

PREP FOOTBALL

Conference play begins for MCC teams

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The smoke has cleared and the intensity of games is rising as Mid-Columbia Conference football teams get set to play their first league games of the season Friday.

While Kamiakin and Chiawana's tilt at Lampson gets top-billing for the week, there's still a full slate of intriguing matchups on tap in the MCC, and among the small schools in the area as well.

A guide to the top games to watch out for as conference play begins:

KENNEWICK AT RICHLAND: The MCC's only teams to play west of the Cascade Mountains so far this season will meet in the first week of the conference slate.

Richland narrowly knocked off Bellevue in Week 1, 24-21, and Kennewick dismantled Cleveland last week, 45-6.

The Lions (1-1) will work their three-pronged power run game — with AJ Templeton, Cedric Riel and Isaac Ruiz — against a very good Richland front seven, that will again be without preseason All-State linebacker Victor Strasser, who is recovering from a shoulder injury.

When the Bombers (2-0) have the ball, Cade Jensen will look to improve on his brilliant first two varsity starts, as he's set the pace in the league so far in completions (35 of 54, 64.8 percent), passing yards (573) and touchdowns (6, tied with Kamiakin's Payton Flynn). He's also the only qualifying QB who hasn't thrown an interception.

Richland coach Mike Neidhold was a quarterback for the Bombers in the '70s, and said he always looks forward to renewing the team's rivalry with Kennewick.

"If you know your history around here, you know Richland-Kennewick, there's been some epic games fought tooth and nail," he said. "I've been apart of some games that broke my heart, and some games that made me so proud to be a Bomber. ...

"They went up to Seattle last weekend, took the same trip we did, and got after Cleveland pretty well. So I would expect

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those guys to give us a handful of trouble as well."

SOUTHRIDGE AT PASCO: With Kashon Tate completing just 41.8 percent of his passes (for 266 yards, two TDs and three interceptions) and lead back Efrain Farias averaging 1.8 yards on his 25 carries, the Bulldogs (0-2) haven't been particularly efficient on offense, but they'll look to do some damage against Southridge (1-1), which is allowing a league-high 328.5 yards per contest.

The game will feature the league's two most productive receivers in Southridge's Peyton Monson (19 rec., 206 yards, 2 TDs) and Pasco's Isaiah Gomez (12 rec., 183 yards).

HANFORD AT WALLA

WALLA: With the emergence of Jared Devine at running back, the normally pass-happy Falcons (1-1) currently boast one of the league's most balanced attacks, averaging 165 yards per game on the ground and 163.5 through the air.

They go on the road to face a Blue Devils' team that has yet to score a point this season, having fallen to Lewiston 21-0 and Eastmont 34-0. Walla Walla's first-year, dual-threat quarterback Nickolas Zehner has been effective in the run game, recording 67 yards on 14 rushes (7 yard/carry average), but has struggled throwing the ball, completing just 10 of 28 passes with four picks.

PROSSER AT OTHELLO:

This game took place in the penultimate week of the regular season last year, with the Mustangs pulling out a 27-14 win in Othello, but moves way up in the schedule this time around because of the CWAC splitting into two divisions.

Prosser first-year quarterback Will Weinmann threw for 208 yards and a touch-

down in a 22-14 win over Kennewick to open the season, and on Monday led the Mustangs to a gutsy, 29-21 win over Zillah, perennially the top team in the SCAC West.

The Huskies will be looking to bounce back after a Week 1 loss to state Class 1A runner-up Connell, 28-10, and a 35-0 defeat at the hands of the two-time reigning Class 1A champion Royal Knights on Monday.

Other area games include Quincy at Grandview, Royal at Warden, Columbia-Burbank at Wahluke, Kiona-Benton at Connell, College Place at River View, Tri-Cities Prep vs. Irrigon (Ore.) at Chiawana, Mabton at Liberty Christian, Almira-Coulee-Hartline at Touchet (3 p.m.), Hermiston at Mountain View and Enterprise at Umatilla.

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