test to describe the Chiawana High School offensive line, one word quickly comes to mind:

big.

The front line that features four returning starters averages 255 pounds per player, a testament to the work the group put in during the offseason.

"All the seniors, we all did our part getting everybody in the weight room," senior

left guard Anthony Reisch said. "We did a lot of bonding, just making it one solid unit."

The work has paid dividends this year, as senior running back Andrew Vargas has set the world on fire

“HE MAKES US LOOK AWESOME, SO WE DO OUR BEST TO GET THAT GUY IN THE END ZONE.”

Chiawana left guard Anthony Reisch on running back Andrew Vargas

with a league-high 1,858 rushing yards and 32 touchdowns through seven games.

For Reisch and the rest of the Chiawana line, Vargas having success isn't enough — they don't want defenders to put a finger on him.

"We try to open the holes

SEE O-LINE, 8B

rez (6-4, 260), center Ford Powers (6-1, 200), right guard Julian Benitez (6-0, 240) and first-year starting right tackle Joey Aikala (6-4, 305) are all juniors. Senior Mitchel Kroner (6-2, 220) has rotated in at both guard and tackle positions.

Graff said the position group's juniors could be on pace for an even more dynamic senior campaign — if they put the work in, that is.

"It all depends on their work ethic in the offseason. Guys get passed up all the time," Graff said. "But we're worried about this season right now, and the Bombers."

Richland boasts the league's No. 2 rushing de-

fense — trailing Chiawana — which is allowing just under 75 yards per game.

"It's going to be a challenge, but we've been working hard," Reisch said of Friday's matchup. "We've got that intensity going."

When the Riverhawks faced Kamiakin in Week 3, the Braves had yet to give up a point and were allowing opposing offenses to gain just 2.78 yards per play. Vargas ended up rushing for 417 yards and four touchdowns as the Chiawana offensive line imposed its will in a 35-13 victory.

Dustin Brennan:
509-582-1413,
@Tweet_By_Dustin

MID-COLUMBIA CONFERENCE

	Lg	All
Chiawana	5-0	7-0
Richland	5-0	7-0
Kamiakin	3-2	5-2
Southridge	3-2	4-3
Walla Walla	2-3	3-4
Hanford	1-4	3-4
Kennewick	1-4	2-5
Pasco	0-5	0-7

MCC LEADERS

Rushing	Carries	Yds	TDs	Avg	
Andrew Vargas-CH	181	1858	32	10.3	
Mitch Lesmeister-WW	105	1009	13	9.6	
Zayid Al-Ghani-SR	160	906	10	5.7	
Jethro Questad-KA	106	638	9	6.0	
Parker McCary-RI	76	505	8	6.6	
Ben Stanfield-RI	74	502	4	6.8	
Mason Martin-SR	94	422	5	4.5	
Tayvonne Miller-HA	74	417	5	5.6	
Deondre Hendrix-PA	114	409	4	3.6	
Ronny Loomis-KE	76	349	1	4.6	
Passing	Comp	Att	Yds	Int	TDs
Paxton Stevens-RI	116	220	1664	5	20
Garrett Horner-HA	134	219	1521	4	19
Zach Borisch-KA	105	175	1449	7	20
M. Lesmeister-WW	68	162	935	11	11
Troy Simpkins-CH	51	80	759	7	7
Keaton Stewart-PA	81	194	742	1	1
AJ Templeton-KE	68	148	709	7	7
Mason Martin-SR	48	79	700	7	7
Receiving	Catches	Yards	TDs	Avg	
Joe Gauthier-HA	37	632	8	17.1	
Alex Chapman-RI	25	581	8	23.2	
Benson Smith-KA	32	424	6	13.3	
Isaiah Brimmer-KA	32	415	7	13.0	
Blake Loftus-KE	30	345	4	11.5	
Brady White-HA	24	317	4	13.2	
Jacob Sandoval-PA	26	281	1	10.8	
Carter Davis-WW	23	276	6	12.0	
Thomas Kitchens-HA	24	256	4	10.7	
Trent Simpkins-CH	20	254	1	12.7	

FROM PAGE 7B

O-LINE

as big as we can," Reisch said. "He makes us look awesome, so we do our best to get that guy in the end zone."

Riverhawks coach Steve Graff didn't hesitate to make the claim that improved play in the trenches is a major reason why his team is 7-0 and has a good shot to knock off the No. 2 Richland Bombers to clinch the Mid-Columbia Conference championship Friday night at Edgar Brown Stadium. Chiawana went 6-4 last year and had its season end

with a 24-13 loss to Central Valley in a state play-in game.

"They played together last year and got hit in the mouth a few times because they were 14- and 15-year-olds playing against 17- and 18-year-olds," Graff said. "That motivated them to get in the weight room and get going, and they've done a pretty good job so far."

Not only is Chiawana's line dominant, but it's also filled with youth. Reisch (6-3, 270 pounds) is the only senior. Left tackle Josh Alva-

rez (6-4, 260), center Ford Powers (6-1, 200), right guard Julian Benitez (6-0, 240) and first-year starting right tackle Joey Aikala (6-4, 305) are all juniors. Senior Mitchel Kroner (6-2, 220) has rotated in at both guard and tackle positions.

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Chiawana's powerhouse offensive line — with right tackle Joey Aikala (79), right guard Julian Benitez (50), center Ford Powers (55), left guard Anthony Reisch (76) and left tackle Josh Alvarez (51) — have paved the way for the Riverhawks to lead the Mid-Columbia Conference in rushing heading into Friday's game with Richland in a battle of unbeaten.

SARAH GORDON Tri-City Herald

