

Sports



SPORTS

Cade Jensen gets his shot to quarterback Bombers team 1D

SARAH GORDON Herald file

Richland High School quarterbacks Cade Jensen (10) and Paxton Stevens (17) talk on the sideline during a 2015 game against Southridge at Lampson Stadium. Now graduated, Stevens was the Bombers' quarterback the past two seasons and Jensen, now a senior, will take over this year.

RICHLAND FOOTBALL PREVIEW

Jensen steps up to pilot talented payload

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A lot of programs take a season to rebuild after making a run to a state championship, figuring out how to move forward after graduating the talented senior class that led the way.

The Richland High School football team doesn't look like its



VIDEO

Neidhold and Jensen look ahead to the 2017 season, online at tri-cityherald.com.

going to have that problem in 2017.

The Bombers are coming off two of the best seasons in their storied program's history, culminating in a state semifinal appearance in 2015 (lost to Gonzaga Prep 31-17) and a trip to the state title game last

year, where they lost a bid for a perfect season with a 24-14 defeat at the hands of the Camas Papermakers. And they seem poised to make another run, with much of the core of the past two teams returning to lead the Green and Gold once again.

"It's not one or two guys, it's like eight or nine," Richland coach Mike Neidhold said of the team's

SEE BOMBERS, 2D

Richland Bombers quick facts

2016 record: 13-1 overall (lost state championship), 7-0 MCC (league champs)

Team offense (first 10 weeks): 393.4 yards/game (3rd in MCC), 38.3 points (3rd)

Team defense (first 10 weeks): 205.2 yards/game (1st in MCC), 10.4 points (1st)

Key returners: Adam Weissenfels, Sr., WR/CB/K; Cade Jensen, Sr., QB; Ryan Piper, Sr., WR/FS; Parker McCary, Sr., RB; Josh Mendoza, Sr., WR/SS; Victor Strasser, Sr., MLB/RB; Jacobee Lee, Sr., DL; Aric Davison, Jr., OT/DT; Jake Stanfield TE/DE; Braden Powell TE/DE.

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BOMBERS

returning leadership.

"They're just kids that, you know you're gonna miss them because they're such great human beings, and they just so happen to be really, really good football players."

Six All-Mid Columbia Conference picks return to the Bombers' roster, including first team wide receiver Adam Weissenfels, defensive lineman Jacobee Lee and middle linebacker Victor Strasser.

Filling the shoes of graduated second team All-MCC quarterback Paxton Stevens — thought of as one of the best in program history — will be his backup for the past two seasons, senior Cade Jensen. While plugging in a first-year starter at quarterback can sometimes hinder an offense, the Bombers — who had the league's most prolific passing attack last year — figure to only move forward with Jensen, a finalist in the Northwest 9 elite quarterback competition this year.

"Cade loves football, and besides all the throwing and catching, he loves the strategy behind it," Neidhold said. "When guys are open, he knows why they're open. He knows what defenses are doing, what route packages we've got called, and why that guy is going to be open. He's hard to fool on the back end.

"And over the summer, he's probably gained 15 pounds (listed at 6-foot, 180 pounds). He's got a good arm and he's sneaky fast ... I think he'll be pretty good ... It's his turn, and I'd suspect he'll do really well."

While Jensen had the tools, both mentally and physically, to move to almost any other school in the area and start right away, he opted to wait his turn and learn behind Stevens. Now,

he's hoping to prove that his patience was worthwhile.

"In a way, you could say it's a blessing in disguise, because you get two years behind one of the best guys in Richland High School history," Jensen said.

"And you know, it does kind of suck, especially during your sophomore and junior years, when you know you're a pretty good quarterback, but there's a guy that's really good in front of you.

"But it is a blessing because you learn so much from him, you saw what he does, and hopefully I can do something that replicates that, and do just as good."

A student of the game, Jensen said his ability to dissect defenses and out-think his opponents is a product of his passion for football. That passion took shape when he started playing Richland Youth Football when he was just 8 years old.

"The mental side of it as a lot for me," he said, "and not just responding after an interception or something, but really studying the other teams, knowing what they do. It's a big part of the game for me, and big for all the coaches, and I just want to be a part of that.

"It just comes from love and passion of the game, and just wanting to be good at it."

BURDEN OF EXPECTATION

Neidhold starts every season hoping the Bombers reach a state championship. It's not because he wants to add banners to the rafters of Art Dawald Gymnasium or put more trophies in the

Richland High hallways, but rather because he wants to get a full slate of 14 weeks — "Mondays," he calls them — to work with each group of kids.

Richland has done pretty well to fulfill that wish as of late, winning 25 games to almost completely maximize the past two seasons. Now it seems all that's left is to get rid of that sour taste at the end of the road.

"By no means do we assume we're going back to Tacoma, that's not what we're about, but these kids know it's no accident how to get there," Neidhold said.

"The last four or five years, we've won a lot of games here, and the common denominator on those kids is that they just know how to work and have fun at the same time ... But they've also lost some big games. And that's humbling.

"We don't have to talk about it, because it's there. We don't gotta talk about losing to Camas. We don't gotta talk about losing to Gonzaga Prep two years ago. They know, and if that brings them motivation, that's on them, but it sure isn't anything we talk about here."

The Bombers appear laser focused on putting in the work and taking care of their business once again. It's an attitude cultivated by a locker room full of veteran players who have spent plenty of years on the front lines, and are ready for their turn to come out on top.

"We're not gonna hide our hopes from anyone," Jensen said. "We're gonna share publicly our goal, and it's to win a state title. It's to get back there and win it this time."

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Cade Jensen