



NOELLE HARO-GOMEZ Tri-City-Herald

Richland's Ryan Piper (20), Josh Mendoza (23) and Cade Jensen (10) signal to the crowd during the Bombers' 42-10 win over Central Valley in a 4A state semifinal game Nov. 25 at Edgar Brown Stadium.

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everything we've asked them to do as student-athletes at Richland High School," Neidhold said. "They've been tremendous role models for the school and for their classmates, and for the young football players at Richland High. I just don't have enough words to tell this group how thankful I am."

That sentiment is felt by players and coaches alike. While the winning and party-like atmosphere of Friday nights at Fran Rish Stadium has its luster, Weissenfels said the camaraderie with his teammates, forged through years spent preparing for games like Saturday's, will be what he misses most.

"These guys who I've grown with over these past three years who have become my best friends, who are truly my family, these coaches that we get to play for," he said. "Having spent so much time with them, 17 straight weeks for the past three years, you spend so much time together, you can't help but create this bond we all have."

"Facing adversity, and getting this far three years in a row, it just fuels that. So it's going to be that much harder because we've had so much success and we've grown so close together."

In their last game together, these Bombers will try to do what they've done so many times already: Just win, baby.

SEE RICHLAND, 4B

4A FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

Richland's seniors hope to write history one last time

BY DUSTIN BRENNAN
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There's a phrase floating around the Richland High School football team's practice this week that has been on the back of players' minds all season, and maybe even for the past year: "Unfinished business."

"We're just trying to focus in on what we do," said senior Adam Weissenfels, a three-year starter who plays wide receiver and defensive back, while also kicking and returning punts. "What we've done up to this point is what's gotten us here, so that's what we're going to continue to do."

The Bombers' talented senior class has achieved more than nearly any other group in the school's history, but has yet to finish a season with a celebration. Richland lost in the 2015 state semifinals to Gonzaga Prep, 31-17, and to Camas in last year's state championship game, 24-14.

So that means it comes down to Saturday, when the

No. 2 Bombers take on the No. 1 Woodinville Falcons at 7:30 p.m. at the Tacoma Dome, for the heralded class of 2018 to solidify its spot in Richland lore.

"Last year, we came up a little bit short, so the opportunity to go back there and get a state title, it doesn't happen very often," senior lineman Jax Lee said. "Hopefully we take ad-

vantage of that opportunity and win on Saturday."

Richland's coach Mike Neidhold has a specific, easy way to measure his team's success, and it's not with trophies, or banners or pounds of confetti. It's about the time he gets to spend with his players, hoping each year to get a maximum of 14 weeks during the season — 14 Mondays, as he

refers to it — which is accomplished by reaching a state championship.

So to be heading into his 41st game (one shy of three perfect 14-game seasons) with this current batch of 30 seniors is a pretty good deal for the Richland alum and 10th-year head coach.

"It's gonna be a sad goodbye, because we love these guys and they've done

two bad series of defense in a row."

Richland has only been in a few gritty, defensive struggles this season, but — obviously — has prevailed each time. The Bombers opened their season with a 24-21 win over Bellevue — which lost to O'Dea by one point in 3A semifinals — needing a late drive and Parker McCary touchdown run to clinch it, and won a ground-and-pound clash against Chiawana, 21-10 in Week 8 to seal

their third consecutive league title.

Then two weeks ago, on the road against Gonzaga Prep in the quarterfinals, Richland dialed up some late turnover magic to pull out a 28-21 win.

This game should be no different. The offense will have to scratch across a couple scores, and the defense will likely have to step up and play one of its best games of the season to deliver the Bombers their third

state title and first since 1999.

"We're gonna have to put pressure on their offense, stop the run and get good coverage against their quarterback," Lee said. "And then on offense, we're gonna have to do what we've been doing, put points on the board any way we can."

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RICHLAND

SIZING UP WOODINVILLE

Held to under 42 points just once in the past five games, it's conceivable that Richland (13-0) could turn this championship match into a track meet. Though, facing a Woodinville (13-0) defense — dubbed "The Dark Side" — that's holding opponents under 9 points

per contest, this could easily become a slugfest.

"They have no weakness. Their defense is fantastic," Neidhold said. "They run to the ball, they put three, four guys on the ball every time it's on the ground, every time we would run it, and they play great pass defense. And they're not gonna have