

RICHLAND 48, KENNEWICK 7

Mendoza's 3-minute flurry fuels blowout

BY JEFF MORROW
Special to the Herald

Richland High School coach Mike Neidhold and his staff have never had to depend on just one player to carry the load in the 28-3 football they've played over the past three seasons.

And after Friday night's 48-7 win over visiting Kennewick — a game in which the running clock was used for almost the entire second half — the Bombers stayed on track with that trend.

"We've got about eight or nine guys who are pretty dynamic," said Neidhold. "In our stat line, you'll always see six or seven guys

catching balls. And it's always different guys stepping up."

On Friday night in the Mid-Columbia Conference opener for both schools, it was the Bombers' No. 23.

Welcome to Josh Mendoza's 2 minutes and 53 seconds of fury.

Let's set the stage: Richland had jumped out to a 14-0 lead in the first quarter, thanks to a 30-yard Jared Whitby TD run, followed by a 1-yard Cade Jensen-to-Ryan Piper scoring strike.

But at the end of the first quarter, Kennewick running back Cedric Riel took a handoff and raced 97 yards for a score to cut the Bom-

bers' lead to 14-7.

And while Casey Perryman answered for Richland with a 39-yard TD run early in the second quarter — making it 20-7 Bombers — it was Mendoza who most fans will remember after this week.

Over the final 3:18 of the half, Mendoza:

A. Picked off Kennewick quarterback Tim Gee's pass in the flat and raced 57 yards for a TD;

B. Hauled in a 23-yard touchdown pass from Jensen on the following offensive series;

C. Caught another TD pass from Jensen on the next series, this one from 27 yards away with 25 seconds

left until intermission.

It was a 21-0 run keyed by Mendoza, a senior who had his shining moments last season and loves playing on both sides of the ball.

"(Gee) threw the ball right at me," Mendoza said of his interception. "I just needed to catch it. I had a load of adrenaline. All I could think of was getting to the end zone."

As for his two TD catches, they were his only pass receptions of the game.

"Cade is so good," said Mendoza. "He can put the ball where only I can catch it."

If that wasn't enough, Mendoza scooped up a loose ball on a muffed opening kickoff return in the second half.

Four plays later, Jensen rambled in from 6 yards out to make it 48-7, activating the running clock.

"They are very good," said Kennewick coach Bill Templeton of the Bombers (1-0 MCC, 3-0 overall). "We

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told our kids before the game that we had to focus on our stuff. When we did that, we competed well. But when you play quality teams, they take advantage when you don't do the job."

And as good as the Richland offense was, the Bombers defensive unit was once again stout.

It surrendered just 157 yards of offense, had the Mendoza Pick-6 and recovered three Lions fumbles. Altogether, the Bombers converted those turnovers into 21 points.

"Defense is our strong suit," said Bombers defensive lineman Jax Lee. "Last year we averaged giving up 12 points a game. Defense is the heart and soul of this

team."

Lee and fellow D-lineman Aric Davison wreaked havoc. Unofficially, Lee had a QB sack, another tackle for loss, and a forced fumble. Davison added a QB sack, another tackle for loss, a QB hurry and a fumble recovery.

Add Mendoza's stellar play in the secondary, and it was another outstanding game by the Bombers defense.

"Defense definitely wins championships," said Mendoza. "Our defensive practices are insane. Defense is what we thrive on, and that's what makes good teams great."

And the Bombers, based on their record these past three seasons, know how to win.

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