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Defending 4A state champion Richland started football practice Wednesday morning. The Bombers, as well as the other Mid-Columbia football teams, were forced to practice inside because of the poor air quality outside.

## HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

# Mid-Columbia teams head inside for first day of practice

BY ANNIE FOWLER

[afowler@tricityherald.com](mailto:afowler@tricityherald.com)

### KENNEWICK, WA

Mike Neidhold was up at 3 a.m. Wednesday.

The Richland football coach was excited to get practice under way, albeit it still was six hours away.

"I had two back surgeries in May and missed spring ball," Neidhold said. "I was on the shelf. I didn't get to go to camp.

I was so excited to get things going. My doctor cleared me for football practice, as long as I stay out of the way.

"I haven't felt this good in years."

The defending Class 4A state champions had about 140 players at practice Wednesday morning, which took place indoors because of the poor air quality.

"There's so much build up to the start of practice," Neidhold said. "You anticipate being out

on the grass, but the guys handled it great. We still got things done. Things could have been worse."

The longtime coach said it was weird looking out among the players and not seeing graduated veterans like Adam Weisenfels, Cade Jensen and Josh Mendoza.

"It goes so fast," Neidhold said. "It is all about the time we spend together."

The Kamiakin Braves also laced up their sneakers and hit

the gym Wednesday.

"We made do with what we had," Kamiakin coach Scott Biglin said. "It's a good lesson for the kids. Something happens that is out of our hands, we need to adapt. Most of the teams across the state are in the same boat."

Biglin said his squad had 40-some freshmen and a total of about 120 kids. The Braves will have two practices a day

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through Friday, then cut down to one for Saturday and next week.

The Kennewick Lions got a head start on everyone by holding practice at midnight in the Lions Den.

"We used to do it about 10 years ago, then got away from it," Kennewick coach Bill Templeton said of the midnight start time. "Did it last year again, and the kids loved it. It's fun to allow kids to embrace football. Practicing inside is not ideal, but our kids have lit a fire and we're getting some work done."

In Pasco, coach Leon Wright-Jackson held his first practice as head coach. As a player for the Bulldogs, he went through hundreds of workouts

under the watchful eye of Steve Graff, Chiawana's head coach since the school opened in 2009.

Hermiston, the newcomer to the Mid-Columbia Conference, held morning practice outside Wednesday, but moved inside for afternoon drills.

Coach David Faaeteete said his team is excited to get the season going.

"We are young and at the beginning of a new chapter," Faaeteete said. "Our kids are looking forward to competing in one of the premiere conferences in the state of Washington. We love what we do."

Annie Fowler: 582-1574;  
[@tchicequeen](https://twitter.com/tchicequeen)